

Be Thou My Vision

~Other Speakers G-L: Hymn Stories:

Text --Irish hymn, c. 8th century

Translated by Mary E. Byrne, 1880-1931

Versified by Elanor H. Hull, 1860-1935

Music --Irish Melody

Arrangement --Norman Johnson, 1928-1983

Tune Name --"Slane"

"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." Proverbs 29:18

"Vision is the art of seeing things invisible." Jonathan Swift--Thoughts on Various Subjects

"Give us clear vision that we may know where to stand and what to stand for, because unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything." Peter Marshall--Mr. Jones, Meet the Master

"Vision is of God. A vision comes in advance of any task well done." --Katherine Logan

This eighth-century, anonymous, Irish hymn text expresses, in the quaint Celtic style, the ageless need of man to have a heavenly vision and to experience God's care and personal presence throughout this earthly pilgrimage. The author's high regard for God is evident in the various titles ascribed Him: Vision, Lord, Best Thought, Wisdom, Word, Great Father, High King, Inheritance, Treasure, Sun, Ruler, and Heart.

Another interesting verse often omitted in our hymnals is as follows:

Be Thou my breast-plate, my sword for the fight, Be Thou my armour, and be Thou my might; Thou my soul's shelter, and Thou my high tower, Raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my Power.

Mary Byrne's translation of this ancient Irish poem into English prose first appeared in the journal *Erin*, Volume Two, published in 1905. Later the prose was put into verse form by Eleanor H. Hull and published in her *Poem Book of the Gael*, 1912. The tune, "Slane," is a traditional Irish air from Patrick W. Joyce's collection, *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs*, published in 1909. The tune was originally used with a secular text, "With My Love on the Road." Its first association with this hymn text was in the *Irish Church Hymnal* of 1919. The tune is named for a hill, ten miles from Tara, in County Meath, where St. Patrick is said to have challenged King Loegaire and the Druid priests by lighting the Paschal fire on Easter eve. Although the melody has been harmonized by various musicians such as Norman Johnson (See "Not What These Hands Have Done," No. 64), it is generally recommended that this tune is most effective when sung in unison.

Mary Elizabeth Byrne was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1880. She received her education at the University of Dublin and became a research worker and writer for the Board of Intermediate Education in her home town. One of her most important works was her contribution to the *Old and Mid-Irish Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of the Irish Language*.

Eleanor H. Hull was born in Manchester, England, on January 15, 1860. She was the founder and secretary of the *Irish Text Society* and served as president of the *Irish Literary Society*, in London. She authored several books on Irish history and literature.

Another anonymous writer has penned these significant thoughts about the importance of having a vision for one's life:

• vision without a task is a dream;
• task without a vision is drudgery;
• vision with a task is the hope of the world.

Truly our visionary attitude throughout life is often the difference between success and mediocrity. One is reminded of the classic story of the two shoe-salesmen who were sent to a primitive island to determine business potential. The first salesman wired back, "Coming home immediately. No one here wears shoes." The second man responded, "Send a boatload of shoes immediately. The possibilities for selling shoes here are unlimited."

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May we as believers be characterized as people of vision -- "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. . . ." Hebrews 12:2

"The highest joy that can be known by those who heav'n-ward wend--
It is the Word of Life to own, and God to have as friend. --Nils Frykman

LIFE

"To the preacher, life's a sermon,
To the joker, life's a jest,
To the miser, life is money,
To the loafer, life's a rest.

"To the soldier, life's a battle,
To the teacher, life's a school.
Life's a great thing for the thinker,
But it's folly to the fool.

"Life is just one long vacation,
To the man who loves his work,
But it's constant dodging duty
To the everlasting shirk.

"To the faithful, earnest worker
Life's a story ever new;
Life is what we try to make it --
What in truth is life to you?" --Unknown