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# **The Christian Year**

John Keble

# Imprint

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## THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

### INTRODUCTION.

John Keble, two years older than his friend Dr. Arnold of Rugby, three years older than Thomas Carlyle, and nine years older than John Henry Newman, was born in 1792, at Fairford in Gloucestershire. He was born in his father's parsonage, and educated at home by his father till he went to college. His father then entered him at his own college at Oxford, Corpus Christi. Thoroughly trained, Keble obtained high reputation at his University for character and scholarship, and became a Fellow of Oriel. After some years he gave up work in the University, though he could not divest himself of a large influence there for good, returned home to his old father, who required help in his ministry, and undertook for his the duty of two little curacies. The father lived on to the age of ninety. John Keble's love for God and his devotion to the Church had often been expressed in verse. On days which the Church specially celebrated, he had from time to time written short poems to utter from the heart his own devout sense of their spiritual use and meaning. As the number of these poems increased, the desire rose to follow in like manner the while course of the Christian Year as it was marked for the people by the sequence of church services, which had been arranged to bring in due order before the minds of Christian worshippers all the foundations of their faith, and all the elements of a religious life. A book of poems, breathing faith and worship at all points, and in all attitudes of heavenward contemplation, within the

circle of the Christian Year, would, he hoped, restore in many minds to many a benumbed form life and energy.

In 1825, while the poems of the Christian Year were gradually being shaped into a single work, a brother became able to relieve John Keble in that pious care for which his father had drawn him away from a great University career, and he then went to a curacy at Hursley, four or five miles from Winchester.

In 1827—when its author's age was thirty-five—"The Christian Year" was published. Like George Herbert, whose equal he was in piety though not in power, Keble was joined to the Church in fullest sympathy with all its ordinances, and desired to quicken worship by putting into each part of the ritual a life that might pass into and raise the life of man. The spirit of true religion, with a power beyond that of any earthly feuds and controversies, binds together those in whom it really lives. Setting aside all smaller questions of the relative value of different earthly means to the attainment of a life hidden with Christ in God, Christians of all forms who are one in spirit have found help from "John Keble's Christian Year, and think of its guileless author with kindly affection. Within five- and- twenty years of its publication, a hundred thousand copies had been sold. The book is still diffused so widely, in editions of all forms, that it may yet go on, until the circle of the years shall be no more, living and making live.

Four years after "The Christian Year appeared, Keble was appointed (in 1831) to the usual five years' tenure of the Poetry Professorship at Oxford. Two years after he had been appointed Poetry Professor, he preached the Assize Sermon, and took for his theme "National Apostasy." John Henry Newman, who had obtained his Fellowship at Oriel some years before the publication of "The Christian Year," and was twenty-six years old when it appeared, received from it a strong impulse towards the endeavour to revive the spirit of the Church by restoring life and soul to all her ordinances, and even to the minutest detail of her ritual. The deep respect felt for the author of "The Christian Year" gave power to the sermon of 1833 upon National Apostasy, and made it the starting- point of the Oxford movement known as Tractarian, from the issue of tracts through which its promoters sought to stir life in the clergy and the

people; known also as Puseyite because it received help at the end of the year 1833 from Dr. Pusey, who was of like age with J. H. Newman, and then Regius Professor of Hebrew. There was a danger, which some then foresaw, in the nature of this endeavour to put life into the Church; but we all now recognise the purity of Christian zeal that prompted the attempt to make dead forms of ceremonial glow again with spiritual fire, and serve as aids to the recovery of light and warmth in our devotions.

It was in 1833 that Keble, by one earnest sermon, with a pure life at the back of it, and this book that had prepared the way, gave the direct impulse to an Oxford movement for the reformation of the Church. The movement then began. But Keble went back to his curacy at Hursley. Two years afterwards the curate became vicar, and then Keble married. His after-life continued innocent and happy. He and his wife died within two months of each other, in the same year, 1866. He had taken part with his friends at Oxford by writing five of their Tracts, publishing a few sermons that laboured towards the same end, and editing a "Library of the Fathers." In 1847 he produced another volume of poems, "Lyra Innocentium," which associated doctrines of the Church with the lives of children, whom he loved, though his own marriage was childless.

The power of Keble's verse lies in its truth. A faithful and pure nature, strong in home affections, full of love and reverence for all that is of heaven in our earthly lot, strives for the full consecration of man's life with love and faith. There is no rare gift of genius. Keble is not in subtlety of thought or of expression another George Herbert, or another Henry Vaughan. But his voice is not the less in unison with theirs, for every note is true, and wins us by its purity. His also are melodies of the everlasting chime.

"And be ye sure that Love can bless  
E'en in this crowded loneliness,  
Where ever moving myriads seem to say,  
Go—thou art nought to us, nor we to thee—away!"

"There are in this loud stunning tide  
Of human care and crime,

With whom the melodies abide  
Of the everlasting chime;  
Who carry music in their heart  
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,  
Plying their daily task with busier feet,  
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat."

With a peal, then, of such music let us ring in the New Year for our  
Library; and for our lives.

January 1, 1887. H. M.

## DEDICATION.

When in my silent solitary walk,  
I sought a strain not all unworthy Thee,  
My heart, still ringing with wild worldly talk,  
Gave forth no note of holier minstrelsy.

Prayer is the secret, to myself I said,  
Strong supplication must call down the charm,  
And thus with untuned heart I feebly prayed,  
Knocking at Heaven's gate with earth-palsied arm.

Fountain of Harmony! Thou Spirit blest,  
By whom the troubled waves of earthly sound  
Are gathered into order, such as best  
Some high-souled bard in his enchanted round

May compass, Power divine! Oh, spread Thy wing,  
Thy dovelike wing that makes confusion fly,  
Over my dark, void spirit, summoning  
New worlds of music, strains that may not die.

Oh, happiest who before thine altar wait,  
With pure hands ever holding up on high  
The guiding Star of all who seek Thy gate,  
The undying lamp of heavenly Poesy.

Too weak, too wavering, for such holy task  
Is my frail arm, O Lord; but I would fain  
Track to its source the brightness, I would bask  
In the clear ray that makes Thy pathway plain.

I dare not hope with David's harp to chase  
The evil spirit from the troubled breast;  
Enough for me if I can find such grace

To listen to the strain, and be at rest.

## THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

### MORNING

His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Lament.  
iii. 22, 23.

Hues of the rich unfolding morn,  
That, ere the glorious sun be born,  
By some soft touch invisible  
Around his path are taught to swell; -

Thou rustling breeze so fresh and gay,  
That dancest forth at opening day,  
And brushing by with joyous wing,  
Wakenest each little leaf to sing; -

Ye fragrant clouds of dewy steam,  
By which deep grove and tangled stream  
Pay, for soft rains in season given,  
Their tribute to the genial heaven; -

Why waste your treasures of delight  
Upon our thankless, joyless sight;  
Who day by day to sin awake,  
Seldom of Heaven and you partake?

Oh, timely happy, timely wise,  
Hearts that with rising morn arise!  
Eyes that the beam celestial view,  
Which evermore makes all things new!

New every morning is the love  
Our wakening and uprising prove;  
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,

Restored to life, and power, and thought.

New mercies, each returning day,  
Hover around us while we pray;  
New perils past, new sins forgiven,  
New thoughts of God, new hopes of Heaven.

If on our daily course our mind  
Be set to hallow all we find,  
New treasures still, of countless price,  
God will provide for sacrifice.

Old friends, old scenes will lovelier be,  
As more of Heaven in each we see:  
Some softening gleam of love and prayer  
Shall dawn on every cross and care.

As for some dear familiar strain  
Untired we ask, and ask again,  
Ever, in its melodious store,  
Finding a spell unheard before;

Such is the bliss of souls serene,  
When they have sworn, and stedfast mean,  
Counting the cost, in all t' espy  
Their God, in all themselves deny.

Oh, could we learn that sacrifice,  
What lights would all around us rise!  
How would our hearts with wisdom talk  
Along Life's dullest, dreariest walk!

We need not bid, for cloistered cell,  
Our neighbour and our work farewell,  
Nor strive to wind ourselves too high  
For sinful man beneath the sky:

The trivial round, the common task,  
Would furnish all we ought to ask;  
Room to deny ourselves; a road  
To bring us daily nearer God.

Seek we no more; content with these,  
Let present Rapture, Comfort, Ease,  
As Heaven shall bid them, come and go:-  
The secret this of Rest below.

Only, O Lord, in Thy dear love  
Fit us for perfect Rest above;  
And help us, this and every day,  
To live more nearly as we pray.



## EVENING

Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. —  
St. Luke xxiv. 29.

'Tis gone, that bright and orb'd blaze,  
Fast fading from our wistful gaze;  
You mantling cloud has hid from sight  
The last faint pulse of quivering light.

In darkness and in weariness  
The traveller on his way must press,  
No gleam to watch on tree or tower,  
Whiling away the lonesome hour.

Sun of my soul! Thou Saviour dear,  
It is not night if Thou be near:  
Oh, may no earth-born cloud arise  
To hide Thee from Thy servant's eyes!

When round Thy wondrous works below  
My searching rapturous glance I throw,  
Tracing out Wisdom, Power and Love,  
In earth or sky, in stream or grove; -

Or by the light Thy words disclose  
Watch Time's full river as it flows,  
Scanning Thy gracious Providence,  
Where not too deep for mortal sense:-

When with dear friends sweet talk I hold,  
And all the flowers of life unfold;  
Let not my heart within me burn,  
Except in all I Thee discern.

When the soft dews of kindly sleep  
My wearied eyelids gently steep,

Be my last thought, how sweet to rest  
For ever on my Saviour's breast.

Abide with me from morn till eve,  
For without Thee I cannot live:  
Abide with me when night is nigh,  
For without Thee I dare not die.

Thou Framer of the light and dark,  
Steer through the tempest Thine own ark:  
Amid the howling wintry sea  
We are in port if we have Thee.

The Rulers of this Christian land,  
'Twixt Thee and us ordained to stand, -  
Guide Thou their course, O Lord, aright,  
Let all do all as in Thy sight.

Oh! by Thine own sad burthen, borne  
So meekly up the hill of scorn,  
Teach Thou Thy Priests their daily cross  
To bear as Thine, nor count it loss!

If some poor wandering child of Thine  
Have spurned to-day the voice divine,  
Now, Lord, the gracious work begin;  
Let him no more lie down in sin.

Watch by the sick: enrich the poor  
With blessings from Thy boundless store:  
Be every mourner's sleep to-night,  
Like infants' slumbers, pure and light.

Come near and bless us when we wake,  
Ere through the world our way we take;  
Till in the ocean of Thy love  
We lose ourselves, in Heaven above.

## ADVENT SUNDAY

Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. — Romans xiii 11.

Awake — again the Gospel-trump is blown -  
From year to year it swells with louder tone,  
From year to year the signs of wrath  
Are gathering round the Judge's path,  
Strange words fulfilled, and mighty works achieved,  
And truth in all the world both hated and believed.

Awake! why linger in the gorgeous town,  
Sworn liegemen of the Cross and thorny crown?  
Up from your beds of sloth for shame,  
Speed to the eastern mount like flame,  
Nor wonder, should ye find your King in tears,  
E'en with the loud Hosanna ringing in His ears.

Alas! no need to rouse them: long ago  
They are gone forth to swell Messiah's show:  
With glittering robes and garlands sweet  
They strew the ground beneath His feet:  
All but your hearts are there — O doomed to prove  
The arrows winged in Heaven for Faith that will not love!

Meanwhile He passes through th' adoring crowd,  
Calm as the march of some majestic cloud,  
That o'er wild scenes of ocean-war  
Holds its still course in Heaven afar:  
E'en so, heart-searching Lord, as years roll on,  
Thou keepest silent watch from Thy triumphal throne:

E'en so, the world is thronging round to gaze  
On the dread vision of the latter days,

Constrained to own Thee, but in heart  
Prepared to take Barabbas' part:  
"Hosanna" now, to-morrow "Crucify,"  
The changeful burden still of their rude lawless cry.

Yet in that throng of selfish hearts untrue  
Thy sad eye rests upon Thy faithful few,  
Children and childlike souls are there,  
Blind Bartimeus' humble prayer,  
And Lazarus wakened from his four days' sleep,  
Enduring life again, that Passover to keep.

And fast beside the olive-bordered way  
Stands the blessed home where Jesus deigned to stay,  
The peaceful home, to Zeal sincere  
And heavenly Contemplation dear,  
Where Martha loved to wait with reverence meet,  
And wiser Mary lingered at Thy sacred feet.

Still through decaying ages as they glide,  
Thou lov'st Thy chosen remnant to divide;  
Sprinkled along the waste of years  
Full many a soft green isle appears:  
Pause where we may upon the desert road,  
Some shelter is in sight, some sacred safe abode.

When withering blasts of error swept the sky,  
And Love's last flower seemed fain to droop and die,  
How sweet, how lone the ray benign  
On sheltered nooks of Palestine!  
Then to his early home did Love repair,  
And cheered his sickening heart with his own native air.

Years roll away: again the tide of crime  
Has swept Thy footsteps from the favoured clime  
Where shall the holy Cross find rest?  
On a crowned monarch's mailed breast:  
Like some bright angel o'er the darkling scene,

Through court and camp he holds his heavenward course serene.

A fouler vision yet; an age of light,  
Light without love, glares on the aching sight:  
Oh, who can tell how calm and sweet,  
Meek Walton, shows thy green retreat,  
When wearied with the tale thy times disclose,  
The eye first finds thee out in thy secure repose?

Thus bad and good their several warnings give  
Of His approach, whom none may see and live:  
Faith's ear, with awful still delight,  
Counts them like minute-bells at night.  
Keeping the heart awake till dawn of morn,  
While to her funeral pile this aged world is borne.

But what are Heaven's alarms to hearts that cower  
In wilful slumber, deepening every hour,  
That draw their curtains closer round,  
The nearer swells the trumpet's sound?  
Lord, ere our trembling lamps sink down and die,  
Touch us with chastening hand, and make us feel Thee nigh.

