

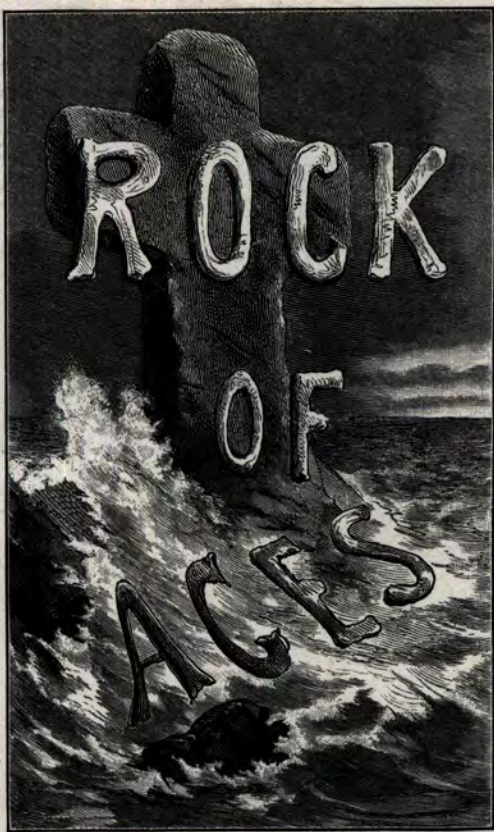
Rock of Ages



May the
Rock of Ages.
be your refuge, is
my sincere wish.

E. C. B.

Christmas 1889.



ROCK OF AGES.

By

Augustus Montague Toplady.

WITH 16 ILLUSTRATIONS.

Thomas Nelson and Sons,
LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK.

Memorial Sketch.

THE number must be few of devout Christians, young or old, who, if well acquainted with the English language, are not familiar with the name of Augustus Toplady. They may know little of his personal history, and still less of the controversial writings which chiefly engaged his pen; but the *name* of Toplady they have heard from childhood, given as that of the author of a few "spiritual songs" which growing years have more and more endeared to their heart and experience. First among these will generally be the hymn, "Rock of Ages," illustrated in the present volume. It is sung, Sabbath after Sabbath, in many a house of prayer, in many a family circle, over the length and breadth of our own land, and wherever our language is spoken. And not less constantly is it used as the expression of private, personal devotion, in Christian retirement; or faltered by dying lips, from the palace to the cottage. Many readers will be pleased to learn something of the author's character and history.

Augustus Montague Toplady was born at Farnham, in Surrey, on November 4, 1740. His father, an English officer, fell in battle soon after, at the siege of Cartagena, and the infant, an only child, was left to his widowed mother's care, whose tender solicitude was well repaid by his dutiful affection and gratitude. After receiving early education at Westminster School, he went with his mother to Ireland, and there, at the age of sixteen, happening one day to stroll into a barn where a lay preacher was speaking from the text, "Ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ," his own soul was arrested by divine grace and led to the Saviour. That day he ever regarded as the "day of decision" in his life. Some years later he writes: "Strange that I, who had so long sat

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under the means of grace in England, should be brought nigh to God in an obscure part of Ireland, amidst a handful of God's people met together in a barn, and under the ministry of one who could hardly spell his own name! Surely it was the Lord's doing."

The rare mental gifts and talents with which he was endowed were very early apparent. Having devoted himself to the sacred ministry, he studied in Trinity College, Dublin, and at the age of twenty-two was ordained to the living of Blagdon, Somersetshire. Some conscientious scruples made him soon resign this charge and remove to another at Broad Hembury, Devon, with a stipend of £80. Here he faithfully laboured for a number of years, giving his leisure time to literary work of various kinds.

He never married, and appears to have lived alone, his mother having died. There were few outstanding incidents in his tranquil history. The extracts from his diary (preserved by a very poor biographer), show a spirit of fervent piety, at times enjoying seasons of rapturous devotion, but not without the fluctuations of feeling so often associated with such a character and temperament. Nor could he have written the beautiful hymn,

"Your harps, ye trembling saints,
Down from the willows take,"

unless his own harp had sometimes hung upon the willows.

One Saturday night he records as a time of terrible temptation and depression, when all he could do was to throw himself "absolutely and at large upon God... without comfort and almost without hope." But next day he was granted a singular measure of joy and peace in believing, and he adds: "Here let me leave it on thankful record, for my comfort and support (if it please God) in future times of trial and desertion, that I never was lower in the valley than last night, nor higher on the mount than to-day. The Lord chastened me, but did not give me over to death. And he never will. He may, indeed, for a small moment, hide his face from me; but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on me."

His health, never robust, did not seem to agree with the Devonshire climate, and in 1775 he removed to London, where, after some desultory preaching, he undertook the charge of the Reformed Calvinistic Chapel, Orange Street. Here he became intimately acquainted with Lady Hun-

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tingdon, Lady Glenorchy, and other eminent Christians. Two of his most beautiful and best-known poems, "When languor and disease invade," and "Deathless principle, arise," were addressed to Lady Huntingdon—the first during her illness, the other from his own deathbed.

He became for a short time while in London editor of the *Gospel Magazine*, to which periodical he had long contributed. In its pages first appeared most of his writings, while engaged in bitter controversy with John Wesley over the points of Calvinistic doctrine upon which they differed. It is painful now to read or think of the language used on both sides; and surely, if sorrow was ever felt in "the better land," these holy men of God, now so long united in the home of that Saviour whom they both so truly loved and so faithfully served, must have mourned their mutual misunderstandings and misrepresentations during their earthly pilgrimage.

Toplady's talents as a preacher were remarkable. "It was the polemic press," writes Dr. James Hamilton, "which extorted human bitterness from his spirit. In the pulpit's milder urgency nothing flowed but balm. His voice was music, and devotion and sanctity seemed to emanate from his ethereal countenance and light immortal form. . . . There was such commanding solemnity in his tones as made apathy impossible, and such simplicity in his words that to hear was to understand. From easy explanations he advanced to rapid and conclusive arguments, and warmed into importunate exhortations, till consciences began to burn and feelings to take fire from his own kindled spirit, and himself and his hearers were together drowned in sympathetic tears" (*Christian Classics*).

In his diary there are repeated notices of a remarkable measure of spiritual comfort being granted to him in preparation for Sabbath services, with a strong assurance of a blessing on the morrow. On one occasion he writes: "Such comfortable and peremptory convictions of God's future presence and support on a succeeding Sunday, with which I have been so often favoured beforehand, I intend henceforth, as often as God is pleased to grant them, to distinguish by the name of *Saturday Assurances*. . . . The Lord has often disappointed my doubts and the evil surmises of unbelief; but he never once disappointed my hope, when he said to my soul, 'I will be with thee.'" After preaching: "I was all on fire for God, and the fire, I verily believe, caught from heart to heart.

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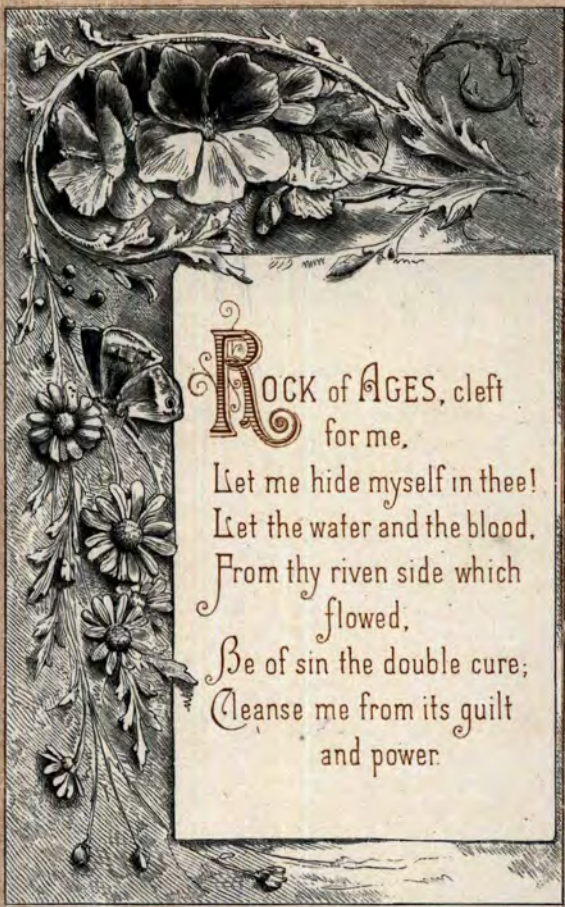
I am astonished, when I review the blessings of this Lord's day."—
August 28, 1768.

The fatal disease, consumption, long undermining his strength, at last made decided progress. He preached for the last time, June 14, 1788, from 2 Peter i. 13, 14, and died August 11. The interval of lingering weakness was truly spent in the Land of Beulah, with the Celestial City full in view, not a cloud of doubt or fear allowed to come between the glorious prospect and the longing pilgrim's eyes. "The consolations of God," he said, "are so abundant that he leaves me nothing to pray for. My prayers are all converted into praise; I enjoy a heaven already in my heart." An hour before death he expressed his joy at his friends being now made willing to part from him, since no mortal could live long after the glories which God had manifested to his soul.

His collected works were published in an edition of six volumes, and also in one large volume, now before the present writer. But the true treasure bequeathed by this man of God to the Church of Christ is contained in a few of the sacred poems printed on the last pages of this ponderous tome. Our space will not permit us to allude further to the others, which will be found in most collections of sacred poetry; but most precious of all is that now illustrated. "Rock of Ages" has been translated into many languages. An elegant Latin version was made by our Premier (Mr. Gladstone) a few years ago. An American missionary, lately visiting an Armenian church in Constantinople, was much impressed by the deep feeling with which a hymn, of which he could not understand a word, appeared to be sung. He found upon inquiry that it was an Arabic version of "Rock of Ages." The latest translation has been into Chinyanja, the language spoken in the region around Lake Nyassa, made by Dr. Laws of the Livingstonia Mission.

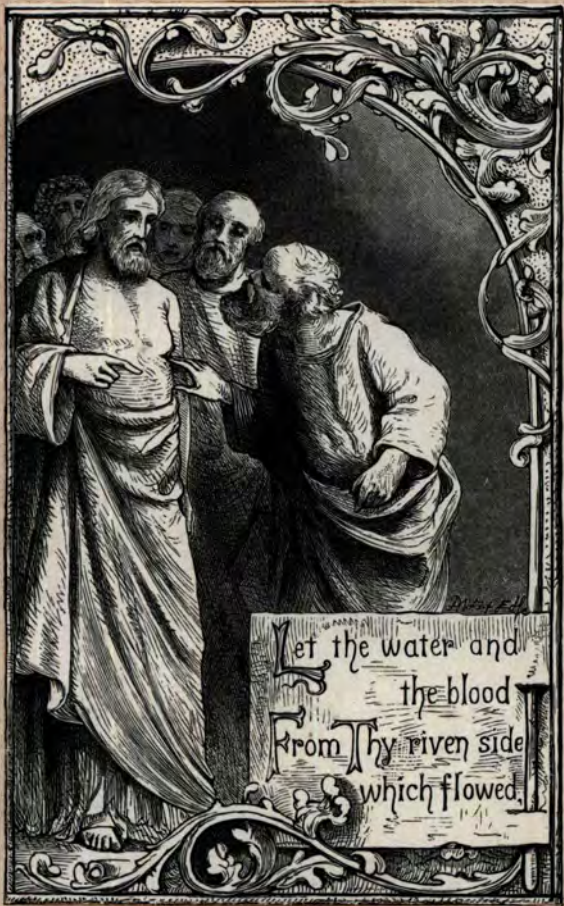
We may say of this hymn what Dr. John Ker writes of the Twenty-third Psalm:—"It has, like some gentle stream, a long history, where it sparkles to the open daylight; and it would have a longer still could we follow it into all its quiet resting-places in hidden hearts, which only the day of God will declare."

H. L. L.



ROCK of AGES, cleft
for me,
Let me hide myself in thee!
Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which
flowed,
Be of sin the double cure;
Cleanse me from its guilt
and power.






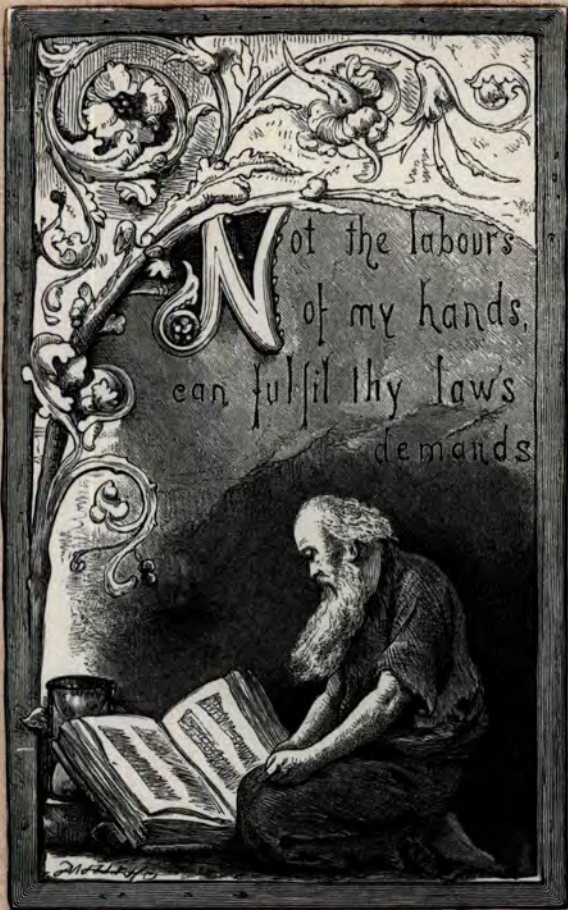
Let the water and
the blood
From Thy riven side
which flowed.

CLEANSE ME FROM ITS GUILT AND POWER



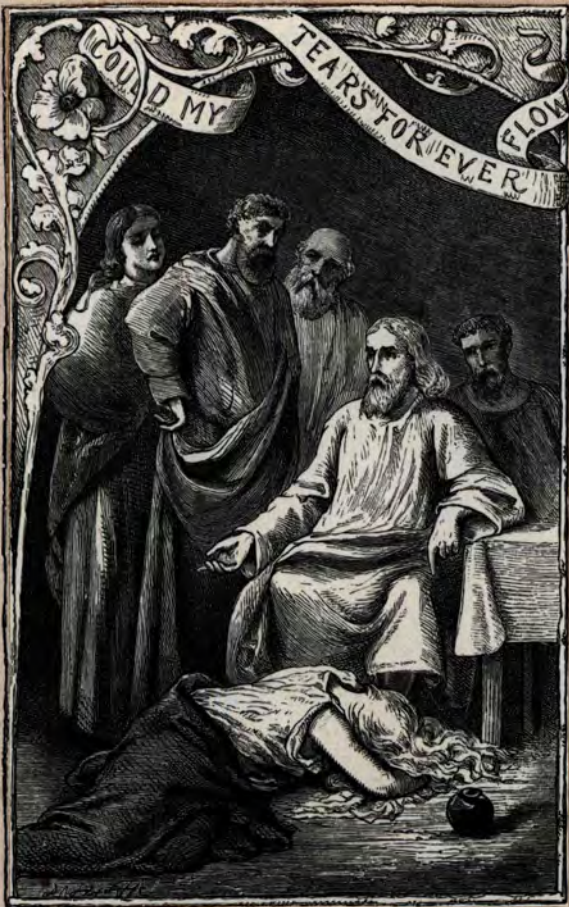


Not the labours of my
hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite
know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and thou
alone.



Not the labours
of my hands,
can fulfil thy law's
demands

W. G. ...





Nothing in my hand
I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for
dress;
Helpless, look to thee for
grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour! or I die.




NOTHING IN MY
HANDS I BRING



Simply to
Thy Cross
I cling,

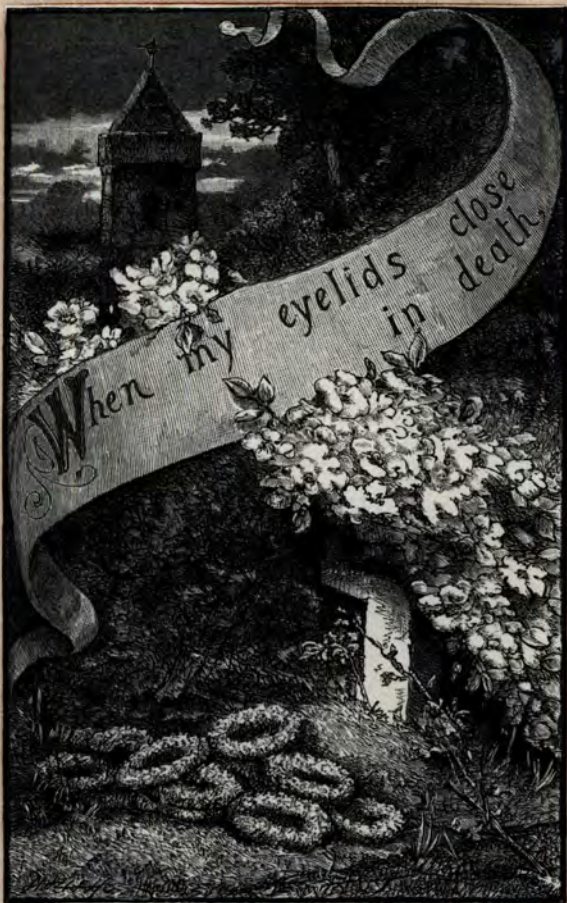


FOUL I TO THE FOUNTAIN FLY



While I draw this
fleeing breath,
When my eyelids close in
death,
When I soar through tracts
unknown,
See thee on thy judgment
throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee!





When my eyelids in close death





ROCK of AGES,
cleft for me,
Let me hide myself
in Thee !