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What A Friend We Have In Jesus

Written in 1940 for the Bowmanville Statesman by Fred R. Foley was a series on "Singers and Their Songs." There was an article which dealt in a personal and intimate way with the life of one Joseph Scriven.

Creator of the hymn "What a Friend We Have In Jesus," Scriven's life came to a tragic end near the shores of Rice Lake.

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
Ah our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Certain hymns, for various and personal reasons, strike sentimental strings in our hearts in ways that are difficult to describe or determine.

Here is a hymn that touches so tenderly the heart strings of the writer of these articles that, for years, he could not sing it.

While others sang this dear old song his eyes were on the open

book but his thoughts were far away in a sick room in Bowmanville where a dear one lay for weeks on a bed of pain, so weak and wasted with disease she could scarcely lift a hand and unable to speak audibly for days. The family gathered about awaiting for her release from suffering.

Suddenly, without human assistance, she sat upright and began to sing her favorite hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Without missing a note without a quiver in her voice, she sang three verses through concluding with "In His arms He'll take and shield thee, thou shalt find a solace there," then sank back upon the pillow. A miracle—Heavenly strength. Heavenly voice. Heavenly words—her last words.

Few have known this inside story but it is told now after these thirty years to illustrate the statement made above and that others may compare it with their personal experiences.

Another pen must needs write the story of Joseph Scriven and his immortal hymn. As both are closely associated with Port Hope and vicinity, a friend living near the Scriven monument on the highway north of Port Hope kindly prepared the article which follows. Our sincere thanks to Mrs. Ed. Dixon of Campbellcroft.

It has been said that a great man never dies. If we look at Joseph Scriven we will find this to be true since he composed the hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Joseph Scriven was born in Dublin, Ireland, graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, and emigrated to Canada at the age of 25.

He settled in our district of Rice Lake where he was first known to this community. He boarded with James Sackville who farmed and operated a mill at Sawlog Hill on the south shore of the lake.

Mr. Scriven regularly visited the homes in the community. He was always present where sickness or trouble prevailed, a friend of the unfortunate and distressed. His income from Ireland was usually given to the poor, thereby denying himself of any luxuries. Those who knew him well in their childhood can remember, as they played barefooted in the sand on a side road, seeing him kneeling and praying to God for guidance.

He was a man of knowledge and understood how to make short but sincere appeals to his listeners.

He talked to children, drunkards and all classes of people, delivering God's word in blacksmith's shop, post office, on street corners in Port Hope, and in front of hotels. He was honored by everyone, even the hotelmen, for his sincerity.

As we mentioned before, Joseph Scriven was greatly interested in those who were in distress or troubled.

We remember the lines in the hymn, "All our sins and griefs to bear," and "Is there trouble anywhere?" This is typical of the spirit of the man, who went about doing good.

He was often seen on the street of Port Hope with a saw horse and saw, on his way to perform a kindly act for some one in need.

This hymn is international and interdenominational.

Written originally for Mr. Scriven's mother and not intended for the public, a copy of the hymn fell into the hands of a traveller who showed it to C. C. Converse, a musical composer in Chicago, who set it to music.

Mr Scriven met his death accidentally. The Sackville family where he boarded obtained their water supply from a spring and it is supposed that the hymn writer,

who was in poor health, wandered alone at night to the spring to get a drink and fell into the creek at the waste gate in the mill dam and was drowned.

Strange, too, that his sweetheart was accidentally drowned on the eve of their wedding day. He was buried in Pengelly's cemetery on the shore of Rice Lake in 1885.

About thirty years later Dr. Byrne, who as a crippled boy known as David Kidd, was befriended by Mr. Scriven, erected two memorial stones in his honor, one at Ontario Street, Port Hope, and one at Kidd's Corners, Highway No. 28.

On each of these monuments was engraved the hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Mr. Byrne unveiled the monument at Kidd's Corners and a collection was taken up among the friends and admirers of Mr. Scriven to erect a monument in the Pengelly cemetery. Over a thousand dollars was contributed and a fitting memorial stands there to the memory of this worthy Apostle.

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrow share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge!
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer,
In His arms He'll take and shield thee:
Thou wilt find a solace there.

Amen.
—J. Scriven, 1820-1886