



**“MY
COUNTRY
‘TIS OF THEE”**



Nearly two centuries ago our national hymn “America” was born. Written by Samuel Francis Smith, a Baptist clergyman, it was first publicly sung in Boston at the Fourth of July celebration.* It has since sung itself deep into the hearts of free men everywhere.

No one was ever great who did not possess a degree of inspiration. This was inspiration at white heat, for at the time of writing, the author was only twenty-four years of age. When the fire fell, he seized a scrap of paper and within a half hour placed upon it the verses substantially as they stand today.

Not every author lives to see his work approved, but this one did. “I have heard it sung in many languages,” he said, “more than half-way around the world, the last in Hebrew.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Harvard classmate of Smith, attributes the genius in “America” to its very first word “My,” a personal pos-

sessive which instantly strikes a silver chord in every patriot’s heart.

“**MY country, ‘tis of thee.**”

“That little pronoun did it all, and will forever do it,” said Holmes, brilliant poet and keenest wit of his generation. “Why couldn’t any of the rest of us have thought of that? That puts ‘America’ in the hearts of the people, and because of it Sam Smith will live when Longfellow and Whittier and all the rest of us have gone into oblivion.”

Holmes was close to a great truth. God is like that. There are many people who know Him only in a remote, objective, impersonal sense. They acknowledge Him as Creator, and admit that the world offers abundant proof of a Master Workman. But they have never acquainted themselves with Him so they can say, “MY God.”

Such relationship is by no means unusual. There was doubting Thomas.¹ He had sat at the feet of Jesus, listened to His marvelous words, witnessed His miraculous works. Yet he did not really know Him. For when the Saviour was raised from the dead, he said, “*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails . . . I will not believe.*” “*Reach hither thy finger,*” Jesus urged, *behold my hands . . . be not faith-*

less, but believing.” Convinced, the doubter exclaimed, “*MY Lord and MY God.*”

What does it matter though the world be filled with gold, if none of it belongs to you? What though all your friends enjoy abounding health if yours is gone? What though God fills all the world with His Spirit, if you possess Him not?

The glorious truth is, you can make Christ *yours*—a personal, priceless, eternal possession. The promise is, “*As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.*”² Focus the telescope of faith, and the distant God will be brought near. Believe, accept, obey. Then you can sing from your heart.

“*My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine.*”

—David J. Fant, Litt.D.

1) John 20:25-28

2) John 1:12

*Written in February 1832, it was sung that same year by Sunday school children in the Park Street Church, Boston, Mass.

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