

The Prodigal Son

An Oratorio

**The Words Selected Entirely from
The Holy Scriptures**

**The Music Composed by
Arthur S. Sullivan**

First performed at the Worcester Music Festival on Wednesday 8th September, 1869

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PREFACE.

It is a remarkable fact that the Parable of the Prodigal Son should never before have been chosen as the text of a sacred musical composition. The story is so natural and pathetic, and forms so complete a whole; its lesson is so thoroughly Christian; the characters, though few, are so perfectly contrasted, and the opportunity for the employment of local colour is so obvious, that it is indeed astonishing to find the subject so long overlooked.

The only drawback is the shortness of the narrative, and the consequent necessity for filling it out with material drawn from elsewhere.

In the present case this has been done as sparingly as possible, and entirely from the Scriptures. In so doing the Prodigal himself has been conceived, not as of a naturally brutish and depraved disposition - a view taken by many commentators with apparently little knowledge of human nature, and no recollection of their own youthful impulses; but rather as a buoyant, restless youth, tired of the monotony of home, and anxious to see what lay beyond the narrow confines of his father's farm, going forth in the confidence of his own simplicity and ardour, and led gradually away into follies and sins which, at the outset, would have been as distasteful as they were strange to him.

The episode with which the parable concludes has no dramatic connection with the former and principal portion, and has therefore not been treated.

ARTHUR S. SULLIVAN

No.1. - INTRODUCTION

No.2. - CHORUS

There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful to them that fear Him.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

(Luke xv.10; Psalm ciii.13; Rev. vii. 16, 17.)

No.3. - SOLO (Tenor)

A certain man had two sons; and the younger said unto his father: "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. For I know that there is no good but for a man to rejoice, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of his labour."

(Luke xv. 11, 12; Eccles. iii. 12, 13.)

No.4. - RECITATIVE AND ARIA (Bass)

My son, attend to my words, incline thine ear unto my sayings; Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and in all thy ways acknowledge Him; for the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

(Prov. iv. 18, 20; iii. 6, 9.)

No.5. - RECITATIVE (Soprano)

And the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

(Luke xv. 13.)

No.6. - SOLO (*Tenor*) AND CHORUS

THE REVEL.

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant. Let us eat and drink.

(Isaiah xxii. 13; lvi. 12.)

No.7. - RECITATIVE (*Contralto*) AND CHORUS

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night till wine inflame them. And the harp and the viol, the tabret and the pipe are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hands.

The mirth of tabrets ceases, the noise of them that rejoice endeth; the joy of the harp ceaseth.

(Isaiah v. 11, 12; xxiv. 8.)

No.8. - SONG (*Contralto*)

Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world; for the world passeth away and the just thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

(1 John ii. 17.)

No.9. - RECITATIVE (*Soprano*)

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled himself with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him.

(Luke xv. 14 - 16.)

No.10. - ARIA (*Soprano*)

O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been like a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?

(Isaiah xivii. 18.)

No.11. - SOLO (Tenor)

How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants."

(Luke xv. 17 - 19.)

No.12 - CHORUS

There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

(Luke xv. 10; Psalm li. 17.)

No.13. - RECITATIVE (Soprano) AND DUET (Tenor and Bass)

And he arose and came to his father, but when he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him.

(Luke xv. 20.)

DUET - (Tenor and Bass)

- Son. Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.
- Father. My son is yet alive! Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, and thou art yet alive.

(Luke xv. 21; Gen. xiv. 28; xlvii. 30.)

No.14. - RECITATIVE AND ARIA (Bass)

Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. Like a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful to them that fear Him.

Blessed be God who hath heard my prayer, and not turned his mercy from me.

(Luke xv. 2; Psalm ciii. 13; lxvi. 20.)

No.15. - CHORUS

O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men.

Let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed. They went astray in the wilderness out of the way; hungry and thirsty their souls fainted in them; yet when they cried unto the Lord in their trouble He delivered them out of their distress.

O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men.

(Psalm cvii. 4 - 6, 8.)

No.16. - RECITATIVE AND ARIA (Tenor)

No chastening for the present seemeth to joyous but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. Come, ye children, and hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Lo, the poor crieth, and the Lord heareth him; yes and saveth him out of all his troubles.

(Heb. xii. 11, 6; Psalm xxxiv. 6, 11.)

No.17. - QUARTETT (unaccompanied)

The Lord is nigh unto them that are of contrite heart, and will save such as be of an humble spirit. Thus saith the Lord, I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.

(Psalms xxxiv. 18; Isaiah lvii. 18.)

No.18. - CHORUS

Thou, O Lord art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting. Hallelujah. Amen.

(Isaiah lxiii. 16.)