

## “Give to the Poor and Lend to the Lord”

### Christian Gellert and the Destitute Woman

Its author the old hymn, "I Have Seen My Days of Sadness" was Christian Fiirchtegott Gellert, born in 1715 at Haynichen, in Saxony. He studied at Leipzig, intending to be a pastor; but he was too modest and retiring to preach, and became a tutor and professor in the University. At one time the poet Goethe was among his pupils. While he was at Leipzig a war broke out, and there was fearful distress and poverty in the city. Gellert could not bear to see his fellow-creatures suffer, and he gave them so much of his small means that he was reduced to great straits himself. One winter morning, as he was going out into the country for a walk, he saw a poor woman sitting by the roadside, sobbing bitterly. He found that, owing to her husband's illness, she and her family were without food, and the landlord threatened to turn them out of their little home if the rent was not paid that , very day. The money owing was thirty thalers, and Gellert possessed the exact sum ; but it was all he had, and he had saved it to buy firewood for the winter. The poor woman's need was greater than his own, so he gave her the money, and then went to the landlord, made him see how hard he 1 was, so that he refused to take the poor woman's money, and she was able to' take it for food. Next day Gellert began to feel the piercing cold and to realize the sacrifice he had made. He became colder and colder, so that the power nearly went out of his fingers; and then he took up his Bible, found the Book of Job, and read ch. ii. 10: "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Then he took up his pen, and as fast as his blue fingers would allow him, he wrote the famous hymn—

"I have had my days of blessing,  
All the joys of life possessing,  
Unnumbered they appear.

Then let faith and patience cheer me,  
Now that trials gather near me.  
Where is life without a tear ?"

He had just finished writing this, when a friend of his, a good doctor, came in, noticed how cold the room was, saw the hymn, and soon found out the whole story, not from Gellert himself, but from the poor woman he had helped. The doctor had to go to a farmhouse to see a patient, and there he found some Prussian officers sitting at dinner. One of them, who turned out to be Prince Henry of Prussia, inquired after Gellert, upon which the doctor told the story and produced the hymn. The story soon spread, and the farmer sent off a great load of firewood to Gellert, saying it was a present for a hymn. The old landlord, too, was touched, and sent back

the thirty thalers, without any name, to the poet; and lastly, Prince Henry himself called upon him, thanked him for his hymn, and gave him a valuable present. Gellert died at Leipzig in 1767, having held the Professorship of Poetry and Philosophy there, and written many books and much sacred poetry.

*I have had my days of blessing,  
All the joys of life possessing,  
Unnumber'd they appear!  
Then let faith and patience cheer me,  
Now that trials gather near me:  
Where is life without a tear?*

*Yes, O Lord, a sinner looking  
O'er the sins Thou art rebuking,  
Must own Thy judgments light.  
Surely I, so oft offending,  
Must in humble patience bending,  
Feel Thy chastisements are right.*

*Let me, o'er transgression weeping,  
Find the grace my soul is seeking;  
Receiving at Thy throne  
Strength to meet each tribulation,  
Looking for the great salvation,  
Trusting in my Lord alone!*

*While 'mid earthly tears and sighing,  
Still to praise Thee feebly trying  
Still clinging, Lord, to Thee;  
Quietly on Thy love relying,  
I am Thine--and, living, dying,  
Surely all is well with me!*