

The Sweet By and By

The year was 1868 in Elkhorn, Illinois where our story begins. Sanford Fillmore Bennett was a druggist at the time. Prior to this, he was a teacher beginning at age eighteen and in 1858 he entered the University of Michigan, and in 1864 he entered the Civil War by enlisting with the 40th Wisconsin Volunteers and served until the end of the war as a 2nd lieutenant. Bennett was born in 1836 so by the end of the war he would have been about twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old, depending on his exact birth date. After the war he returned to Elkhorn and engaged in the drug business and studied medicine and in 1874 he graduated from Rush Medical College of Chicago.

While living in Elkhorn, Bennett became associated with one Joe Webster with whom he became good friends. In fact, together they wrote many songs since Webster was a musician. For reasons not known, Webster was subject to bouts of emotional depression. One day in 1868 Webster, carrying his violin, entered the drug store where Bennett was. Bennett could tell that his dear friend was upset just by the way he entered the store. Without saying a word, Webster walked over to the stove that was used to heat the place; he stood there with his back to Bennett. This caused Bennett to ask what the problem was now. Webster simply said, "It's no matter. It'll be all right by and by." Times before, Bennett found that if he could suggest an idea or theme for a new piece of music, it would help to recover him from the depressing mood he was in. That last phrase by Webster, "by and by" arrested the attention of Bennett and it was then that Bennett wrote the words for, "*The Sweet By and By*." Bennett said, "I penned the words as fast as I could write." As he would hand the lines to Webster, he could see a spark of life beginning to shine forth in his eyes. Music, it can for a soul what nothing else can do and, this became evident as Webster played his violin and jotted down notes. Within a half hour the song was written. Two other men who were in the store at the time were called over and an impromptu quartet began to sing the song for the first time. As they sang, a customer entered the store and listened to them sing. Afterwards, with tears in his eyes he said, "That hymn is immortal!"

God, through the person of His Holy Spirit, creates in the heart of His children a song and, when that song is sung for His honor and glory, lives are touched as only He can do. So, it is with this song, "*The Sweet By and By*."

There's a land that is fairer than day,
And by faith we can see it afar;
For the Father waits over the way
To prepare us a dwelling place there.

Refrain:

In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.

We shall sing on that beautiful shore
The melodious songs of the blessed;
And our spirits shall sorrow no more,
Not a sigh for the blessing of rest.

To our bountiful Father above,
We will offer our tribute of praise
For the glorious gift of His love
And the blessings that hallow our days.

This song is beautiful, encouraging, uplifting, with a powerful message for the child of God. As Christians, we are not perfect and we know it, for we are only sinners saved by the grace of God and, we know that this world is not our home. One day, we know not exactly when, our earthly tabernacle {human body} will cease to function

and, when it does, we will be with our loving Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. “Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: ... We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” {2 Corinthians 5:6,8} Jesus Christ as promised us, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.” {John 14:1-3}

This promise is made possible by Jesus Christ who paid our sin debt when He died and shed His blood on the Cross of Calvary. {John 3:16} Sadly, those who have not repented of sin and trusted Him as Saviour do not have this promise; all they can look forward to is eternity in hell. “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” {John 3:18}

My friend, will you repent of your sin and by faith alone in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, receive Him as your personal Saviour? If you will do this, He will forgive and save you {“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Romans 10:13} then you too will be able to sing this song with unspeakable joy in your heart.

--Richard A. Ciarrocca/2019

All Scripture references are KJV