

THE LAND OF THE LIVING

N. F. S. Grundtvig, 1824; tr. © S. A. J. Bradley, 2002

By S. A. J. Bradley

O loveliest land!

where hair shall not whiten, where time stays its hand,
where sun shall not scorch nor the tempest-spray sting,
where Autumn embraces the blossoming Spring,
where evetide and morning dance both to one tune
in the brightness of noon.

Most blissful of lands!

where time-glass runs never with tears nor with sand,
where nothing is wanting that heart might hold dear,
where that only lacks which gave suffering here!
Each human soul seeks with a longing so sore
your welcoming shore!

You long-promised land!

foreshadowed in morningtide's mirror-bright strand,
when children perchance glimpse your image serene
and dream they may find you where forest is green,
to share with the flowers and rushes, in play,
their sorrowfree day.

Ah, transient dream!

eternity's isle glimpsed from time's rolling stream;
joy's shrine, from this valley of weeping and dread;
the demigod's life, from this hall of the dead:
you vanish - and few will still trust lies at hand
the living soul's land.

Ah, fickle, false dream!

you shimmering bubble on time's rolling stream!
In vain will the poet, with tongue or with pen,
from glimmering likenesses shape you again:
when likeness is closest, then innocents cry
to hold what they spy.

You spellbinding dream!
 the glimpse of eternity's pearl in time's stream!
 You mock the poor wretch who so vainly aspires
 to paint or to carve what the heart most desires
 and hails as immortal what withers and dies
 as sure as time flies.

O Spirit of Love!
 Your radiant hand, stretched from heaven above
 to earth's realm of clay, like a child let me hold.
 It touches our eyes with its fingers like gold:
 and in the blue rises, yond sounding sea-strand,
 that loveliest land!

O heavenly name!
 which, would we embrace you, enfolds us the same.
 Unspotted, the Spirit can thus touch this clay,
 restoring the dry leaf from death and decay.
 O deep let me, creature of dust, bend the knee,
 that God may me see.

O Faith, wondrous Faith!
 that high overarches the deep, staith to staith,
 deriding the ice-drift that gains on the strand,
 from the home of the dead to the living soul's land.
 Sit lowlier here with me, highly-born guest,
 as pleases you best.

O Hope, light of wing!
 Godbrother! reborn in the font's holy spring!
 For many a journey to land over sea,
 for good news, for comfort you granted so free,
 allow me to thank you, that joy I still store
 when hope is no more!

O Love, first of three!

calm spring whence all strength, as a river, flows free!
 called 'Father' by him who unshackles our chains;
 one spark of your spirit our soul-strength sustains;
 your realm is where death's taunting voice is struck dumb -
 O, thy kingdom come!

Our Father, what grace!

that fain would be throned in this low earthen place,
 this temple the Spirit has raised in Christ's name
 in each human breast, with its altar aflame,
 a heaven-lit dwelling so secretly won
 for you and your Son.

O Christendom's Way!

you bring to our hearts what no worldling can say,
 what dimly we glimpse with an eye young and pure
 yet lives in us truly: we feel it for sure!
 "My land" declares Life "is both here and above:
 wherever dwells Love!"

Literal prose translation:

1. O lovely land, where hair grows not grey and time has no bite, where sun does not burn and wave does not beat, where Autumn embraces the blossoming Spring, where evening and morning forever dance together with the radiance of noon.
2. Oh blissful land! where the time-glass does not run with tears nor with sand, where one wants for nothing that is worth the wish, where that alone is missing which here gave pain! Each human seeks, with yearning at heart, your smiling shore!
3. Promised land! you are hailed in the morning's mirror-clear sea-shore, when the child perchance beholds your likeness so fair, and dreams that you are to be found where the woodland is green, where the child can share with flowers and rushes its smile and its life.
4. O fleeting dream of eternity's isle, amid the ages' stream; of the temple to joy, amid this vale of tears; of the demigod-life, amid this

mortal abode: together with you forthwith vanishes from most people the land of the living.

5. O unavailing dream, you shimmering bubble on the ages' stream, in vain will the poet with mouth and with pen create you again from glimmering shadows; when the shadow is most like [the reality] then the little ones sob who gaze upon it.

6. Enchanting dream of eternity's pearl amid the ages' stream; you fool the wretches who in vain seek in painting and art what the heart desires, so that they call that most enduring which shall pass away as surely as hours and years.

7. O spirit of love! Let me childlike kiss your radiant hand which reaches from heaven to the earth-kingdom's clay and touches our eye with fingers like gold, so that bluely beyond the sounding shore uplifts itself the lovely land.

8. O heavenly name! which opens to ours [i.e. to our embrace] your holy embrace, so the Spirit, untainted, can touch dust and make living the withered leaf. O let me, being of clay, so deeply kneel down that God may but see me.

9. O wondrous Faith! which throws the arched bridge, that defies the encroachment of ice upon the resounding shore, across the chasm from the home of mortals to the land of the living; sit lower down with me, you high-born guest - as it best pleases you.

10. Light-winged Hope! God-brother! reborn in holy baptism! For the many journeys to the land beyond the sea, for the good news, for the comfort you gave, let me thank you then, that I may see happiness when hope is no more.

11. O Love's own self! you peaceful source of the river of strength; he who looses our chains calls you Father; all life-strength in the soul is a spark of your Spirit; your kingdom is there where death is defied - may it come to us!

12. Our Father so gracious! You are pleased to sit enthroned in the earthen temple which the Spirit upraises in the Intercessor's name with smoking altar in the human breast, with a dwelling-place heavenly-bright from the secret spark, for you and your Son.

13. O Christianity! You grant to our hearts what the world does not know, what we glimpse only dimly whilst eye is blue; yet it lives in us, this we well feel. My land, says Life, is heaven and earth, where Love dwells.