



The Forest Minstrel: Lydia Jane Wheeler Pierson

Popular magazines and newspapers flourished in the early 1800s, giving clergy and lay members new ways to share faith stories, engage in theological debate, and lift up beauty through poetry. Many women became active and successful authors.



Born in Connecticut, Lydia Jane Wheeler (1802-1862) sang and wrote verse by the age of 12, demonstrating early literary skills that eventually became her livelihood. After her marriage to Oliver Pierson at 18, she moved to rural Liberty Township in the Allegheny Mountains of Pennsylvania. She was known as the “Forest Minstrel.”

Pierson’s writings appeared in a wide variety of publications. She wrote for the English-language *Weekly Messenger* of the German Reformed Church, and her short sermonic pieces reminded readers of the call to discipleship in everyday life. She often asked, “*And how did Jesus love his disciples? Did he love them for their docility, their gratitude, and affectionate attention? Oh no! He loved them while they were unbelieving, captious, easily offended, and ready to forsake him in the hour of trial.*”

“Lydia Jane’s” poetry focused on the moral dynamics of families. She called out fathers and husbands, speaking plainly about how one could not abuse family members and then kneel to pray. Keeping the Sabbath, attending to the Word, practicing fervent prayer and worship were paramount.

The voice of this creative laywoman still rings strongly almost two hundred years later in her poem, “Hymn to Jesus.”

*Wake and sing, my raptured soul!
Wake and sing in sacred lays;
Let the sounding numbers roll
To thy Great Redeemer’s praise.
Sing to Jesus—spotless, bright,
Source of every pure delight.*

*Now he sways infinity!
Yet his grace is still the same;
Still he hears the sinner’s cry,
Still he loves the humble frame,
Still he bids the weary breast
Welcome to his blissful rest.*

Contributor: Carolyn Call
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