



The Rich Man in His Castles

Treasure No 24: The Rich Man in His Castles by Maurice Frost: An article from Bulletin 93, Autumn 1961, also Correspondence: Bulletin 94, Winter 1961,

‘THE RICH MAN IN HIS CASTLE’

*The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And ordered their estate.*

So does the offending verse read in H. J. Gauntlett’s musical edition of Mrs. Alexander’s *Hymns for Little Children*. I have not a copy of the first edition of 1848, but I think we can assume that Mrs. Alexander approved the text of 1877. So please note the punctuation, and the wording: ‘high or lowly’, and ‘ordered’.

The Church Catechism has suffered from a somewhat similar misrepresentation by having the words ‘do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me’ interpreted as if they were ‘do my duty in that state of life unto which it *hath pleased* God to call me’. I have very little doubt that Mrs. Alexander was perfectly familiar with the parable of Dives and Lazarus, and if asked would have suggested that the parable of the talents had more bearing on this verse of her hymn. The hymn does not say that God made one high and the other lowly, but that both alike are his creation, whether rich or poor. Possibly ‘And ordered their estate’ suggests to modern ears predestination of the individual to poverty or wealth, but surely Mrs. Alexander was a better theologian than her critics, and had in mind the language of Catechism and Book of Common Prayer: that whether a man be rich or poor that, for the time being, was the estate to which God was calling him, and wherein he would find duties to God and his fellow men. The servants in the parable were given varying amounts, but the final reward was the same for all.

Anyhow, why should the great undifferentiated middle class be treated as if they alone are God’s creation?

MAURICE FROST.

[The Society expresses to Dr. Frost its joy at the news of his recovery from a serious operation. May he soon be fully restored to health!—*Editor.*]

CORRESPONDENCE

THE RICH MAN IN HIS CASTLE.

From the Rev. Arthur W. Vallance.

18th September, 1961.

Dear Editor.

Dr. Maurice Frost is to be thanked for his note on Mrs. Alexander's verse—not that the verse is at all likely to be restored, seeing how prone it is to misconstruction. It once prompted the twentieth-century emendation:

*The rich man in his motor,
The poor man on his bike.
God did not make them different.
He made them both alike.*

If this never found its way into print, other twentieth-century additions did find inclusion in the *American Beacon Song and Service Book* (1935), in the Junior School section:

*He made the deer and rabbits,
The squirrels brown and grey,
The fishes in the river,
The butterflies so gay:*

*And all the dogs and horses,
The friendly cows and sheep:
God giveth us his flowers
And animals to keep.*

The authorship of this addition is not stated.

Yours sincerely,
ARTHUR W. VALLANCE.