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EDITORIAL

Our readers will have observed that from time to time we have used these pages for the reprinting of historic documents and writings in our field. Of this practice some have been good enough to express approval; and we are therefore offering this year a reprint of the second half of James Montgomery's introduction to *The Olney Hymns*. The Title-page of the book from which we take the article runs: Olney Hymns/in/Three Books.../with/ An Introductory Essay/by/James Montgomery/Author of 'The World before the Flood,' 'Songs of Syon,'/'The Christian Psalmist', 'The Christian Poet," etc./Second Edition./Glasgow:/William Collins, S. Frederick Street.../ 1840. The Essay opens with a biographical sketch of John Newton, in whom (of the two collaborators) James Montgomery appears to be the more interested. We take up the tale where he enters on his critique of the hymns themselves.

JAMES MONTGOMERY ON THE OLNEY HYMNS [1]

There are few joint-memorials of friendship and talents, raised by kindred spirits, in polite literature. Every other species of art may be successfully practised by "many men and minds." In architecture, sculpture, and painting, the diversified talents of various hands may often be so harmoniously associated as to form a magnificent whole; because the composition, however exquisitely and intellectually designed, consists of material parts, and is accomplished by manual process. But those original works of genius, of which language is the expression, scarcely admit of fellowship, either in conception or execution. One book must be the product of one brain, in which, to constitute excellence, there ought to be as strict unity of thought and diction as the ancient critic required of time and place in dramatic action. Now, two minds cannot think simultaneously; nor can one express a thought suggested by another, in terms which shall convey it to a third with precisely the same impression as it was felt by the first. Language in itself being as invisible and immaterial as the ideas which it communicates, those ideas will necessarily be best communicated in *his* language who first conceived them; and through others may seize hints, and carry them out into more perfect and beautiful exhibition than the inventors could have done, yet the original thoughts themselves will be as much changed (perhaps for the better) as the diction has been improved. These remarks, of course, refer principally to those more recondite and complicated imaginations and reasonings which it is the prerogative of superior minds to create or evolve in their diviner moods, when "thoughts that breathe, and words that burn," give perpetuity of youth to their mental offspring. Yet they *do* apply, more or less, to all literary productions in which fancy, feeling, or elaborate argument, are component principles, or characteristic features. There is but one splendid exception to this *usage*—not to call it *law*—of nature in our poetic annals. The plays which pass under the names of Beaumont and Fletcher were unquestionably written so consentaneously, it is impossible now to ascertain the peculiar merits of either, by apportioning to each his share of personal contributions to the common stock, or of labour in turning that capital to the best advantage. Unhappily, however, these extraordinary emanations of twin-minds—nobly gifted, but atrociously prostituted—are so tainted with the grossness of the age in which they appeared, and which they too faithfully reflected, that they will neither bear to be read nor represented in our better and more fastidious times; for not merely more fastidious, but positively better, in this respect, our times *are,* notwithstanding the well-founded charges of licentiousness which may yet be brought

[1] *Olney Hymns,* pp xxvi—xliii.

against many of the books and much of the conversation of the present day.

The volume before us is a monument of friendship and genius far otherwise directed and far more honourably employed, however short in poetical display it may fall of the former meretricious offspring of combined talents, at once the glory and the shame of their possessors. It also belongs to a different class of literary labours,—a class which readily admits of joint-stock authorship, and in which the independent contributions of any number of individuals may be associated, for the illustrations of a connected series of subjects. These Hymns, however, (as we have seen already,) were written by two persons only,—living miracles of divine grace,—to perpetuate the remembrance of their fellowship in the bonds of the Gospel, to show what great things the Lord had done for them, and thereby to edify the church of Christ in the neighbourhood where they dwelt. This, and much more, has been effected: the collection has become a standard-book, of its kind, among devout readers of every evangelical denomination. Such a miscellany, with no other means of recommendation than its own intrinsic worth, cannot have been a work of ordinary character, however humble its claims, and unpretending its execution. Many a superficial book has *obtained,* but not one in the annals of literature ever *kept* popular favour for half a century, or even half that term. Public opinion is often mistaken *before* it is formed, but *when* formed, it is not less infallible and irreversible than human judgment can be when there is neither necessity nor inducement to continue in error. By the decision of posterity — for the present generation is posterity to the authors—this volume may now safely abide, whatever imperfections or offences against good taste may be found in its numerous and very unequal compositions.

Newton's portion of the work is by far the largest, and it is no disparagement to his memory to say, that this might be considerably reduced with advantage to the remainder, though it would be a bold hand, and ought to be a delicate one, that should presume to attempt the desirable excision. Let the good man, however, speak for himself:—"My part would have been much smaller than it is, and the book would have appeared in a very different form, if the wise though mysterious providence of God had not seen fit to cross my wishes. We had not proceeded far upon our proposed plan before my dear friend was prevented, by a long and affecting indisposition, from affording me any further assistance. My grief and disappointment were great; I hung my harp upon the willows, and for some time thought myself determined to proceed no farther without him. Yet my mind was afterwards led to resume the service."—It was well for him, and well for the world, that he did so. The blessings of millions, on his memory, among the dead, the living and the unborn will justify his

courage and perseverance in finishing, at his peril, an enterprise so auspiciously begun, and so lamentably interrupted. The suspension of Cowper's labours is the more to be regretted as the pieces which he did furnish towards the work—few (about sixty) in comparison with Newton's—were, nevertheless, sufficient to prove his own peculiar talent for this species of sacred song, and to disprove the unwarrantable canon of criticism which his friend thus lays down:— "There is a style and manner suited to the composition of hymns, which may be more successfully or at least more easily attained by a versifier than a poet. They should be *Hymns,* not *Odes,* if designed for public worship, and the use of plain people, Perspicuity, simplicity, and ease, should be chiefly attended to; and the imagery and colouring of poetry, if admitted at all, should be indulged very sparingly, and with great judgment."—What does all this mean? Certainly *not* that mere versifiers can write hymns better than poets—which the author intended to say, but has happily miscarried;—it means neither more nor less than that hymn-writing, like every other kind of poetry, has a style suitable to itself. But to take it for granted, that, because this is the case, a poet, a genuine poet, a poet of the highest order, is not better qualified to excel in this branch of his own art than a free-and-easy syllable-monger, is not less gratuitous and self-contradictory than it would be to affirm, that because an artist, of surpassing skill, can contrive a time-piece, which shall show, not only the lapse of every second, minute, and hour, but also the days of the week, month, year, with all the phases of the moon, and the sun's course through the zodiac, —he is, for that very reason, less able to make a common watch than his own apprentice. The major necessarily includes the minor capacity, as great power includes less; otherwise a child, who might lift ten pounds and no more, would do *that* better (more easily) than a porter, who could heave five hundredweight. Now, Cowper, in the very "style and manner" which his less-gifted coadjutor lays down as most "suited to this kind of composition;" namely, "perspicuity, simplicity, and ease," combined also with grace, elegance, pathos, and energy, such as poetic inspiration alone could supply,—Cowper as much excels his less-gifted coadjuter in these requisites as his later and loftier productions, 'The Task,' &c., he excels himself, when considered only as the Author of these humbler and holier essays, in which (again to borrow Newton's own words,) "the imagery and colouring of poetry," though admitted, are "indulged sparingly, and with great judgment." It was no discredit to Newton, to be distanced by Cowper in such a race; he has won glory, which will not soon pass away, by having, as he honestly says, "done his best;" and he had reason to be satisfied, that, by "the mediocrity of talent" with which "it pleased the Lord to favour him," he was admirably "qualified for usefulness to the weak and the poor of

Christ's flock, without disgusting persons of superior discernment." —For, not in the smallest degree to exaggerate his merits, it may be said, that "persons of superior discernment," who are, at the same time, spiritually-minded, are those by whom his labours will be most highly esteemed, and the value of some of them even put into competition with the more poetic effusions of his friend, to whom he himself so willingly concedes the palm, in his preface to the finished work, at a time when that friend was never likely to claim or enjoy his superior honours.

Though Newton's pieces in this collection may be regarded as fair models, according to his own view of the nature of such compositions, yet it must be confessed, by his warmest admirers, that the pulpit idioms, the bald phraselogy, and the conversational cadence of his lines, frequently lower the tone of his poetry so much, that what would be pleasing and impressive in prose becomes languid and wearisome in verse. Indeed, when verse (not otherwise pretending to be poetical) is not *much better* than prose, by the charm of numbers alone it is *much worse.* Its artificial structure is *then* a decided disadvantage, and no reader *can* even if he would, (though many try to persuade themselves that they do,) like a sentence better for the clanking of a chain of syllables. "The day that makes a man a slave takes half his worth away," says the old poet; and language enslaved in metre loses half its power, unless the loss of natural freedom be abundantly compensated by the grace of accent, and the melody of rhythm.

This volume is divided into three Books. The first consists of Hymns on select portions of the Old and New Testaments. No experiments in verse can be more hopeless and thankless than such. The difficulty consists partly in the *ease* with which scriptural passages may be shaped into measured lines, to the satisfaction of the paraphrast himself, and the indifference with which the reader receives the most successful performances of the kind, from their inevitable inferiority to (what are to him) the *originals* in his native tongue. With these he has been so familiarized from infancy, that no new collocation of words—even in prose, much less in rhyme—can ever be so pleasing to his ear, or convey to his mind so ineffable an impression of the meaning of the sacred oracles. In plain truth, scripture language, whether historical, poetic, or doctrinal, is so comprehensive, that in anywise to alter is to impair it; if you add you encumber; if you diminish you maim the sense; to paraphrase is to enfeeble everlasting strength; to imitate is to impoverish inexhaustible riches; and to translate into verse is necessarily to do one, or the other, or both of these, in nearly every line. For example—I purposely choose what may be called an extreme case, to make the illustration more palpable,—Ps. xix, 7, 8, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of

the Lord is sure, making wise the simple:—The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."—The literal terms here are so perfect a vehicle of pure thought, that any metrical reading must render them less so, because words equally few and simple cannot be found in the English tongue which would express these plain sentiments in rhymes and numbers. The failure of all who have attempted this passage has proved that it is the cross of versifiers; and he who could carry it, without being put to shame, need not despair of accomplishing what must still be considered as a desideratum—a version of the Psalms, which shall not (on the whole) disappoint every reader. That such is all but impossible may be inferred from one case.—The 137th Psalm is one of the most poetical in imagery and diction; therefore one of the fittest for metrical arrangement. Now this has been oftener essayed than any other, by poets of the highest talents, from Lord Surrey, in the sixteenth century, downwards; yet all have laboured in vain, and spent their strength for nought; as may be seen by turning over the multitudinous volumes of Chambers's British Poets, as well as the countless collections of Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs by versifiers of all ranks.

The prime cause of miscarriage in every attempt to paraphrase scripture passages appears to be, that, in order to bring them within the rules of rhyme and metre, all that the poet introduces of his own becomes alloy, which debases the standard of the original. On the contrary, when he adorns a train of his private thoughts with scripture images and ideas, or interweaves with his own language, scripture phrases, that fall without straining into his verse, the latter is illustrated and enriched by the alliance or the amalgamation. In a word, divine themes are necessarily degraded by human interpolations; while human compositions are necessarily exalted by the felicitous introduction of sacred allusions. This is a secret of which few that have meddled with the perilous and delicate subject have been aware. A single verse, in each way, will probably make the point clear.

Olney Hymns, Book ii, Hymn 74.

> "But could I bear to hear him say,
> —'*Depart, accursed, far away*!
> With Satan in the lowest hell
> Thou art for ever doom'd to dwell!'"

How impotent is this, compared with the terrible words—"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Here the divine theme is degraded by human interpolation and omission *both*.

Book iii, Hymn 28.

> "Perhaps some golden wedge supprest,
> Some secret sin offends my God;
> Perhaps that Babylonish vest,
> Self-righteousness, provokes the rod."

Here the poet adorns the train of his private thoughts with scripture images; and oh with what force and conviction are "the wedge of gold," and "Babylonish vest," brought in! The reader, from previous knowledge, needs no other hint to recollect the whole history,—yea, and to make him tremble too, as though he felt himself in the tent of Achan at the moment when his sin was discovered. Who does not instinctively recoil, and look with horror towards that dark corner of his own heart, in which "the accursed thing" was once found, or *is there still*?

Of the scriptural hymns before us, Newton's are not so often feeble paraphrases of the text, as suitable meditations on the respective subjects, and not seldom appear to be little skeletons of sermons, which he may have actually preached. Among these "Cain and Abel," Book i, Hymn 2, may be quoted as an average specimen of plain narrative, easy to be understood, but having little grace or elevation besides.—Book i, Hymn 19, is a good sample of his spiritualizing manner, and indeed is of a superior order.

Book i, Hymn 31,[1] is excellent. The author is wakening up his heart to prayer. Indeed, this collection contains so many beautiful and exhilarating views of the privilege and happiness connected with that duty, as show the writers to have been themselves men of prayer. Book ii, Hymn 60,[2] Book iii, Hymns 12,[3] and 19,[4] may be specially adduced.—These hymns are often *retrospective* also, alluding to the real circumstances under which the individual (whether Cowper or Newton) was found by divine grace, and delivered from sin. See Book i, Hymns 41, 43, and 70, Book ii, Hymn 57.—For a cheerful strain of thanksgiving, Book i, Hymn 57,[5] may be named.—Book i, Hymn 119, affectingly describes some of the finer internal conflicts which exercise the faith, the patience, and the love of God's people. Book i, Hymn 130, furnishes a lesson of close self-examination. A preceding hymn (126) in the same book well describes the warfare between sin and grace in the believer's heart. 'Jonah's Gourd,' Hymn 75, in the same Book, is pathetically applied to the writer's Christian trial, on losing the delight of his eyes and the desire of his heart.

A question too comprehensive to be discussed here may be touched upon, since it arises out of the character of the pieces of this First Book, and likewise peculiarly affects the experimental

1 'Come, my soul, thy suit prepare'.
2 'What various hindrances we meet'.
3 'Approach, my soul, the mercy-seat'.
4 'God of my life, to thee I call'.
5 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds'.

hymns in the other two. Are such compositions fit to be sung in great congregations, consisting of all classes of saints and sinners?—It must be frankly answered, with respect to the far greater proportion—*No*!—except upon the principle, that whatever may be *read* by such an assembly may also be *sung*. On no ground can either the reading or chaunting of the Psalms from the Common Prayer-Book of the Church of England, or the singing of authorised versions of the same, be justified except on *this*—namely, that these are subjects to be impressed upon the minds and memories of the people, for individual application by themselves (when they can be persuaded to make it;) but generally, for instruction, warning, reproof, correction, and example,—in reality as means of grace. The part which a congregation of professing Christians can personally take in the routine of Divine service—in reading, praying, responding, or singing—is a subject (considering what is the real usage,) almost too awful to think upon in any other view than the foregoing. Confining himself to this point of justification alone, the writer of these remarks ventures to add, that, whereas singing is only one of the forms of utterance which God has given to man—not which man has invented any otherwise than as he may be said to have invented speech, by the faculty which God gave him to do so—whatever a man may, without sin, *recite* with his lips, in the house of God, he may also *sing*, when the same subjects or sentiments are modeled in verse, or set forth in numerouse prose, like the translated Psalms, and other poetical parts of Holy Writ, suitable for chaunting. After all, let every man be persuaded in his own mind, and do that in the house of God which he can do to edification.

The Second Book contains pieces on occasional subjects, and these, for the most part, were on actual, not imagined or hypothetical occasions, though capable also of extensive application under similar circumstances—local, temporal, and providential. Thus there are hymns not only for *any New* Years or *Old* Years, but which were expressly written, and used as devotional exercises on the commencement and departure of *particular* years, long ago numbered with those beyond the flood,—years that came and went over millions to whom time is now no longer, but whose everlasting destinies are at this moment affected by their respective employment, for good or for evil, of those very portions of time thus given and taken away. Others, who were then children, may yet be living, and living, at this day, under the effects of the influence which these individual hymns may have then had upon their tender and susceptible minds.—The same may be predicated of the dead, and presumed of the living, with respect to the following hymns for various 'Seasons' of years, which had their spring, summer, autumn, and winter, in turn, —their flowers and buds, their fruits, their breezes and their storms, not otherwise recorded than in these humble strains; but

yet to some of those who then lived—to some who may still be alive—days to be remembered through eternity.—The hymns also under the head of 'Ordinances,' were composed to celebrate special Sabbaths, Sacraments, and Anniversaries, &c., though they may generally be used, on corresponding opportunities, to the end of time.

The hymns on 'Providences,' in the same Book, are very striking, as commemorating national, local, and personal judgments, visitations, and deliverances. Of those on the commencement of hostilities with the American Colonies, the Fast day in 1776, the earthquake in 1775, it may be said, in justice to each, "that strain was of an higher mood." The stanzas 'On the Fire at Olney, 1777,' contain incidental glimpses into the dark and fearful condition (spiritually considered) in which Christian society exists, even in places where the Gospel is most faithfully preached, and where it seems to bring forth much fruit. They show us in what a perilous state of unpreparedness the majority of our fellow-creatures every night lie down to sleep,—though liable to be awakened at any hour, by a cry of fire, by the shock of an earthquake, or by the last trumpet itself, for aught they can foresee. How picturesque and terrible are these two verses:—

> "The shout of fire, a dreadful cry,
> Impress'd each heart with deep dismay,
> While the fierce blaze and reddening sky
> Made midnight wear the face of hay.
>
> "The throng and terror who can speak?
> The various sounds that fill'd the air—
> The infant's wail, the mother's shriek,
> *The voice of blasphemy and prayer*!"

The compositions in the latter part of this Second Book are on the works of creation and the phenomena of nature, which belong rather to poetry than devotion; and these being written more generally by Newton than Cowper, are less interesting than most others in the volume: feeble, though not unpleasing, they are evidently on themes chosen for the purpose of versifying and spiritualizing them—not forced upon the writer's attention by the impulses of his heart, the reveries of his mind, or the duties of his station. The last hymn, however, in this Book, is a more poetical example of Newton's skill in allegorizing than any of the former. It is rather remarkable, that one who had such "visions of the night;" and instruction sealed upon his mind, even in youth, as his dream in the Mediterranean implies, should have succeeded so indifferently as he often does in his fancy-pieces and moral fictions. From this flight of imagination, the appearance of a second Bunyan might have been augured; but Newton, though

in many other respects much resembling the author of the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' was far behind him "in similitudes..."

The hymns in the Third Book are very miscellaneous, embracing the most solemn, affecting, delightful, and splendid, as well as the most important and practical themes of religion—warnings and exhortations to repentance; confession of sin, contrition, seeking, pleading, and hoping for salvation; reasonings and trials, temptations within and without; devotion, self-denial, and surrender of all the ransomed powers of mind and body; and finally, songs of praise and thanksgiving. These are frequently in a higher tone of poetry, with deeper pathos and more ardent expression, than the average strain of pieces in the foregoing Books. The best wine has been reserved to the last. Book iii, Hymn 10, is earnest in prayer and faith and hope; the two concluding stanzas, in particular, may be often used by the Christian reader in reference to himself, in his own time of need, but not of despondency. The 22nd Hymn in this Book is very faithful in describing a species of temptation which often pursues the suppliant to the very throne of grace, and in the form of Satan among the sons of God, accuses the self-condemned sinner, who , yet clinging to the footstool, and not to be moved, pleads the promises, and cries for the blessing, which never was *so* sought, in vain. Book iii, Hymn 58—'Home in View,' is one of the most consolatory in the volume, and may make the drooping yet reviving heart homesick for heaven, in prospect, for the tast time, before he reaches it for ever. In Hymn 60, Book iii, Newton very strikingly alludes to his former and his latter state; his change from nature unto grace, and the fruits that followed.

On the whole, though it must be acknowledged that Newton was a poet of very humble order, yet he has produced, in this collection, proofs of great versatility in exercising the one talent of this kind entrusted to him. He has also turned it to the best account, by rendering it wholly subservient to the best purposes in the service of God and man. With this sanction, all his deficiencies as a technical versifier will be forgiven and forgotten by those who have the religious feeling which can appreciate the far higher excellencies of these plain, practical, and often lively, fervent, and sincere effusions of a heart full to overflowing of the love of God, and labouring with indefatigable zeal to promote the kingdom of Christ upon earth.

Of Cowper's share in this work little need be said. Those may disparage the poetry of his hymns who hate or despise the doctrines of the Gospel. They are worthy of him, and honourable to his Christian profession. These first-fruits of his Muse, after she had been baptised,—but we must drop the fictitious being, and say rather, after *he* had been baptised "with the Holy Ghost and with fire," will ever be precious (independent of their other merits,) as the transcripts of his happiest feelings, the memorials

of his walk with God, and his daily experience (amidst conflicts and discouragements,) of the consoling power of that religion in which he had *found* peace, and often *enjoyed* peace to a degree that passed understanding. On the other hand, it is a heart-withering reflection, that his mightier efforts of genius—the poems by which he commands universal admiration—though they breathe the soul of purest, humblest, holiest piety, and might have been written amidst the clear shining of the Sun of Righteousness arisen on him with healing in his wings—were yet composed under darkness like that of the valley of the shadow of death. While the tempted poet sang the privileges, the duties, and the blessedness of the Christian, he had himself lost all except the remembrance that he once possessed it, and the bitter, insane, and invincible conviction, that for him there was no hope, "either in this life or that which is to come." Under this frightful delusion, in its last effect, for several years, even his intellectual being was absorpt, till the discorded body fell into dust, and the soul returned to God who gave it. Oh! when that veil of horror, with the veil flesh, was taken away, and the enfranchised captive emerged in the invisible world,—may we not hope, that, like dying Stephen on *this* side of eternity, he on the *other* saw heaven opened, with Jesus standing at the right hand of God,—may we not believe that he could *then* and *there* exclaim, with that first triumphant martyr,—"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

In conclusion, this volume of Olney Hymns ought to be for ever dear to the Christian public, as an unprecedented memorial, in respect to its authors, of the power of Divine grace, which called one of them from the negro-slave market, on the coast of Africa, to be a burning and a shining light in the church of God at home,—and raised the head of the other, when he was a companion of lunatics, to make him, (by a most mysterious dispensation of gifts,) a poet of the highest intellectuality, and in his song an unshaken, uncompromising confessor of the purest doctrines of the Gospel, even when he himself had lost sight of its consolations.

J. M.

SHEFFIELD, JANUARY, 1829.

ROCK OF AGES

by E. J. Fasham.

This hymn has long been the subject of controversy as to whether it was written during a thunderstorm in Burrington Coombe whilst Toplady was sheltering there, and that he used a playing card for the purpose. My research work into the history of this hymn goes back to 1902 and I hope to show in the following details that the story has no truth behind it, simply pure conjecture and, if I may say so, concoction.

The story about the playing card being preserved in America has appeared in several books on hymns, one as recently as May 1955. In all cases I have challenged the authors to say where in America it can be found. They all say they do not know but have accepted the story which they say they have taken from Dr. Limmer Shepherd's book *Great Hymns and their Stories.* Dr. Shepherd never replied to my request to state the location. I have a brother-in-law, a Baptist Minister in California, another an editor with experience of Chicago, San Francisco and Philadelphia; a score of nephews and nieces all over the States and they have made enquiries with negative results. There is no evidence available anywhere to support the truth of this statement. There is, however, ample evidence in the British Museum and a few larger reference libraries (Birmingham being one) to the origin of the hymn is far removed from Burrington Coombe, and I shall refer to this later.

The Rev. A. M. Toplady was at Blagdon, March 1762 to 1764 and there is no record anywhere of his hymn being used there. Hymns in those days were extremely scarce and it seems fair to suggest that had he written it there he would have had it sung there—everybody would have been proud of it. Toplady was never happy at Blagdon. He never wanted to go there and he resented the manner in which his friends secured his appointment there. On page 11, Vol. 1 of his works we read:

> "Of the method adopted by them, it would seem he was not for some time aware and when at length he made the discovery, his tender conscience was troubled and he never felt easy until he resigned his charge."

He left Blagdon with no record of anything special happening while he was there. There is no record anywhere of this story until 1850 when the Rev. J. Swete, D.D., who was then Vicar of Blagdon gave it out on the first Sunday in July, 1850 that in his opinion it was written in Burrington Coombe, but he gave no proof of it or any reason for telling the story. Some older folk in Blagdon Village told me by the cottage in which they lived in the summer of 1902, that they remembered the Rector saying it in 1850, 75 years after Toplady had left Blagdon.

Dr. Julian's Dictionary confirms what I say about people remembering the story. I do not know the names of the people I talked to—it may even be the source of Julian's information.

This is what Julian says:

> "We have put this story to the test and though fondly believed by many, we find it was never heard of until the coming of Dr. J. Swete, D.D. as Rector of Blagdon.
> In 1850, 75 years after he left Blagdon, the hymn appeared in the *Gospel Magazine*. Our witness is Miss Pugh, who in 1903 is still alive and was a teacher in the village when Dr. Swete came. Dr. Swete's son, a professor of Divinity at Cambridge who was curate to his father at Blagdon, says he has no knowledge of the story beyond his father's statement."

Julian adds:

> "It is a beautiful story, but we must have clearer evidence before we accept it as an undoubted fact."

The Wills family bought some land which included the Gorge and Rock known as Burrington Coombe and in June 1898, Sir H. W. Wills wrote to the *Times* giving the thunderstorm story. Later writers added to the story how he picked up a playing card left by some gamblers and wrote the hymn on it. In Sir H. W. Wills's letter he makes no mention of a cleft rock. He simply says he sheltered between two massive pieces of rock—no mention of any cave.

Now we jump to 1923, 25 years later than Sir H. W. Wills's letter—and we find the Rev. W. J. L. Shepherd giving the playing card story and adding:

> "The playing card on which the hymn was written is still preserved in America."

Now we move to 11th November, 1951, when another story appeared in "Illustrated". The writer says:

> "I have visited this district several times and an old inhabitant (Mr. A. Griffin) took me into the *large cave* on the other side of the road in which, he said Toplady actually sheltered and received his inspiration whilst looking at the rock *opposite*."
> "There would be no shelter in the narrow cleft of the rock—more likely to get a cascade of water there, in fact. In the cave which is deep and where one can stand upright he wrote the famous hymn."

The word to pick out in this letter is the word "opposite". No cave exists opposite the rock. The land opposite is a wide open space where coaches and cars park when parties come from around Bristol for their annual service. I was there eight days

after this letter appeared in "Illustrated"—19th November, 1951. The cave referred to is 95 yards further up the Coombe and cannot by any stretch of the imagination, be described as large. It is tall enough for a man to stand in, but is not more than 4 feet from back to front and about 6 feet wide. These measurements were taken by me at 12.15 p.m. 19th November, 1951. It is not natural. It is man-made as a store for road materials and tools and that was what I found there on my visit. It is quite impossible to see the cleft rock from this dug-out, even if you step out into the middle of the road.

Both these stories cannot be true and from my personal observations, the cave story is certainly not correct. The story first told in 1850 has grown in dimension as well as age. (See further reference later).

What are the doubts in this story? First the weather. Toplady made a practice of recording in his diary, the weather. I have his diary and on page 38 Vol. 1 he records: (and I am writing with his diary at my side—23rd November, 1955)

> Saturday 23rd, 1774. I think this has been the most remarkable day in point of weather, I ever knew. Between the rising of the sun in the morning and returning home at night we have had frost and thaw, snow, rain, hail, thunder and lightning, calm, high-wind and sunshine. A mixture of almost all weathers from sunrise to sunset."

Surely if he recorded weather in this way we should expect to find some reference to the supposed thunderstorm in Burrington Coombe, but there is no such reference.

> "Sunday 24th, 1774. A day of almost perpetual rain. Read prayers and preached in the morning at Harpford (5 miles from here E. J. F.) and here (Venn Ottery I think he means by "here" as he was near there and it is only 1½ miles from Harpford. E. J. F.) in the afternoon to a good congregation, considering the weather."

Further on page 466, vol. 5 of his Works he preaches on "Reflections on a Thunderstorm." But he again makes no reference to Burrington Coombe. These writings, I think, prove that there is reason to doubt the thunderstorm story.

Now examine the story a little closer:

Do you think a man of the saintly character of Toplady would bother to pick up a playing card, much less write a hymn on one? Have you ever seen a playing card on the back of which you could write a hymn? What did he use to write with—a pencil would not do it and fountain pens were not invented then. Where did the gamblers come from? This spot in Somerset was miles from anywhere and no means of transport other than by horse or walking. Parties did not tour round there in those days—the road was not as we know it today. Simply a rough track up a gorge, mainly used by shepherds. Lastly, if the card is in

America, let it be produced. Americans do not usually hide English treasures; I have already explained my enquiries in America among my relations and I also asked the American Hymn Society to undertake a search for me in November, 1949. This they did and wrote me 7th December, 1949:

> "I do not know what the opinion is in England regarding the circumstances of the writing of Rock of Ages. In the American Episcopal Handbook which only includes facts thoroughly authenticated, there is no mention of the place and story of the writing of the hymn. The Handbook to the Scottish Hymnary repeats the story of the cleft rock in the Mendips. I think the whole account is apocryphal, if not fantastic."
>
> R. L. McALL. Mus. Doc.
> Sec.

What then is the true story?

Fifty years' research work at the British Museum unearthed these facts and similar work in the Birmingham Reference Library confirms them. It must be remembered that the ministers in Toplady's day often composed verses to be sung after their sermons. I am convinced that Rock of Ages came in this way. He went to Devon in 1774 and was at Venn Ottery and Harpford from 1774 to 1778. Then he went to Broadhembury and here he adopted the pen-name "Minimus" and it was over this name he published the sermon mentioned in the October 1775 Gospel Magazine, and the Broadhembury people still say he preached this sermon there. There is a cross in Harpford Churchyard to his memory inscribed "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling."

In 1775 he did preach at the French Calvinistic Church in London and "Life a Journey" may have been preached there. His text was Genesis 12, v. 5. "They went to go into the land of Canaan and into the land of Canaan they came." (This refers to the Children of Israel, and they passed the rock cleft by Moses in their Journey.) He makes two divisions from his title "Life a Journey."

1. The world will endeavour to turn your feet out of the narrow way.
2. Beware of Sin; shun the remotest appearance of evil. Yet if you fall, be humblest, but do not despair, pray afresh to God who is able to set you on your feet again. Look to the blood of the covenant and say to the Lord from the depth of your heart:

> Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee.
> Foul, I to the fountain fly,
> Wash me Saviour, or I die.

The sermon continues for another page and the complete hymn appears in Vol. 6, Hymn no. 22, pages 413-414.

Dr. Percy Dearmer in *Songs of Praise Discussed,* says the hymn first appeared in the Gospel Magazine in March 1776, and later in the same article he says it had already appeared in the Gospel Magazine, October, 1775. This latter is correct. He goes on to say it also appeared in the article about Sins and National Debt. This article is in Vol. 3, pages 344-363 and there is nothing there about the hymn.

Now let us take a further step and possibly put the origin of the hymn in its rightful place.

Some years ago I went to the Handsworth Wesleyan College, Birmingham, to see a student about a preaching engagement. Whilst waiting in the Library I noticed a book, *Wesley's Sacramental Hymns, 1745* (Note this date is 20 years before Toplady went to Blagdon. Opening this I found a preface which read :

"O Rock of Israel
Rock, struck and cleft for me
Streams of blood and water
Which gushed from Thy side." D. B.

Who was "D. B."? A search through the indexes of the Reference Library at Birmingham gave many D. B.'s and looking through works by all of them I chose Dr. Daniel Brevint D.D. He was Dean of Durham 1661-1673 and during that time he preached a series of sermons on the Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice. These were published in a book under this title and it is dated 1673.

The British Museum made this book available to me from their strongrooms, and on page 16 I read :

"Let not my heart burn with less zeal to follow and serve Thee now when this bread is broken at this table than did Thy disciples when Thou didst break it at Emmaus. O Rock of Israel, Rock of Salvation, Rock struck and cleft for me, let those two streams of blood and water..." and so on.

The British Museum kindly made a photo-copy of this page which can be seen by anyone interested.

Here then is Wesley's preface to his Communion Hymn Book. If Wesley knew of Dr. Brevint's book, is it unfair to suggest that Toplady knew of it and had this in his mind for his sermon "Journeying through the Wilderness." Would not this recall the struck and cleft rock by Moses and inspire "Rock of Ages, cleft for me"? Books of this character were scarce in those days and eagerly snapped up by ministers. I am convinced that all this detailed evidence I have produced supports my claim that Dr. Daniel Brevint's book inspired Toplady's sermon.

The Burrington Coombe story has not a scrap of real evidence to support it and perhaps the strongest evidence of all is that a

man could not possibly get shelter in the Burrington Coombe cleft rock—when it is raining it is simply a waterfall. I witnessed this when I was last there, and regretted I did not have my camera—19th November, 1951.

The story is now taking another twist and there are claimants in the Lake District and Ireland, and I have letters about it. Another story is prevalent that it was written in the Llanberis Pass, Wales.

(March 1st, 1956) I think I shall be able to show now that *Rock of Ages* was definitely not written in Burrington Coombe while Toplady was at Blagdon. He may have got some inspiration from the rock in Burrington Coombe but in many of his sermons he constantly referred to God as the Rock of Ages. In his farewell sermon at Blagdon, Easter Sunday, April 25th, 1764, he used the phrase "Rock of Ages" for the first time. In his sermon he said :

> "If God were to justify and save only those who are pure and upright, Heaven would be empty. I say not this to encourage sin, but to encourage those who are grieved for their sin and who fly to the Blood of the Cross for pardon. Let not such be afraid to meet Him, let not such say, how shall I stand when He appears, for such have a foundation to stand upon. A foundation that cannot fail, even Jesus, the Mediator and Surety of the Covenant, Christ the Rock of Ages."

If *Rock of Ages* was written before this sermon was preached is it not reasonable to expect to find some reference to it in this sermon? No, we have to go to the essay, as some call it, preached or written as "Life a Journey" from the text "They went to go into the land of Canaan and into the land of Canaan they came." Here the hymn comes in at the end and it is definitely its first appearance.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.
Foul I to the fountain fly,
Wash me Saviour, or I die.

Lines 1 and 2 are in the first verse; 3 and 4 are in verse 3. Does this indicate that he wrote the whole hymn (as was the custom) to use at the end of his sermon, and in his sermon quoted only four lines? These four lines are also quoted in the reprint of his sermon in the Gospel Magazine for September / October 1775. This sermon in the *Gospel Magazine* furnishes a striking piece of evidence that must not be overlooked. It is over the signature "Minimus". From October, 1774 to December 1774 he used this signature to all his writings and in no other period are his sermons and essays signed "Minimus". This then apparently dates the hymn, and during this period he was at Broadhembury,

Devon, having charge of Venn Ottery and Harpford previous to Broadhembury. There is evidence that on 18th November, 1774, he wrote to a Dr. Baker at Honiton from Broadhembury. The all important thing is, where he was living during the last three months of 1774; this letter points to Broadhembury and "Minimus" points to that place too.

This evidence, I submit, removes from Burrington Coombe completely the idea of the hymn ever having been written there.

Once again as a final note I refer to the old playing card story. The Wills story I have already mentioned, then came the story in the *Strand Magazine* of July 1911, which was further enlarged upon in a book published in 1923 to which I refer earlier. In the Strand Magazine the card is said to have two lines of the hymn on it and dated 12th March. This date of 12th March is not likely to be one to find visitors in that Coombe in any year, still less likely in 1772 when foot or horse were the only means of travel to reach it. The further one goes in research, the further you get away from Burrington Coombe. That is my final opinion after a visit on 4th January, 1956.

THE SUBSCRIPTION

We have to announce that as from January 1st, 1957, our subscription must be raised to ten shillings a year. We do this with all possible regret, and in the hope that our readers will understand the necessity for doing so. The cost of printing and distributing the journal has once again caught up with, and passed, the resources at our disposal with the subscription at the lower rate. We must not live on our small capital for the sake of keeping the subscription at an uneconomic level; for the first charge on what capital we have must be the work being done on *Julian*. Societies like ours minister to a circle of subscribers among whom are very many of the poorest among the learned—the clergy. It is hard to demand greater payment for what we offer, but, so far as printers and paper-makers go, we must pay our way. When our readers renew their subscriptions, therefore, we ask that they remit the sum of ten shillings for this year (or a multiple of ten shillings for a number of years) to our Treasurer, Mr. D. C. B. Harris, 28 Halford Road, Stratford on Avon. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to 'The Hymn Society', and our Treasurer will appreciate it if these payments are made promptly, and that if any wish not to renew their subscription, they will send him a note to that effect rather than merely omitting to send the subscription. The subscription to the Hymn Society of America is of the same amount and may be included in the amount sent to the Treasurer.

THE TUNE 'JESU, DULCIS MEMORIA' (E.H. 238)

Recently encountering a version of this tune (E.H. 238, S.P. 549 ii) in Freeman's University Carol Book, II 14, the Editor was moved to write to Dr. Frost and ask about its history. Dr. Frost's reply is here appended in full. The tune is marked in E. H. as 'the proper tune from Coln Gesangbuch, 1619', but its history seems to be longer than that.

Deddington Vicarage
Oxford.

8 December, 1956.

My dear Routley,

Your question sent me scouring through my carol books, and as luck would have it I unearthed some information about the tune.

It was a noël melody before it was taken into the hymn books:

A la venue de Noël
Chacun se doit rejouir,
Car c'est un testament nouvel,
Que tout le monde doit tenir.
(12 stanzas)

The *words* appear first in a MS collection in the B.N. in Paris, written before 1498, probably before 1494. It is called Livres de Noël and belonged to Charles VIII and Louis XII.

The *tune* was noted (with the words) in Jean Babelon's La Fleur des Noëls, published at Lyon in 1535.

That aw(e)ful collection, Dictionaire de Noëls et de Cantiques ...par Fr. Perennes (one of the Migne series) gives it on col. 87 (Ancien Noël Lorrain).

Vieux Noëls...H. Lemeigen, Nantes, 1876, prints it as the second of the tunes appended to volume iii, but heads the words (vol. i, p. 5) "Sur le chant: *Jesu, redemptor omnium.*"

Stainer published a small collection of twelve carols (Novello) to illustrate a lecture. It comes as No. 5, headed Nouèl des Ausèls.
(Bird Carol)
Bas-Quercy.
He says he took it from Chants Populaires du Bas-Quercy...par M. Emmanuel Soleville (Paris, 1889).

Sir Richard Terry gives it as No. 97 in his Two Hundred Folk Carols, Burn Oates, 1933. He heads it:

Gods of the Heathen
(Eguberriren jitiaz)

Old Basque carol. Words translated by Rev. J. O'Connor.
This is the only place where I found it as a 9-line carol. The original four lines are given as a refrain to the other four.
As a hymn tune Bäumker, vol. i, No. 125, gives two versions.

You will find more information in Les Noëls et la Tradition Populaire, J. R. de Smidt...H. J. Paris, Amsterdam, 1932, No. 4, pp. 109-112.

That, I am afraid, is the extent of the information I can supply.

Ever yours,

MAURICE FROST.

It seems then that the source of the tune should properly be given as either 'French carol melody, *c.* 15th century', or 'from J. Babelon, La Fleur des Noëls, Lyon, 1535'.

SOME RECENT BOOKS

Among books recently published that may well be of interest to members of the Society, we venture to mention first the reprint of E. F. Benson's *The Hymnody of the Christian Church* (Knox Press, Richmond, Virginia: equivalent price in this country, 28s). This book, first published in 1927 and long since out of print, will be widely welcomed. A good deal has been written on the subject since 1927, and Benson's book has not in any way been altered from its original form. But there is enough solid scholarship in the work (a commodity not always generously provided in books on hymnology) to make it a valuable reference book, and Benson's judgment was always poised and sane.

Sydney Moore's *Sursum Corda* (Independent Press, 8s 6d), a study of German hymns and their writers, will be fully reviewed in the next issue.

Those who are interested in plainsong must not miss Father G. B. Chambers's *Folksong-Plainsong* (Merlin Press, 18s), which appeared a few months ago. This is a scholarly and also a most important work; its contention is that plainsong has far closer affinities with primitive folksong than has been normally supposed, and Father Chambers argues his case, at one point in direct opposition to certain established authorities such as Don Gregory Murray of Downside, with great persuasiveness. Dr. Vaughan Williams contributes a brief introduction with a characteristic straight left punch aimed at 'our bat-eyed musicologists'. There is much good and new thought here.

Musicians will be interested in Basil Smallman's *The Background of Passion Music* (S.C.M. Press, 8s 6d), a slim volume packed with suggestive information about the musical ancestry and the religious surroundings of Bach's two great Passions: an unusual work to come from a Press entirely devoted to religious literature, and an admirable book for the extension of Christian musical culture.