

# Ancient or Modern, *Ancient and Modern*: The Victorian Hymn and the Nineteenth Century

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The historian who would consider the impact of literature on the culture of the Victorian period would do well to consider *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, and the neglected field of hymnody in general. Very few references to the hymn are to be found in studies of the period, and yet the publication figures tell a story of a literary form that penetrated further into ordinary life than any other: even the novels of Dickens and the poetry of Keble or Tennyson, successful though they were, could not match the extraordinary success of *A&M*. It was published in 1861, and by the end of the century sales had reached more than 35 million. The 1889 edition (that of 1875 with a supplement) sold 3,524,626 copies in 1889 and 1890.<sup>1</sup> And *A&M*, of course, was not the only hymn book. Over a third of the churches in the Province of Canterbury used *Church Hymns with Tunes*, published by the SPCK,<sup>2</sup> so a rough estimate of those sales would be ten million. Then there were the denominational hymn books: the *Congregational Hymn Book* of 1836 sold over 116,000 copies in nine years.<sup>3</sup> The Wesleyans and the United Methodists each had a separate book, and so did the Primitive Methodists (whose 1854 book was described by Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* as 'the worst edited and most severely mutilated collection of hymns ever published').<sup>4</sup>

We have to imagine these books in the homes of Victorian middle-class families, resting on the piano during the week and taken to church or chapel on Sundays. People, especially Nonconformists, possessed their own copy of their denominational hymn book, often one of the few books in the house beside the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress* (until recently hymn books in Methodist churches were stamped 'For the use of visitors', assuming that church members would bring their own). They provided a vast multi-cultural resource: they contained texts of great splendour and antiquity from the earliest years of the Christian Church at one extreme, and texts such as 'The Church's one foundation', that confronted nineteenth-century anxiety, at the other:

Though with a scornful wonder  
Men see her sore opprest,  
By schisms rent asunder,

<sup>1</sup> Figures from W. K. Lowther Clarke, *A Hundred Years of 'Hymns Ancient and Modern'* (London: Clowes, 1960), p. 42, and Ian Bradley, *Abide with Me: The World of Victorian Hymns* (London: SCM Press, 1997), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Clarke, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Bradley, p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> John Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (London: Murray, 1892), p. 730.

By heresies distrest,  
 Yet saints their watch are keeping,  
 Their cry goes up, 'How long?'  
 And soon the night of weeping  
 Shall be the morn of song.

This hymn, written by Samuel John Stone, a young curate at Windsor, was a response to the controversy over Bishop Colenso's *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined*, published in 1862, and the subsequent attempt by his senior bishop to have Colenso deposed and excommunicated. The hymn would have brought the controversy out of the newspapers and into every Anglican church and home. It was part of a great spectrum of religious and moral experience to be found in a hymn book: between this response to a contemporary problem on the one hand and the great hymns of the early Church on the other, there were poems by Herbert and Addison, hymns by Watts and Wesley and Cowper, and translations from Latin, German, and Greek. A hymn book was a treasure-house of British and European culture.

For many households it must have been the chief access to poetry, an anthology of tried and tested pieces which gave a glimpse of the imaginative world that was normally denied to them. There were no degrees in English Literature in the time of *A&M*. History, too, would have come from the pages of a hymn book: no Congregationalist could have read or sung from a hymnal without becoming aware of the towering figure of Isaac Watts, and assimilating something of that late seventeenth-century Puritan temper and artistic severity that is found in his hymns and psalms; no Methodist, of any of their branches, could have missed the force of Charles Wesley and sensed his Hogarth-like response to the ills of eighteenth-century London—'Harlots, and publicans, and thieves'; no Anglican could have failed to notice the tradition of unshowy devotion in the morning and evening hymns of Thomas Ken. Whether they knew it or not, the singers of these hymns were being given insights into the past, being introduced to the times and tempers of other cultures.

And in addition to an education in literature and history, they would have absorbed the music of hymns, from the plainchant of the early Church, through the German chorale tradition and the Georgian psalmody of the eighteenth century, to the lush harmonies of John Bacchus Dykes and the grandeur of Samuel Sebastian Wesley. To sing 'All people that on earth do dwell' to the tune called the 'Old Hundredth' was to be exposed to the Reformation in all its austere simplicity. To the words, which assert with a Protestant fervour that '*We* are his folk, he doth *us* feed, | And for his sheep he doth *us* take', was added the grand tune, probably by Louis Bourgeois, which came out of the French reformed psalter. The very introduction of metrical psalms was a revolutionary step: the Victorian singers would probably have been aware of this only if they knew something about ecclesiastical history, but for all of them that tune and those words spoke and sounded out the features of a particular place and time. So would the singing of 'O God our help in ages past' to the early eighteenth-century 'ST ANNE', by William Croft, or 'Eternal Father, strong to save' to Dykes's 'MELITA'. There was a musical and poetical education in every hymn book.

This was a culture, not of the learned, but of the not-very-well-educated and not particularly privileged, for whom a hymn book would have been the nearest thing, apart from the Bible, to a repository of knowledge and an awareness of something beautiful. D. H. Lawrence valued it all his life; at home, he remembered many years later, hymn-singing was a way of spending the evening. Listening to a woman singing to him in the dusk, his mind went back

To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside  
And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.  
(‘Piano’)<sup>5</sup>

Lawrence is describing what must have been a very common late Victorian experience, especially among Nonconformists. It has been largely forgotten by literary historians, partly for ideological reasons and partly because that kind of culture was dismissed, even by critics as sensitive to spirituality and morality as Arnold and Ruskin. Arnold’s withering description of Nonconformity—‘a life of jealousy of the Establishment, disputes, tea-meetings, openings of chapels, sermons’<sup>6</sup>—does not mention hymns, but Ruskin does. He dismissed them as ‘half paralytic, half profane’,

consisting partly of the expression of what the singers never in their lives felt, or attempted to feel; and partly in the address of prayers to God, which nothing could more disagreeably astonish them than His attending to.<sup>7</sup>

Ruskin’s usual sensitivity to religious and moral feeling deserted him at this point: the feelings and prayers in good hymns make up the fundamentals of human experience. They include the sense of unworthiness, the desire for acceptance, the hope to become better, the seeking for assurance, the yearning for peace and justice. Hymns give expression to the normally inarticulate longings of faith, hope, and love. This is why they were important to so many people in the Victorian period, and why they should not be forgotten in any attempt to understand it.

The present essay is an attempt to discuss the Victorian hymn, and the way in which it helps us to understand the Victorian world. It can do so only selectively, because the number of texts available is vast: according to Percy Dearmer, the editor of *Songs of Praise*, ‘before the end of the Victorian era, Dr. Julian had to go through 400,000 hymns in various languages when he compiled the first edition of his *Dictionary of Hymnology*’.<sup>8</sup> It therefore takes the pre-eminent hymn book of the age, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, as a primary example of a book in which many of the features of the period are found, and in which the pressures and conflicts of the age are revealed.

*A&M* was published on Advent Sunday, 1860 (although the publication date is usually taken as that of the words-and-music edition of 1861). Its subtitle

<sup>5</sup> *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 148.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. by J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: Allen, 1903–12), xxxi (1907), 116.

<sup>8</sup> Percy Dearmer, *Songs of Praise Discussed* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. xix.

was 'for use in the Services of the Church', and it was very much a Church of England book. Nonconformist books were very different, in both structure and tone, for they were more concerned with 'experience'. John Wesley described his 'Large Hymn Book', the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, as 'a little body of experimental and practical divinity', and the emphasis on experience and practical religion was common in Nonconformist books. *A&M* was different in almost every way. It deserves attention, however, because of its representation of a central Anglicanism, with all its attention to the Church and its facing both ways, or at least in many directions. Indeed, Susan Drain called her book on it, with some justification, 'The Anglican Church in Nineteenth Century Britain'.<sup>9</sup>

That Church was frenetically active. In the words of Owen Chadwick, 'Victorian England was religious.'<sup>10</sup> To find a hymn book that satisfied its various groups, Anglo-Catholic, Protestant, sacramentalist, evangelical, ritualistic, sermon-preaching, High Church, Low Church, Broad Church, liberal, was a tall order. When it was in process, the compilers were advised by no less a figure than John Keble to 'make it comprehensive',<sup>11</sup> an aim which was fine in theory but less easy in practice. Its success indicates that somehow the compilers achieved an extraordinary act of survival in the maelstrom of conflicting currents, hymnological, theological, and ecclesiastical.

*A&M*, in its comprehensive way, included hymns from the Latin tradition and from the German. It also used hymns by Watts and Wesley, who had hitherto been regarded with suspicion, the first because he was a dissenter, the second because he was associated with the Methodists. The animus against such people is shown by the fact that John Mason Neale, normally a sensible and eirenic man, could not only write but even publish the following:

The good old Church of England!  
With her priests throughout the land,  
And her twenty thousand churches,  
How nobly does she stand!  
Dissenters are like mushrooms,  
That flourish but a day;  
Twelve hundred years, through smiles and tears,  
She hath lasted on alway!<sup>12</sup>

This dates the foundation of the English church to the seventh century, which is odd (though 'fourteen hundred years' would have been metrically impossible); but the point of the verse is the emphasis which it places, however crassly expressed, on stability and continuity (one wonders if Noel Coward knew it). And it shows the depth of prejudice that existed, even in the minds of people such as Neale.

The preface reveals little of the character of *A&M*, being taken up with

<sup>9</sup> *The Anglican Church in Nineteenth Century Britain: 'Hymns Ancient and Modern' (1860-1875)* (Lewiston, Lampeter, and Queenston: Mellen, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> *The Victorian Church*, 3rd edn (London: Black, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Drain, p. 236.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Drain, p. 62.

thanks and with instructions for singing and playing the tunes. But it does refer to the hymns at one point:

With regard to the Hymns they [the Compilers] have only to say, further, that in the very spirit, as they hope and believe, of the English Prayer-book, they have been gathered alike from the treasures of antiquity and from modern sources, and are the result of united prayer as well as united work. (p. iv)

There may be a difference between ‘treasures’ and ‘sources’, the former being more valued than the latter, or this may just have been a stylistic device to avoid repetition. The principal point, however, is the combination, also signalled in the title, ‘ancient and modern’. Those three words carry a huge subtext, signalling nothing less than a struggle for the soul of the English Church, and even for the English nation itself. For when he said that ‘Victorian England was religious’, Chadwick was acknowledging that it was ‘religious’ in the sense of going to church, thinking about religious problems such as geological evolution and the survival of the fittest, worrying about the status of the Bible and the possibility of an afterlife; but he was also drawing attention to the fact that religion shaped national life. What should the ideals of the nation be? What are its most pressing problems? What should its political judgements be founded upon? How should society conduct itself? These questions were the stuff of the serious novelists, Dickens, George Eliot, Gaskell, but they were also the concern of preachers and churches. Nonconformists, for example, were strongly concerned about poverty and the evils of drink: they were two of the disruptive forces in a society which they wished to see stable and ordered, if only in order to encourage enterprise and trade. Church of England writers were concerned with ‘the poor’ also, advocating a society in which duties and responsibilities were acknowledged. When Cecil Frances Humphreys (later Alexander) published *Hymns for Little Children* in 1848, it contained ‘All things bright and beautiful’, with the verse:

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

She was probably thinking that the rich had a responsibility to the poor, and the poor had a place in an ordered society. It reads badly now: indeed Percy Dearmer, one of the founders of the Christian Social Union at the end of the century, called it ‘the appalling verse’.<sup>13</sup> But it is an example of the way in which religion, politics, and society were unbreakably linked. Another example would be education, and the struggles between government and the various religious bodies. During the 1840s, when Lord John Russell set up a Committee of Education and a system of school inspectors led by Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, there was much anxiety that the government might be tempted to interfere in local schools, which had hitherto been seen as the responsibility of the parson and the squire. A good clergyman, such as John Keble at Hursley, would teach in the school, and take pains to see that it was well run; a slack clergyman might

<sup>13</sup> Percy Dearmer, *Songs of Praise Discussed* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933),

not. Tension between religious foundations and non-religious ones can be seen in the foundation of University College London, and the foundation of King's College in response to it.

What went on in education was symptomatic of what went on in society itself. Matthew Arnold's urbanity conceals an almost desperate desire to see the ideals and aspirations of British society rise above the limited aims of material prosperity, in which the post went twelve times a day between Islington and Camberwell, but only between a dismal, illiberal life in one place and a dismal illiberal life in the other. Arnold despaired of the jealous and bitter squabbling of nineteenth-century religion: two church magazines he designated 'The High Church rhinoceros and the Evangelical hyena'.<sup>14</sup> In *Culture and Anarchy* he reproduced a dialogue between himself and 'a Nonconformist manufacturer', who had opened an Independent chapel in a Midlands town, so that 'now Church and Dissent were pretty equally divided, with sharp contests between them'.<sup>15</sup> Arnold's belief that this was a pity was part of his wish to see British people lift their eyes towards Europe, towards the culture of France and Germany, and also towards the past, the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.

Religion in Victorian times was political. Every gesture, every assumption, every allegiance to a belief, was accompanied by a set of assumptions about society, often unspoken but always present, in ideas about wealth and power, in attitudes to the Empire and its peoples, in pressure for reform, in attitudes to education, in temperance movements, or just in the desire to be left alone (as Sir William Heathcote and Keble, despotic squire and conservative parson, evidently wished at Hursley). It was into this confused and fevered world that *A&M* was born. It contained 273 hymns, arranged as follows: a preliminary section: Morning and Evening, Sundays (5 hymns) and the days of the week (1 each); then the church year, from Advent to Trinity Sunday, followed by hymns labelled 'General Use'; then hymns on the Sacraments and Special Occasions (Harvest, Dedication of a Church, for example); and finally, hymns for Saints' Days, and for Apostles, Evangelists, and Martyrs. It was clearly a book for the Church, but—in such a politico-religious age—what kind of church? We may start by considering the 'Ancient' of the title, which meant principally Latin.

Latin hymns had been lost to the Church since the Reformation. There had been a few isolated examples of translation, such as John Cosin's 'Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire' and Dryden's 'Creator Spirit, by whose aid', both translations of 'Veni, creator spiritus'. But the real revival of Latin hymnody began in the nineteenth century. It was a statement of the value of tradition: it was as much a part of the nineteenth-century fascination with the past as was the interest in the Middle Ages. The difference was that whereas the Middle Ages were valued as a time of prosperity and community life, as well as being picturesque, the Latin past was a time of Roman virtue and imperial achievement, followed by centuries of monasticism and scholarship.

Latin was the tongue of saints and scholars. It was also the language of Ro-

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', in *Essays in Criticism, First Series* (London: Macmillan, 1865; repr. 1910), pp. 1–41 (p. 29).

<sup>15</sup> *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. by Dover Wilson, p. 21.

man Catholicism, and therefore suspect in the eyes of Protestant England. For example, some verses of 'Adeste, fideles, laeti triumphantes', including the first, come from an eighteenth-century collection called 'The Jacobite Manuscript', probably originating in Douai and entitled 'A Prayer for James', referring to James III, the Old Pretender. The tune was often played in the chapel of the Portuguese Embassy in London, and became so associated with a foreign embassy of a Roman Catholic country that it was called 'PORTUGUESE'. During the French Revolution, French Roman Catholics took refuge in England: one of them, Abbé Étienne Jean François, Monsignor de Borderies, added another verse to the Latin text. It was a splendid hymn for Christmas, but its origins were suspect.

But if Latin brought with it a suggestion of Papist infiltration, it also had the distinction of being the language of an educated person. It was the language of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Newman published a collection of Latin hymns from the Roman and Paris Breviaries, *Hymni Ecclesiae*, in 1838. Keble's lectures as Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1832 to 1841 were given in Latin, and not translated into English until 1912. Isaac Williams, another of the major figures in the Oxford Movement and author of 'Be thou my guardian and my guide', said that during his schooldays at Harrow he 'received no religious instruction of any kind', but that his preference for Latin was so great that when he had to write an English exercise he had to think it out, or write it out, in Latin, and then translate it into English.

In 1829 Williams began translating hymns from the Paris Breviary of 1736. He noted that at the time 'there prevailed a general horror among Church people of unauthorized hymns being sung in church, and I remember I put them often into unrhythmical harsh metres to prevent this'.<sup>16</sup> He published some of his translations in a religious periodical, the *British Magazine*, where they attracted the attention of John Chandler, Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Chandler acquired a copy of the Paris Breviary for himself, and began translating from it, publishing *The Hymns of the Primitive Church* in 1837, with an enlarged edition in 1841. It contained hymns such as 'On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry' and 'The heavenly child in stature grows'. In the same year as Chandler's first edition, Richard Mant, then Bishop of Down and Connor, published *Ancient Hymns from the Roman Breviary, for Domestick Use*.

Williams, Chandler, and Mant were Latin scholars, Oxford men. They were willing to accept the disapproval of the evangelicals and Nonconformists for the sake of the material which they had unearthed. They were pioneers in a venture to bring to the Church of England hymns of a different kind from those then in use, primarily among evangelical churches where they had been introduced unofficially into services. Suspicion of this practice was considerable among the senior clergy: when Reginald Heber, then a Shropshire vicar, asked permission in 1820 to compile a collection of hymns for the Church's year, he was refused. Meanwhile evangelical churches used unofficial books, often compiled by local clergy, or written by them: the best-known example was by a Sheffield incumbent, Thomas Cotterill, whose *Selection of Psalms and Hymns*

<sup>16</sup> *The Autobiography of Isaac Williams, B.D.*, ed. by Sir George Prevost (London: Longmans, Green, 1892), p. 37.

was published in 1810, with many successive printings and enlargements. A classic hymn book of this kind was *Olney Hymns*, written by Newton and Cowper and published in 1779, which was one of the books which furnished material for these selections.

Williams and Chandler were entering this field in different ways. Williams by stealth, printing translations that no one could sing; Chandler more boldly. In his orotund preface to *Hymns of the Primitive Church* he addressed himself to the Church of England with a kind of heavy playfulness:

It will not, I trust, be unpleasing or unedifying to her members to see a Morning Hymn by a Bishop of Milan of the fourth century [Ambrose] joined to one on the same subject by a Bishop of Salisbury of the seventeenth [probably Chandler meant Ken here, though Ken was Bishop of Bath and Wells]. Perhaps, if the authorities of our Church carry on the design, we may see next to them a hymn by a Bishop of Calcutta of the nineteenth [Heber]. (p. x)

The reference to Heber points to his *Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Church Service of the Year*, published in 1827. Heber, after some hesitation, had accepted appointment as Bishop of Calcutta in 1823, dying suddenly in India in 1826. His unexpected death, caused by overwork (more immediately by plunging into a cold swimming pool on a hot day), shocked the country, and his widow, Amelia, took advantage of his position as a heroic martyr of the mission field to override episcopal objections and bring out his hymn book. It contained hymns such as 'Brightest and best of the sons of the morning', 'Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty', both of which are still sung, and the missionary hymn 'From Greenland's icy mountains' which is not, although it was once a compulsory hymn for every mainstream hymn book. Its second verse, in particular, was so well known that it was parodied by Kipling ('The 'eathen in 'is blindness bows down to wood an' stone; | 'E don't obey no orders unless they is 'is own'):

What though the spicy breezes  
Blow soft through Ceylon's isle:  
Though every prospect pleases,  
And only man is vile;  
In vain with lavish kindness  
The gifts of God are strewn;  
The heathen in his blindness  
Bows down to wood and stone!

Missionary work was one way of distracting attention from the anxieties at home, as Dickens's Mrs Jellyby in *Bleak House* comically demonstrates; and its Christian expansionism is often unattractive, although the heroism of nineteenth-century missionaries, going out to countries where they had a life expectancy of a few years or even a few months, is often forgotten.

Chandler's reference to Heber is significant, indicating a readiness to see contemporary hymnody as part of a tradition stretching back to St Ambrose. It is evidence of a slow discovery that hymns were not necessarily the preserve of evangelicals, dissenters, or Methodists, but capable of bringing into the nineteenth century the riches of the early Church, which was regarded as purer than its confused and divided contemporary counterpart:



Christ's Church was holiest in her youthful days  
Ere the world on her smiled.

That poem was no. 131 in *Lyra Apostolica*, the volume published in 1836 by Newman in conjunction with like-minded religious associates—Hurrell Froude, Keble, Isaac Williams, and others. It was part of the growing interest in the poetry of religion that accompanied the Tractarian movement. The interest had begun almost ten years before, with *The Christian Year* of 1827, the same year as Heber's *Hymns*. Although Keble appeared in it, *Lyra Apostolica* was markedly different from *The Christian Year*. As G. B. Tennyson has pointed out, it was more aggressive and polemical. The title, as he says, 'calls to mind a common Romantic image, the poet as inspired singer':

Theirs is an *apostolic* lyre, one in harmony with the stirrings of the Apostolic Church, which is both Newman's Church of the Fathers and the Church that secured its perpetuity even to the present through the apostolic succession, a principle of enormous importance to the Tractarians and the source for their arguments on behalf of the authority of the visible Church and the validity of the Church of England as part of the Church Catholic.<sup>17</sup>

The gathering cloud of Tractarian disquiet with the state of the English Church burst with Newman's conversion of 1845, after which all became clearer. Newman himself tried to entice Keble to follow him, in a clever and seductive review of Keble's *Lyra Innocentium* of 1846, arguing that the Roman Catholic Church was the most 'poetical' of all churches and that Keble, who had done so much to bring poetry to the Church of England, would find his true place in Rome.<sup>18</sup> At this point hymns and poems were becoming weapons in the battle for the hearts and minds of British Christians. One convert, F. W. Faber, who published *Jesus and Mary; or, Catholic Hymns for Singing and Reading* in 1849, and a collected edition of his hymns in 1862, wanted his hymns to do for Roman Catholics what *Olney Hymns* had done for evangelical Protestants. The 1849 preface acknowledged the power of hymns over them, while completely failing to understand the glories of Wesley or the subtlety of Cowper:

There is scarcely anything which takes so strong a hold upon people as religion in metre, hymns or poems on doctrinal subjects. Every one, who has had experience among the English poor, knows the influence of Wesley's hymns and the Olney collection. Less than moderate literary excellence, a very tame versification, indeed often the simple recurrence of a rhyme is sufficient: the spell seems to lie in that.<sup>19</sup>

Another convert, Edward Caswall, published *Lyra Catholica* in 1849, the title proclaiming his new allegiance. It contained hymns such as 'Bethlehem! of noblest cities', translated from the Latin of Prudentius, 'O sola magnarum urbium', and 'Hark! an awful voice is sounding', a translation of 'Vox clara ecce intonat'. In the first flush of his new allegiance, Caswall was investigating the

<sup>17</sup> G. B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 122–23.

<sup>18</sup> J. H. Newman, 'Keble', in *Essays Critical and Historical*, 2 vols (London: Pickering, 1872), II, 421–53. Keble, said Newman, 'did that for the Church of England which none but a poet could do: he made it poetical' (p. 442).

<sup>19</sup> F. W. Faber, preface to *Hymns* (1849), repr. in *Hymns* (London: Burns & Oates, 1862), pp. xiii–xviii (p. xvi).

possibilities of ancient hymnody, and in translating them he was not only making them available to the British Christian community but also promulgating the idea of the continuity of the Church.

The greatest of these translators was John Mason Neale (1818–66). At Cambridge he was one of the founders of the Cambridge Camden Society (later the Cambridge Ecclesiological Society), with aims that were not dissimilar to those of Newman and his associates at Oxford. Prevented through ill health from taking up the living of Crawley in Sussex, he became Warden of Sackville College, a small sisterhood at East Grinstead, where his High Church practices aroused the wrath of the Bishop of Chichester, who denounced his furnishing of the chapel as ‘spiritual haberdashery’. But because the chapel and sisterhood were part of a private foundation, the bishop had no jurisdiction over it, and Neale lived a quietly productive life, writing the history of the Eastern Church and a novel, *Theodora Phranza*, and publishing *Mediaeval Hymns and Sequences* in 1851 and *Hymns, Chiefly Mediaeval, on the Joys and Glories of Paradise* in 1865. He was also considerably involved in a production of the Cambridge Ecclesiological Society, the *Hymnal Noted*, which appeared in two parts (1852, 1854). His enthusiasms may be seen from the preface to the first of these, which introduced Sequences to the British Church:

It is a magnificent thing to pass along the far-stretching vista of hymns, from the sublime self-containedness of S. Ambrose to the more fervid inspiration of S. Gregory, the exquisite typology of Venantius Fortunatus, the lovely painting of S. Peter Damiani, the crystal-like simplicity of S. Notker, the scriptural calm of Godelascus, the subjective loveliness of S. Bernard, till all culminate in the full blaze of glory which surrounds Adam of S. Victor, the greatest of them all.<sup>20</sup>

Neale translated hymns that became universally known and loved, such as ‘Jerusalem the golden’, ‘Of the Father’s love begotten’, ‘O come, O come, Emmanuel’, and ‘The royal banners forward go’. In the first edition of *A&M* he was the most represented author. Like Faber he was commendably interested in ‘the poor’, and wrote *A Short Commentary on the Hymnal Noted, from Ancient Sources, Intended Chiefly for the Use of the Poor* in 1852. It explained the aims of the *Hymnal Noted*, and condemned the metrical psalms created by the Reformers, who ‘put the psalms into verse, and sang them by way of hymns’. This led to the neglect of ‘the old hymns of the Church of England’ (those written before the Reformation), ‘and so a great number of “collections”, that have no authority, came into the Church’.<sup>21</sup> The ‘no authority’ phrase referred to the many unofficial collections made by clergy for their individual churches: it was this proliferation of hymn books that the publication of *A&M* was intended to stop.

Latin was a resource for these hymn writers that emphasized their shared status as educated men. One book, *Clavis Dominica* (1884), contained translations of some hymns from *A&M* into Latin, including two by the Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone, ‘Jesus, pro me perforatus’ (‘Rock of ages, cleft for me’) and ‘Scis te lassum? Scis languentem?’ (‘Art thou weary, art thou languid’). The second of these was originally a Greek hymn, translated into English by

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, p. 787.

<sup>21</sup> J. M. Neale, *A Short Commentary on the Hymnal Noted* (London: Masters, 1852), p. iv.

Neale, whose *Hymns of the Eastern Church* (1862) introduced English-speaking readers to what Neale called 'this huge treasure of divinity [. . .] a glorious mass of theology'.<sup>22</sup> As Leon Litvack has pointed out, Neale turned from Rome to Greece in his quest for 'Sobornost' or unity, that unity which he found so lacking in the fragmented and irritable British churches.<sup>23</sup> The result was hymns such as 'The day of resurrection', 'The day is past and over', and the hymn by St Andrew of Crete:

Christian! Dost thou see them  
On the holy ground,  
How the troops of Midian  
Prowl and prowl around?

Who the troops of Midian might have been was not specified. This was one of the great advantages of these hymns: such imagery could be applied to whoever was the opposing party at the time, or used to support one's own side:

Through many a day of darkness,  
Through many a scene of strife,  
The faithful few fought bravely,  
To guard the Nation's life.

This is from a celebrated Victorian hymn, 'Thy hand, O God, has guided', written by Edward Hayes Plumptre, Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford, Professor at King's College London, and then Dean of Wells. Who 'the faithful few' were would have depended on where you stood in the turbulent and faction-ridden Victorian Church.

Nor was the insatiable appetite for controversy confined to the Protestant-Catholic divide or to High Church and Low Church. The Congregationalists in 1855 were torn apart by Thomas Toke Lynch's *The Rivulet; or, Hymns for Heart and Voice*, an inoffensive collection of hymns which saw God in nature ('Flowers will not cease to speak, | And tell the praise of God'). The book was denounced by John Campbell, the editor of two Congregationalist magazines, the *British Banner* and the *Christian Witness*, as 'miserable garbage': the hymns were 'crude, disjointed, unmeaning, unchristian, ill-rhymed rubbish'.<sup>24</sup> The reason for such wild rage was evidently the insecurity of the Congregationalists (who lacked the stability of the official status of the Church of England and the *Book of Common Prayer*) in the face of doubt, science, and rational thought. Campbell identified the Tübingen school as the source of the problem:

While the Magazines were under his care they [the readers] need fear nothing from Germany. He discarded all such speculations. He had burned, he might say, reams of a speculative nature. He had dropped anchor in Westminster, where he found matter in abundance, in the Confession of Faith, in the Shorter and Larger Catechisms.<sup>25</sup>

'Westminster' refers to the Westminster Confession, the great statement of independent faith in the seventeenth century; and Campbell's furious response

<sup>22</sup> J. M. Neale, *Hymns of the Eastern Church* (London: Hayes, 1862), p. xli.

<sup>23</sup> Leon Litvack, *J. M. Neale and the Quest for Sobornost* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> William White, *Memoir of Thomas T. Lynch* (London: Isbister, 1874), pp. 109–10.

<sup>25</sup> Albert Peel, *These Hundred Years: A History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1831–1931* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1931), p. 220.

to Lynch's work was a return to the violent passions of those days. All that Lynch was doing was preaching a doctrine of God as found in the beauty of the natural world, a church'd Wordsworthian creed. To Campbell, nothing less than the gospel of the atonement through the saving blood of Jesus Christ would suffice. And Campbell, like others after him, was a book-burner.

So far, this account has been dominated by the squabbles of men, and it is time to consider briefly the place of women. Although there were some women, as Richard Jenkyns has shown,<sup>26</sup> who were excellent at Greek (notably George Eliot), it was men who primarily appropriated Latin and Greek as languages of a cultivated man. Women, with some exceptions, were thought to be less capable of the required intellectual effort. It was generally thought, with Mr Stelling in *The Mill on the Floss*, that girls had 'a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow.'<sup>27</sup> The most poignant example from the world of the Victorian hymn was Dora Greenwell, who wrote hymns that are still sung, such as 'And art thou come with us to dwell'. Her brother William was a noted antiquarian and a Canon of Durham Cathedral. She received from him what might be called the Maggie Tulliver treatment:

I remember I read one book (I forget which) and said, 'Dora, I cannot see your aim. What is it you want to tell people? You seem to be in earnest, but what is the conclusion? You roll your subject over and over, and then you stop. I don't believe you know yourself what you want to teach!'<sup>28</sup>

The bland assurance of 'I forget which' speaks volumes. It is hardly surprising that one of Dora's hymns should begin 'I am not skilled to understand | What God has willed, what God has planned'; nor that her life seems to have been one of frustration and unhappiness. Nor is it surprising that Christina Rossetti's 'In the bleak mid-winter' should end with

What can I give him,  
Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd  
I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise man  
I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give him—  
Give my heart.

A distinguished modern hymn writer, Elizabeth Cosnett, has pointed out that 'when a woman wrote these words women were largely excluded from the professions and from higher education'.<sup>29</sup> And yet the women hymn writers of the nineteenth century, such as the Unitarian Sarah Flower Adams ('Nearer, my God to Thee'), Frances Ridley Havergal ('Take my life, and let it be'),

<sup>26</sup> Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

<sup>27</sup> *The Mill on the Floss*, Book II, chapter I, Stereotype Edition (London and Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1894), p. 135.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Constance L. Maynard, *Dora Greenwell: A Prophet for Our Own Time in the Battleground of Our Faith* (London: Allenson, 1926), p. 122.

<sup>29</sup> 'A (Female) Bookworm Reads Some Hymns', *Bulletin of the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 205 (October 1995), 172–84.

and Anna Laetitia Waring ('In heavenly love abiding'), produced texts that have continued to inspire generations of hymn-singers. The greatest of them all, however, was the translator Catherine Winkworth. She was one of many women writers who translated German hymns, which makes an interesting confluence of two streams: the growing confidence of women writers and the Reformed tradition of German hymnody.

In addition to translations of individual works such as Schiller's *Die Räuber* and Bürger's *Lenore*, there was a lively general interest in German philosophy, aesthetics, and theology throughout the nineteenth century. In hymnology the first great consequence was Carlyle's essay in *Fraser's Magazine* (1831) entitled 'Luther's Psalm'. The psalm in question was 46, beginning in Luther's version 'Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott' and in Carlyle's translation 'A safe stronghold our God is still'. Carlyle described Luther as

A man [...] not only permitted to enter the sphere of Poetry, but to dwell in the purest centre thereof: perhaps the most inspired of all Teachers since the first Apostles of his faith; and thus not a Poet only but a Prophet and God-ordained Priest, which is the highest form of that dignity, and of all dignity.<sup>30</sup>

Carlyle's comments were written immediately after Catholic emancipation, and they can hardly have pleased those, like Keble and Newman, who were hard at work at Oxford on the writings of the Church Fathers. But the reference to Luther as a 'God-ordained Priest' would hardly have delighted the episcopally ordained priests of the English church either. Carlyle's brief essay, with its magnificent psalm, was 'a plague on both your houses' rebuke to the effete clergy of all denominations and shades of belief. It was followed, however, by translations of hymns with a much more strident agenda. Richard Massie, who published *Martin Luther's Spiritual Songs* in 1854, introduced his translations with a lengthy preface, carrying the message that at the Reformation 'the light of the Gospel had by God's grace again risen upon benighted Christendom':

For my own part, the longer I live, the more I learn to bless God for the Reformation and the Reformers, and the more I feel convinced that in a firm adherence to their doctrines and principles, so admirably embodied in our Articles, Liturgy, and Homilies, lies the best safety of our Church amid the perils which surround her.<sup>31</sup>

German hymns and theology were therefore part of a Protestant agenda (except for extremists such as Campbell). The man who did more than any other to introduce them into England was Christian Carl Josias Bunsen, the scholarly and cultured ambassador to the Court of St James. Before entering the diplomatic service, Bunsen had been a theologian and historian, and had published a vast treasury of German hymns and prayers, *Versuch eines allgemeinen evangelischen Gesang- und Gebetbuchs, zum Kirchen- und Hausegebrauch* (Hamburg, 1833). He made the acquaintance of Frances Elizabeth Cox, encouraging her to produce her *Sacred Hymns from the German* (1841); and Susanna Winkworth, whom he persuaded to translate an anthology of German mystical prose writers, *Deutsche Theologie*, resulting in *Theologica Germanica* (1854). He then encouraged the

<sup>30</sup> Repr. in Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 5 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1899), II, 160–64 (pp. 160–61).

<sup>31</sup> Richard Massie, *Martin Luther's Spiritual Songs* (London: Hatchard, 1854), pp. vi, xiii.

greatest of all German hymn translators, Susanna's sister Catherine, to produce *Lyra Germanica* (First Series, 1855, Second Series, 1858).

The Winkworth sisters were from an evangelical background, modified by the gentler teaching of their mother,<sup>32</sup> and even more modified by a year's study in Dresden. They had been taught German by William Gaskell, and met Bunsen through the Gaskells and their circle of Unitarian intellectuals in Manchester. Five of Catherine's translations were in the first edition of *A&M* in 1861: two years later she produced, with the assistance of two distinguished musicians, Otto Goldschmidt and William Sterndale Bennett, *The Chorale Book for England*, containing such hymns as 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation' and 'Jesu, priceless treasure'. Bunsen's response shows how closely the endeavour was bound up with Reformation ideology: 'her really wonderful translations seem to promise to effect what hitherto has proved impossible—namely, to *naturalize* in England the German *Hymns*, the most immortal literary fruit of the Reformation'.<sup>33</sup>

Cox and the Winkworth sisters were three of many women translators of German texts. Hymn translators included Eleanor, Lady Fortescue (*Hymns, Mostly Taken from the German*, 1843), Henrietta Joan Fry (*Hymns of the Reformation by Dr M. Luther and Others from the German*, 1845, 1853), and Jane Montgomery Campbell, who translated 'Wir pflügen und wir streuen' ('We plough the fields and scatter'). The pre-eminence of Luther was reaffirmed by a series of small books published in Edinburgh by two sisters, Jane Laurie Borthwick and Sarah Laurie Findlater, entitled *Hymns from the Land of Luther* (1854, 1855, 1858, 1862), including 'Be still my soul: the Lord is on thy side'. Rich in experience and individual interpretation of Scripture, the German hymns were a powerful contrasting element to the Latin hymns from the Breviaries.

*A&M*, in its comprehensive way, managed to satisfy many of these conflicting demands, and it sold very well indeed. The compilers said that they could not send forth their *Appendix* of 1868 'without the expression of their deep gratitude to Almighty God for the marvellous success with which He has been pleased to bless their former work' (p. iii). A second edition followed in 1875, with a Supplement added in 1889. Into these successive editions went the great hymns of the Victorian Church, 'Thy hand, O God, has guided', 'Alleluia, sing to Jesus', 'For all the saints who from their labours rest', 'The Church's one foundation'. The effect of singing these was sometimes quite extraordinary. When the last-named was sung at a service in St Paul's Cathedral during the third Lambeth Conference in 1888, the effect was described as 'almost appalling':

Sung by a large congregation, some people say this hymn was really more than they could bear. 'It made them feel weak at the knees, their legs trembled, and they really felt as though they were going to collapse.'<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Margaret J. Shaen, *Memorials of Two Sisters, Susanna and Catherine Winkworth* (London: Longmans, Green, 1908), pp. 8–9.

<sup>33</sup> Shaen, p. 139.

<sup>34</sup> Wesley Milgate, *Songs of the People of God*, 'A companion to *The Australian Hymn Book/With One Voice*' (London: Collins, 1982), p. 154. Unfortunately, Milgate does not give the source of this extraordinary account.

Similarly, the singing of 'The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended' at the service for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897 had a great effect. When she chose it, the Queen can have been under no illusions about the British Empire: although the procession contained representatives from half the world, coloured red on the map, participants in services all over the country sang

So be it, Lord; thy throne shall never,  
Like earth's proud empires, pass away.

Kipling's 'Recessional', written on the same occasion, was a reminder that the magnificence of the procession and the power of the naval review were transient:

The tumult and the shouting dies;  
The captains and the kings depart:  
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice  
An humble and a contrite heart.

The hymn (brilliantly linking 1897 to Psalm 51), which was included in the *English Hymnal* of 1906, was one of the hymns written at the end of the century which strove to remind the singers of national life and political responsibility, although the greatest of these, Chesterton's 'O God of earth and altar' and Scott Holland's 'Judge eternal, throned in splendour', date from the first years of the twentieth century. But they emerge from a late Victorian movement, the Christian Social Union, which sought to promote better conditions for the poor and a more equitable distribution of wealth. The Salvation Army, the 'Missions', and the 'Settlements', together with some devoted clergy of all denominations, all tried to do something to minister to the material welfare of the underprivileged: while clergy such as Percy Dearmer, later an editor of the *English Hymnal* and *Songs of Praise*, was deeply affected by the dockers' strike of 1889. Ben Tillett, the leader of the dockers, was a chapel-goer; and there is some truth in the adage that the beginnings of the Labour Party owed more to Methodism than to Marx. But this is hardly revealed in hymns until Chesterton's plea for a society that would unite 'prince and priest and thrall'. Robert Bridges's 'Rejoice, O Land, in God thy might' is very general in its admonitions 'Walk in his way, his word adore, | And keep his truth for evermore.'

Bridges's hymn comes from the *Yattendon Hymnal*, published in four parts between 1895 and 1899. It was designed for the parish church at Yattendon in Berkshire, where Bridges appointed himself precentor. It contained a hundred hymns, mainly translations, from both the Latin/Greek tradition and the German. The hymns were carefully selected and beautifully printed: the book was as much a product of the aesthetic movement as of the religious impulse. Indeed, in Bridges's mind it would have been impossible to separate the two. His own translations were a deliberate attempt to distance hymn language from the discourse of everyday life. In 'The duteous day now closeth', a translation of a hymn by Paul Gerhardt, the beauty of the night sky is so wonderful that man 'forgets his selfish being | For joy of beauty not his own':

His care he drowneth yonder,  
Lost in th' abyss of wonder;  
To heav'n his soul doth steal:

This life he disesteemeth,  
The day it is that dreameth,  
That doth from truth his vision seal.

Bridges's language was a protest against a religion where language coarsened feeling (we need to remember that this was the age of Sankey's *Sacred Songs and Solos* and Hoyle's *Temperance Hymns*). So was his book. He took the fascicles to his friend Horace Hart, printer to the University of Oxford, who used red and black inks on hand-made paper, folio size, with Fell typeface and woodblocks and Peter Walpergen music notation.

Bridges's aesthetic statement is an indication of how hymns can be seen as dialogues (in the Bakhtinian sense) with the world of the nineteenth century. They engage with an age which was, as Chadwick saw, 'religious': in that word can be seen the conflicting impulses of ancient and modern, the need for tradition and the need for progress, the looking back to certainty and the looking forward to the unknown. The problems of the Victorian age are mirrored in the hymns: the anxieties about death and the afterlife, the uncertainties of belief, the questions about the ordering of society—rich and poor, men and women, oligarchy or democracy. The need to cling to the Church for certainty led to deplorable hostility between Catholic and Protestant, church and chapel, and to the ugly fanaticism of Campbell in his attack upon Lynch; but it was also a certainty that led to an intense experience of a particular culture. D. H. Lawrence thought that 'it was good to be brought up a Protestant: and among Protestants, a Nonconformist, and among Nonconformists, a Congregationalist', disliking both the 'snobbish hierarchies of class' in the Church of England and 'the personal emotionalism which one found among the Methodists when I was a boy'.<sup>35</sup> As so often, Lawrence was in touch with a world that is too often ignored by literary historians, a culture that is in danger of being forgotten or neglected, but which was alive for those who sang round the tinkling piano in thousands of British homes.

<sup>35</sup> D. H. Lawrence, 'Hymns in a Man's Life' (1928), in *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. by A. Beal (London: Heinemann, 1956), pp. 6–11 (p. 9).