

STORY OF GOSPEL HYMNS

Sankey's Collection of Sacred Songs and Solos

by
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CHAPTER FIVE

~ O - P ~

O FOR A THOUSAND TONGUES TO SING

Words by Charles Wesley

Music by Oliver Holden

*“O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise.”*

When Charles Wesley consulted Peter Bohler as to the propriety of praising God, he replied, “Had I a thousand tongues, I would praise him with all” – an expression that is believed to have inspired the opening line of this hymn which Wesley wrote in 1739, to commemorate the first anniversary of his new birthday, the day of his conversion.

When John Wesley made his collection of hymns for the use of the Methodists, he selected this one to stand as the first hymn in the book. To this day it remains in that place of honor, and as S. W. Duffield says, it “well deserves the prominence.”

OH, TO BE NOTHING

Words by Georgiana M. Taylor

Music by R. G. Halls.

har. by P. P. Bliss

*“Oh, to be nothing, nothing,
Only to lie at His feet.”*

Miss Taylor writes me:

“The idea for the hymn came into my mind through reading the expression, ‘Oh, to be nothing,’ in a volume of an old magazine. I think it occurred in an anecdote about an aged Christian worker. At all events the words haunted me; I mused on their meaning, and the hymn was the outcome.”

Some one has misinterpreted the true meaning of the hymn, and has written another entitled, "Oh, to be something." But it is not in accordance with the Master, who made himself nothing; nor is it in the spirit of the text which says that he that abaseth himself shall in due time be exalted.

This hymn was much used as a solo in our meetings in Great Britain.

OH, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

Words by Fanny J. Crosby

Music by Philip Phillips

*"Oh, what are you going to do, brother?
Say, what are you going to do?"*

Away back in 1867 this hymn was written and dedicated to the Young Men's Christian Associations of America. For many years I used it both in Great Britain and America. Many testimonies have been given of the blessing it has brought to young men who have heard it sung.

"I have a young men's Bible-class," writes a Christian worker in Rotherham, England. "Some years ago one of my scholars brought a stranger to the class, who had just come to our town on business. He continued to attend very regularly for about a year.

"Having obtained a better business appointment in a distant town, he told me before leaving the class that when he first arrived he had fully made up his mind to shake himself free from all religious influence; as he had come to a strange town where no one knew him, he would enjoy himself any way he chose. But he consented to attend the class just once. The first hymn sung was, '*Oh, what are you going to do, brother? Say, what are you going to do?*'

"He could not get it out of his head all the week, and it was the means of entirely setting aside his intentions. On arriving at his new home he immediately united with a Christian church.

"His steady, consistent life won for him further promotion in business, and he now fills a position of usefulness and responsibility in an important town. All the good he had received he attributed to that hymn on the first Sunday of his residence here."

ON JORDAN'S STORMY BANKS

Words by the Samuel Stennett

Music by T. C. O'Kane

*“On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye.”*

While visiting the Holy Land I sang this hymn on the banks of the Jordan, opposite Mount Horeb, where God showed Moses the promised land of Canaan. As the banks of the Jordan are not stormy, the word “rugged” has by many been substituted for “stormy” in the first line.

Of the many hymns written by Dr. Stennett, this is one of the most famous. The author was born at Exeter, England. His father was the pastor of the Baptist Church, in Little Wild Street, London. With this church young Sennett united. He became his father’s assistant, and later his successor, continuing in that pastorate until his death, in 1795, at the age of sixty-eight. He was noted as the friend of King George III. The hymn was first published in Rippon’s “*Selections*,” in 1787.

ONE MORE DAY'S WORK FOR JESUS

Words by Miss Anna Warner
Music by Robert Lowry

*“One more day’s work for Jesus;
One less of life for me.”*

One day, while the children in a Mission Chapel were singing “*One more day’s work for Jesus*,” a woman passing by stopped outside to listen. She went home with these words fixed in her mind. The next day, as she was bending over the washtub, the words of the hymn came to her again and aroused the question, “Have I ever done one day’s work for Jesus in all my life?” That marked the turning point.

There and then she began to work for Christ. She washed the clothes for Jesus, cleaned the house for Jesus, administered the needs of her family for Jesus. A new light came into her life; and at the close of that day she could sing with a different feeling and a new enthusiasm:

*“One more day’s work for Jesus;
How sweet the work has been.”*

ONE SWEETLY SOLEMN THOUGHT

Words by Phoebe Cary
Music by Phillip Phillips

*“One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o’er and o’er.”*

A gentleman traveling in China found at Macao a company of gamblers in a back room on the upper floor of a hotel.

At the table nearest him was an American, about twenty years old, playing with an old man. While the gray-haired man was shuffling the cards, the young man, in a careless way, sang a verse of "One sweetly solemn thought," to a very pathetic tune. Several gamblers looked up in surprise on hearing the singing. The old man, who was dealing the cards, gazed steadfastly at his partner in the game, and then threw the pack of cards under the table.

"Where did you learn that song?" he asked.

The young man pretended that he did not know that he had been singing.

"Well, no matter," said the old man, "I have played my last game, and that's the end of it. The cards may lie there till doomsday, and I'll never pick them up."

Having won a hundred dollars from the young man, he took the money from his pocket and, handing it over to the latter, said: "Here, Harry, is your money; take it and do good with it; I shall with mine."

The traveler followed them downstairs, and at the door heard the old man still talking about the song which the young man had sung. Long afterward a gentleman in Boston received a letter from the old man, in which he declared that he had become a "hardworking Christian," and that his young friend also had renounced gambling and kindred vices.

This hymn was composed in a little third-story bedroom one Sunday morning in 1852, after the author had come from church. Miss Carey was then twenty-eight. She died in Newport, Rhode Island, nineteen years later.

ONLY A STEP TO JESUS

Words by Fanny J. Crosby
Music by W. H. Doane

*"Only a step to Jesus!
Then why not take it now?"*

The editor of a religious periodical in the South sends me the following incident, which occurred while he was holding meetings in a small town:

"One night a prominent man of the county, not a Christian, was in town. Having heard of the fine singing, he went to the meeting for a few minutes to listen to a song or two. He heard only one song and then went away; but that song went with him.

“It was, ‘*Only a step to Jesus! Then why not take it now?*’

“The words stayed with him, and were repeated over and over. They came back to him the next day, and awakened inquiry regarding himself which at last led him into repentance and a happy conversion. Many people wept as he related his experience before the church.”

ONLY TRUST HIM

Words by J. H. S.

Music by J. H. Stockton

*“Come, every soul by sin oppressed
There’s mercy with the Lord.”*

While on the way to England with Mr. Moody in 1873, one day in mid-ocean, as I was looking over a list of hymns in my scrapbook, I noticed one commencing, “*Come every soul by sin oppressed,*” written by John Stockton, with the familiar chorus,

*“Come to Jesus, Come to Jesus,
Come to Jesus just now.”*

Believing that these words had been so often sung that they were hackneyed, I decided to change them and tell how to come to Jesus by substituting the words, “*Only trust him.*” In this form it was first published in “*Sacred Songs and Solos*” in London. While holding meetings in Her Majesty’s Theater in Pall Mall, London, and singing this hymn, I thought I would change the chorus again, and asked the people to sing,

*“I will trust Him, I will trust Him,
I will trust Him just now.”*

Then as we sang I decided to change it once more, and asked them to sing, “*I do trust him.*”

God blessed this rendering of the hymn to eight persons present, who testified afterward that by the change they were led to accept salvation.

* * *

“I am much interested in sacred songs,” writes a missionary in England, “because it was the first verse of ‘*Only trust Him*’ that opened the door of my heart to let the Master into my soul in all his fullness. I was in the army, and found my way to the Woolwich Soldiers’ Home, where I heard the Gospel; and for a fortnight I was groping in the dark for peace, when one evening I heard the singing of ‘*Only trust Him,*’ which brought light into my soul. I have ever since been happy, serving Him with my whole heart. I am now a missionary to my comrades.”

ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

Words by S. Baring-Gould

Music by A. S. Sullivan

“Onward, Christian soldiers I Marching as to war.”

Written for a special occasion, the author was totally unprepared for the subsequent popularity of this hymn. In 1895 he said regarding its composition:

“Whit-Monday is a great day for school festivals in Yorkshire. One Whit-Monday, thirty years ago, it was arranged that our school should join forces with that of a neighboring village. I wanted the children to sing when marching from one village to another, but couldn’t think of anything quite suitable; so I sat up at night, resolved that I would write something myself. ‘*Onward, Christian soldiers*’ was the result.

“It was written in great haste, and I am afraid some of the rhymes are faulty. Certainly nothing has surprised me more than its popularity. I don’t remember how it got printed first, but I know that very soon it found its way into several collections. I have written a few other hymns since then, but only two or three have become at all well-known.”

The tune to which it is now sung is the one by which Sir Arthur Sullivan is likely to be known longest to posterity.

Mr. Moody would not give out this hymn in connection with his meetings, as he thought it contained too much vain boasting. He would exclaim: “We are a nice lot of soldiers!”

OUT OF THE SHADOW-LAND

Words by Ira D. Sankey

Music by Ira D. Sankey

*“Out of the shadow-land, into the sunshine,
Cloudless, eternal, that fades not away.”*

I wrote this hymn especially for the memorial service held for Mr. Moody in Carnegie Hall, where I also sang it as a solo. It was the last sacred song to which I wrote both the words and music. It has been largely adopted in England as a funeral hymn.

As it does not appear in “*Gospel Hymns*” the words as they are found in “*Sacred Songs and Solos*” are here given in full.

OUT OF THE SHADOW-LAND

Out of the shadow-land, into the sunshine,
Cloudless, eternal, that fades not away;
Softly and tenderly Jesus will call us;
Home, where the ransom'd are gath'ring to-day.

Chorus.

Silently, peacefully, angels will bear us
Into the beautiful mansions above;
There shall we rest from earth's toiling forever,
Safe in the arms of God's infinite love.

Out of the shadow-land, weary and changeful,
Out of the valley of sorrow and night,
Into the rest of the life everlasting,
Into the summer of endless delight.

Out of the shadow-land, over life's ocean,
Into the rapture and joy of the Lord,
Safe in the Father's house, welcomed by angels,
Ours the bright crown and eternal reward.

OVER THE LINE

Words by Ellen K. Bradford
Music by E. H. Phelps

*"Oh, tender and sweet was the Master's voice
As He lovingly called to me."*

We were holding meetings in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1878. One day, at the noon meeting in City Hall, a minister rose on the platform and bore testimony to the way the Lord had blessed one of his sons, a Yale student.

"My son," he said, "happened be seated beside a gentleman from England in one of Mr. Moody's meetings. Tarrying for the after-meeting, he was spoken to by the gentleman beside him about becoming a Christian. After half an hour spent in talking they went out into the street, and the gentleman said that he would gladly walk home with my son if he had no objection, as he had nothing else to do.

"They came at last to the gate which led to my home. Before parting, the earnest Christian worker said he would like to offer one more prayer for my boy.

“Holding the young man’s hand, he asked that the Lord would enable him to decide the great question that very night. With this prayer they separated. The gentleman left town the next day, and may never know how God heard and answered his prayer.

“My son was greatly impressed. Approaching the house, he stopped suddenly, made a deep line across the graveled walk with his cane, and said: ‘Now, I must decide this question, for or against Christ, to-night. If I cross the line my life shall be for him; but if I go around it, it will be for the world.’

“Standing there considering the great question with himself for an half hour, at last he cried: ‘O God, help me to decide aright!’

“Then he went bounding over the line, and came into my room and said: ‘Father, I wish you would pray for me! I have decided to be a Christian.’”

The minister said that his heart went out in supplication to God to keep and bless his boy.

This story affected the audience to tears. One of the newspapermen, Mr. E. H. Phelps, proprietor of one of the leading papers of the city, took down the father’s story and published it the next morning. And Mrs. Bradford, of Palmer, in the same state, after reading the incident in the paper, sat down and wrote “*Over the Line.*” She sent the hymn to the editor of the paper, Mr. Phelps, and he at once set it to music. Three days later he handed the song to me. I adapted it and had it published in “*Gospel Hymns.*” It has been blessed to thousands of souls all over the world, leading to the conversion of very many.

* * *

“While I was holding a series of revival meetings at Brigham, Utah,” relates an Iowa clergyman, “a man was brought to a full surrender of himself to Christ by the singing of the hymn, ‘*Over the Line.*’ The first two or three meetings made him very angry, and he determined not to go any more; but as the services increased in interest his anxiety and troubled mind induced him to return, yet only as an observer. He remained in the lecture-room, which opened into the audience-room. Here he was noticed walking the floor, as if in bodily pain. But when at the close of the meeting we sang this hymn, he advanced toward the pulpit, made a long step as though stepping over some object, reached out his hand and said in a loud, determined voice: ‘I have stepped over the line.’ This dramatic surrender to Christ and public profession had a powerful effect upon the audience, and many more followed his example.”

* * *

A missionary sends me the following incident:

“I was holding a gospel meeting one Sunday in a Woman’s Christian Temperance Union mission. We were on our bended knees when the Spirit said to me, sing, ‘*Over the Line.*’

“When we arose I turned to the lady at the organ, who had a consecrated voice, and said, sing ‘*Over the Line.*’ At the close a man rose and spoke as follows:

“‘I came away from home and family and work two weeks ago in a drunken spree. Since I came to your city I have often heard of this mission, and was asked to come, but with oaths I refused up to an hour ago, and then I entered this room. The same spirit of unbelief possessed me until this lady began to sing. Those words went to my heart; they were all written for me, and as she sang the last verse I crossed the line, I gave myself, and – with a deep sob – He took me.’”

~ P ~

PASS ME NOT

Words by Fanny J. Crosby
Music by W. H. Doane

*“Pass me not, O gentle Saviour,
Hear my humble cry.”*

An earnest Christian pastor told of a young man about whom he had long felt much anxiety, as he had seemed so unconcerned about his soul, and was, in reality, a real cause of disturbance and interruption in the classes for other young men.

Meeting him one day, the loving pastor sought once more to influence him, urging, “We want you for Christ and his service.”

There was a certain change in his manner which did not escape the eye of the prayerful watcher for souls, and – lacking time to do more – he seized the opportunity to secure the presence of his young friend at a Christian Endeavor meeting soon to be held.

True to his promise he was there. When an opportunity was given for some of the young men to choose a song, it was seen that he was urging his companion to select some particular hymn. The other, yielding to his request, asked if the hymn, “*Pass me not, O gentle Saviour,*” might be sung; and both young men joined in the singing with evident interest and heartiness. Later in the evening it was requested that all who were definitely on the Lord’s side would confess their allegiance by standing. Whereupon the one over whom the heart of the pastor was specially yearning rose at once, and with decision.

“Tell me about your conversion,” the thankful Pastor requested at the close of the meeting, when hands were clasped in glad, brotherly welcome and recognition . . .

“Oh, yes,” assented the other.”It was all through that hymn we have just sung. I was working on the canal at G—, and there was a meeting being held at the Mariner’s Chapel nearby. The words floated out over the water, and from the tug where I was working I could hear them plainly enough. When they were just going to sing those lines—

*‘While on others Thou are calling,
Do not pass me by!’*

A great fear came over me, and I thought, ‘Oh, if the Lord were to pass me by, how terrible it would be!’ Then and there, on the tug, I cried out: ‘O Lord, do not pass me by.’ And with a bright smile – “he didn’t pass me by. I am saved.”

* * *

No hymn in our collection was more popular than this at our meetings in London in 1874. It was sung almost every day in Her Majesty’s Theater, in Pall Mall, and has been translated into several languages.

At one of our noonday prayer-meetings in Glasgow a prominent gentleman was awakened by the singing of this hymn. He had been very much opposed to our meetings, and his opposition was not lessened when he saw his wife converted. That day he had agreed to attend the meeting for the last time, as a sort of concession; and that was the day when the Spirit of God touched him by this hymn.

PEACE! BE STILL!

Words by Miss M. A. Baker
Music by H. R. Palma

*“Master, the tempest is raging!
The billows are tossing high!”*

When a deep and comforting spiritual experience finds expression it will surely bring comfort to others, as this hymn has done many times. Miss Mary A. Baker has told of its origin:

“Dr. Palmer requested me to prepare several songs on the subject of the current Sunday-school lessons. One of the themes was ‘Christ Stilling the Tempest.’

“It so expressed an experience I had recently passed through, that this hymn was the result. A very dear and only brother, a young man of rare loveliness and promise of character, had been laid in the grave, a victim of the same disease that had already taken father and mother. His death occurred under peculiarly distressing circumstances. He was more than a thousand miles away from home, seeking in the balmy air of the sunny South the healing that our colder climate could not give. Suddenly he grew worse. The writer was ill and could not go to him. For two weeks the long lines of telegraph wires carried back and forth messages between the dying brother and his waiting sisters, ere the word came which told us that our beloved brother was no longer a dweller on the earth. Although we mourned not as those without hope, and although I had believed on Christ in early childhood and had always desired to give the Master a consecrated and obedient life, I became wickedly rebellious at this dispensation of divine providence.

“I said in my heart that God did not care for me or mine. But the Master’s Own voice stilled the tempest in my unsanctified heart, and brought it to the calm of a deeper faith and a more perfect trust. Since then I have given much of my time and strength to active temperance work as a member of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Witnessing the unparalleled suffering that comes to sisters, wives and mothers through the legalized curse of our land, the rum traffic, which is yearly slaying its thousands and tens of thousands in their early manhood and hurrying them into dishonored graves, I have come to feel a keen sense of gratitude for the sweet memories left of my departed brother. God’s way is best.

“I supposed that the hymn had done its work and gone to rest. But, during the weeks when our nation kept watch by the bedside of our greatly beloved President Garfield, it was republished as especially appropriate to the time, and was sung at some of the many funeral services held throughout the United States. It is quite a surprise to me that this humble hymn should have crossed the seas and been sung in far distant lands to the honor of the Saviour’s name.”

PULL FOR THE SHORE

Words by P. P. Bliss

Music by P. P. Bliss

“Light in the darkness, sailor, day is at hand!
See o’er the foaming billows fair Haven’s land.”

On one occasion the vessel on which Mr. Moody was returning from Europe, accompanied by his oldest son, was disabled by the breaking of a propelling shaft. Mrs. Moody was at my home in Brooklyn, waiting to receive them on their arrival.

Day after day passed without word from the steamer, and Mrs. Moody became almost frantic with anxiety. At last I received this cable dispatch from Mr. Moody: “Saved, thank God.”

I learned afterwards that the people gathered around him and begged him to pray for their deliverance. Several infidels on board, who had been making light of Mr. Moody’s work, were found kneeling at his side, and through the earnestness of his prayers and divine help they were led to Christ.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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