

Hymnology for Feb. 24, 2019

#657 “Love divine, all loves excelling” (Hyfrydol): This text was no. 9 in Charles Wesley’s anonymous *Hymns for Those that Seek and Those that Have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* (London, 1747). The tune Hyfrydol was composed by Rowland Hugh Prichard about 1830 when he was only twenty years old and it was published in a three-part version in his *Cyfaill y Cantorion* (Llanidoes, 1844) [The Singer’s Friend]. It then appeared in *Halewiah Drachefn* (Carmarthen, 1855) [Hallelujah Again]. Hyfrydol became widely popular after its inclusion in *Alexander’s Hymns No. 3* (New York, 1915). The tune appears in the third of Vaughan Williams’s *Three Preludes on Welsh Hymns for Organ* (1920), where it receives a strong, dissonant treatment that must disturb many singers’ understanding of the nature of what is, on one reading, a placid hymn.

#391 “Before the Lord’s eternal throne” (Winchester New): This text by Isaac Watts first appeared in the *Hymnal* in 1808. It is an indication of the more liberal attitude of Anglicans in the US toward hymns of “human composure” than was the case with their contemporaries in England. Originally the text was a paraphrase of Psalm 100. It first appeared in Watts’s *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament and Applied to the Christian State and Worship* (London, 1719). John Wesley, in his *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (Charleston, SC, 1737) wrote his own first two lines and then used Watts’s third and fourth lines. The result was “Before Jehovah’s awful throne / Ye nations bow with sacred joy. / Know that the Lord is God alone: He can create, and he destroy.” The editors of the present hymnal decided to clarify the archaic use of the word “awful” and rewrote the line to “Before the Lord’s eternal throne...” The tune Winchester New first appeared in a different meter with the German text “Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten” (If thou but suffer God to guide thee) in *Musikalisch Hand-Buch der Geislichen Melodien* (Hamburg, 1690). John Wesley changed the meter and renamed it Swift German Tune. In George Whitefield’s tunebook, *Divine Musical Miscellany* (London, 1754) the tune appears in triple time and bears the name Winchester New Tune – to distinguish it from another tune called Winchester (Hymn #94). The tune was further modified by William Henry Havergal in *Old Church Psalmody* (London, 1847) and given the alternative names Crasselius and Winchester New. From there the tune entered the first edition of *Hymns Ancient & Modern* in 1861, where it appeared with a harmonization by William Henry Monk.

#593 “Lord, make us servants of your peace” (Dickinson College). A prayer traditionally attributed to the medieval mystic St. Francis of Assisi is the source of this hymn. The English text we sing is by the noted Roman Catholic hymn writer and theologian Rev. James Quinn, S.J. In the five stanzas of this hymn text, Fr. Quinn captures all the themes and images of this much-loved prayer. The tune Dickinson College by Lee Hastings Bristol, Jr. was chosen for use with this text. It was adapted by the composer as a hymn tune from an anthem, “Lord of all being throned afar.” The tune name honors Dickinson College, Pennsylvania, the composer’s alma mater.

#677 “God moves in a mysterious way” (London New) first appeared in our *Hymnal* in 1826. It has gained further exposure through its inclusion in Benjamin Britten’s cantata *Saint Nicholas* (1948). The text by William Cowper had already achieved popularity before it appeared in *Olney Hymns* (London, 1779). It was probably written before the end of the year 1772. Cowper wrote it about a year before the onset of the intense period of depression that

led to attempted suicide in October 1773, and brought his major hymn writing to an end. The tune is first found without text as one of the “Common Tunes” in the great Scottish psalm book of 1635, *The Psalmes of David in Prose and Meeter*. The present form dates from 1671, when it appeared in John Playford’s *Psalms & Hymns in Solmenn Musick of Four Parts* (London, 1671). The harmonies are from *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (The Hague, 1973). No special reason for the name London New is known, but the addition of “New” was doubtless to distinguish it from another tune named London by William Barley in 1645.

#390 “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (Lobe den Herren): In an August 1978 survey of congregations across the country sponsored by Standing Commission on Church Music to ascertain the use of materials in *The Hymnal 1940*, this hymn was rated as one of those most frequently sung. Although its popularity came as no surprise, it was an item of real news to many when they discovered that the hymn did not enter the *Hymnal* until the 1940 edition! The original German text was written by Joachim Neander and first published in the author’s *Glaub-und Liebesübung: Aufgemuntert durch Einfälltge Bundes-Lieder und Danck-Psalmen* [The Practice of Belief and Love: Encouraged by Simple Songs and Psalms of Thanks] (Bremen, 1680) in five stanzas. Our present version in English is a revision of Catherine Winkworth’s translation. The tune now known as Lobe den Herren occurs in a wide variety of forms, which suggests that it has folk song origins. The fact that one variant occurs in a manuscript collection of largely secular songs would seem to confirm such an origin. The earliest printed version of the melody appeared in *Ander Theil des Erneuertes Gesangbuch* [Another Part of the Revised Songbook] (Frankfurt, 1665). The harmonization in our present hymnal is based on the work of William Sterndale Bennett and Otto Goldschmidt in *The Chorale Book for England* (London, 1863).

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