

CHRISTIAN HYMN WRITERS

COME ALIVE II

by Mayrene Bobbitt



CHRISTIANPUBLISHERS

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**CHRISTIAN HYMN
WRITERS COME ALIVE II**

By Mayrene Bobbitt

***To my daughters: Irene, Myra and Angie who
were my first career***

FOREWORD

On several occasions I have enjoyed Mayrene Bobbitt's performances of her dramatic monologues of famous hymn writers. I was delighted when her *Christian Hymn Writers Come Alive* containing five of her dramatic monologues was published in 1986. Now I am even more pleased that Contemporary Drama Service is publishing Volume II.

Three of the monologues in this second volume focus on the lives and contributions of three well-known women hymnists, all nineteenth-century Anglicans whose hymns are sung throughout the English-speaking world: Cecil Frances Alexander, Frances Ridley Havergal, and Charlotte Elliott. Another monologue, which takes a different approach, tells the fascinating story of a Swedish hymn made popular in English through the Billy Graham crusades in the 1950s and now published in major American hymnals, "How Great Thou Art." The final monologue portrays B.B. McKinney, an author-composer of gospel hymns from Louisiana, known primarily to Southern Baptists, and whose centennial of birth was celebrated in 1986.

As a teacher of hymnology in the theological seminary, it has been gratifying to find that students get excited when they discover the rich backgrounds behind the hymns they sing. When they become acquainted with the lives of the great hymnists, the singing of hymns takes on a fresh and exciting new dimension for them.

Mayrene Bobbitt's dramatic monologues can generate enthusiasm for our rich heritage of congregational song and contribute toward the realization of the words of the apostle Paul in our own worship through singing: "I will sing with my spirit, but I will sing also with my mind." (I Corinthians 14:15b, TEV)

Harry Eskew

Professor of Music History and Hymnology
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

PRODUCTION NOTES

The term "At Rise" is used in all the monologue scripts. Although usually referring to a curtain rising at the beginning of a scene, a light turned up or dimmed could fill the same purpose of indicating the beginning and ends of scenes. The narrator in "Monologue of Charlotte Elliott" should stand off to one side of the actress, and if possible, only be visible when speaking. This would be true for the other monologues if a narrator is used to set the scenes. The Charlotte Elliott and Frances Havergal monologues are both approximately 15 minutes, so they could be presented during the same program featuring handicapped women hymnists. Or Miss Elliott or Miss Havergal could be given in the same program with the blind, popular author of gospel hymns, Fanny Crosby (see *Christian Hymn Writers Come Alive*, Volume I by Mayrene Bobbitt).

Charlotte Elliott: This is a true incident in the life of Charlotte Elliott recounting how she wrote the popular gospel hymn, "Just As I Am Without One Plea" which is used extensively by Billy Graham in his evangelistic meetings. It would be more accurate to have Charlotte reclining on a couch than seated at a table as she was quite crippled. It is thought that she had something like polio or meningitis. This short piece gives the actress an opportunity to present a wide range of emotion. Her emotion is important in presenting the depth of depression, even to the point of tears, experienced by Charlotte in this situation. Her attitude changes quite a bit as she speaks of Rev. Malan, showing a haughtiness which was evident of her personality before her conversion. Then she is plunged into an even deeper depression near the ending. The hidden voice singing the hymn before the closing narration should be a lady's as it represents the thoughts of Charlotte Elliott. The singing should be soft, slow and reflective. A recorded voice could be played of the first stanza, and as the soloist begins another stanza, slowly fade out as the narrator begins to speak the closing words of the brother. Another well-known hymn by Charlotte Elliott, "My God, My Father While I Stray" could be used in the program.

Frances Ridley Havergal: Frances Havergal was another 19th century invalid. Her malady was tuberculosis, referred to as consumption. She died at the age of 43. This incident was probably during a remission when she was able to travel. Her personality never showed the depression of Charlotte Elliott, rather, she was always optimistic. I found her deeply pious, almost to the point of being a bit obnoxious for the 20th century. She should be presented as deeply consecrated as her words reflect. Since the monologue is in the form of a letter, the script could be on the writing table for reference during the performance. Be careful, however, to know the material well and not give the appearance of reading. Begin by giving the appearance of writing with an old-fashioned pen, but then look up and away from the letter to reminisce. In the writing of the hymn at the closing, quote the words slowly, expressively with deep dedication. The woman's voice sings in the same way. A spotlight on Miss Havergal slowly fades during the singing as she freezes, head bowed in prayer. Other well-known hymns of Frances Havergal could be used in the program. These could include: "Like a River Glorious," "Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak," "I Gave My Life for Thee," "Truehearted, Wholehearted," "Another Year Is Dawning," and "Who Is on the Lord's Side." She composed one hymn tune: "Hermas" sung with the words "Welcome, Happy Morning."

Cecil Frances Alexander: This is a pulpit drama for two men and two women (or 3 men & 1 woman) in monologue form, using the hymns of Cecil Frances Alexander. Use a printed program which lists the time and place of each scene with the hymn texts printed between scenes. A narrator could be used to announce the time, place and introduce the character before each scene. Soloists, choirs or congregation could be used to sing the hymns between scenes. In scene I, Major Humphreys ends the scene by announcing he will read some poetry written by his daughter, Frances. The scene can end before he actually reads anything or words from the hymn, "Once in Royal David's City" can be used. They are as follows:

Once in royal David's city
 Stood a lowly cattle shed,
 Where a mother laid her Baby
 In a manger for His bed:
 Mary was that mother mild,
 Jesus Christ her little Child.

He came down to earth from heaven,
 Who is God and Lord of all;
 And his shelter was a stable,
 And his cradle was a stall:
 Mary was that mother mild,
 Jesus Christ her little Child.

No props or scenery is required so any area of the chancel may be used. The four characters could speak from four different areas. Authentic costuming of the early 19th century would enhance the setting. Miss Humphreys should be seated in Scene II at the line: "I'll just sit here quietly by Mary" and remain seated for the rest of the scene. The father and husband may speak seated or standing as desired. The housekeeper of Scene III could be changed to a man-servant as part of these words were actually taken from the writings of a man who had worked for the Alexanders. The servant could speak with an Irish accent. The other characters were English. This drama is approximately 30 minutes in length.

How Great Thou Art: A pulpit drama using three male characters and a narrator. Careful attention to the costuming suggestions will enhance this presentation. The three men can speak from different areas of the chancel or stage rather than from the center if desired. The narrator may be a man or woman in modern dress. Carl Boberg can either be a young preacher as was his age at the actual time the hymn was written, or he can be the middle-aged statesman or an elderly former statesman who is remembering the past. A good Swedish accent will add authenticity to this character. Boberg should be in nineteenth century dress: a frock coat or tails, wide old-fashioned necktie or string black tie. Perhaps a wide colorful ribbon over one shoulder and fastened under the opposite arm as statesmen of that day wore. A medal or two could be attached. Stuart Hine could also be middle-aged or older and speak with a British accent. He could wear a tweed or plaid sports jacket with leather elbow patches for an English look. George Beverly Shea should be in modern three-piece suit with matching tie. Three different men can play the parts or one man may present all three characters by changing his coat and tie while the narrator is speaking. If three different characters are used, and if they are singers, they could sing the hymn in unison or harmony for the closing. A recording of the actual voice of George Beverly Shea would be effective. The congregation would certainly enjoy singing this popular hymn. I would suggest that this be done at the opening of the program.

B.B. McKinney: Is another pulpit drama, this time using three women and a man. If the scenes are not described in a program, a narrator should introduce the characters and tell the time and place. Martha McKinney, the mother of B.B. McKinney is in her late thirties. She is dressed in a simple long gown of "homespun" looking material with an apron and sunbonnet. The sister, Litha McKinney, is in her late twenties. A long dark skirt with a long-sleeved white blouse or a "middie" blouse would give the right look for 1915. Lelie McKinney, his wife, is in her early forties and should wear a typical dress of the 1930s. The minister of music (or pastor) should wear a modern suit. The same actress may portray all three characters in a "one woman show" by layering the costumes and changing from sunbonnet to wigs. A change in style of speaking will also make one person believable in all three roles. Mrs. McKinney wore wireframe or rimless glasses and wore her long hair up in a bun rather than the short 30s style. The solo voices may be recorded and played over the house sound system between the scenes. Stanzas of the McKinney hymns suggested were chosen to fit the situations from his life at that time. Other McKinney hymns could be used in the program and sung by a choir or congregation.

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NARRATOR: It is a spring day in 1834. Invalid, Charlotte Elliott has been left alone at a house in Brighton, England while the rest of the family is attending a church bazaar.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT, holding a Bible, is seated at small table or desk on which are piled books and paper. She struggles to rise from the chair, then takes halting steps as she holds on to the chair. She falls back into the chair, then speaks:

CHARLOTTE: It is no use! I cannot make it back to bed alone. Sarah! Sarah! Where is that girl? Oh, she must have gone outside and cannot hear me.

Why did I let them leave me sitting up when I knew it would be hours before they returned? I thought it would be a quiet time and I could read or write my poems . . . but I get so tired. My energy grows lower and weaker every day.

It has been thirteen long years since that fever, that mysterious malady, struck me down. I was strong and healthy then, and only thirty-two years old. On a beautiful warm day like this I would have been outside riding horseback or going for a walk . . . or I could have gone to the bazaar. And here I am, confined, alone. I could have planned and carried out the whole bazaar. Standing on my feet all day working would not have tired me in the least, then.

Perhaps I would have married and had a family of my own. But I'm a helpless cripple, dependent upon my father all my life and now upon my brother . . . my brother, Edward, the pastor of Brighton. He is so useful

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1 in the Lord's work. His entire family has an important
 2 ministry here. But of what use am I? Oh these conflicts,
 3 these doubts! On, this wretched self-pity that I feel! This
 4 depression! It feels like a barrier between God and
 5 me . . . there are fightings within, fears without!

6 Jesus, why do you seem so far away at times like this?
 7 You said that you would never leave me or forsake me.

8 What was it Rev. Malan, the famous Swiss evangelist,
 9 used to say when he came to visit Papa? I had only been
 10 ill for about one year the time that he first came. But he
 11 did not seem so concerned for my physical condition. He
 12 was more concerned for my spiritual condition. He had
 13 the audacity to ask if I was a Christian! Imagine! Me!
 14 Smart, talented and well-educated for a woman . . . and
 15 brought up strictly in the Church of England. Papa and
 16 Mama were pillars of our church. Well, I told him I had
 17 been a Christian all my life, but he persisted in his
 18 questioning. All of this was well and good, he said, but
 19 it did not automatically make me a Christian. I had to
 20 realize my *own* lost condition, my *own* sin and realize
 21 that Jesus' blood was shed for *me*. Only *he* could cleanse
 22 my life of my sin.

23 Yes, Lord, at that time I believed. I trusted you to
 24 save me. And heavenly Father, you know, and you alone,
 25 what it is to fight day after day against these feelings of
 26 physical weakness . . . and langour . . . and exhaustion!
 27 He will enable me to yield not to this depression, this
 28 irritability! Such a body as this! It makes me so useless,
 29 even to God.

30 After my conversion, I chose as my motto this verse:
 31 "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself,
 32 take up his cross daily and follow me." I want to deny
 33 self, Lord; I want to follow you.

34 I know, Lord, that you still will speak to me through
 35 your word. (*She picks up Bible and reads John 6:37.*) "All

1 that the Father giveth me shall *come* to me and him that
2 *cometh* to me I will in no wise cast out.”

3 That’s it! Just come! He can use me *just as I am* —
4 weak, helpless, unworthy. But I must forget everything
5 else and come to him *just as I am*. (She quotes aloud as she
6 writes on a paper at the desk.)

7
8 Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
9 Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
10 Yea, all I need in thee to find.
11 Oh Lamb of God, I come, I come.

12
13 (A hidden lady’s voice sings stanza one, unaccompanied, as
14 CHARLOTTE continues to write, then bows her head in prayer.)

15 NARRATOR: In later years, Miss Elliott’s brother wrote: “I
16 hope that I have been permitted to see some fruit of my
17 labor in the course of my long ministry, but I feel that
18 *far more* has been done by this single hymn of my sister’s.”
19 Surely thousands have come to the Lord Jesus through
20 the words of Charlotte’s great hymn, “Just As I Am
21 Without One Plea.”

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The Testimony of Frances Ridley Havergal

AT RISE: FRANCES HAVERGAL is in her late thirties. She is seated at a small table dressed in a long flowing dressing gown. She is writing a letter, reciting it aloud, but she stops often to look up as she reminisces. A lighted candle, Bible, and writing materials are on the desk. She reads the date and place aloud as she writes.

FRANCES: December, 1873 . . . from the Areley House, Worcestershire, England . . . My dearest sister, Maria . . . Yes, this letter is from your youngest sister, Frances Ridley Havergal, who is answering your letter at last.

I came to this place five days ago for a visit. It is near our old hometown of Astley in Worcestershire where Papa was rector when I was born. Being here made me reminisce and think of you and all our family.

I have been too happy to sleep tonight. It is almost morning now and I have passed the night in praise, prayer and renewal of my own consecration. I must share with you what God has done here.

This year of 1873 has been a time of unprecedented blessing to me, and these last days the most victorious of all, even though I continue to suffer much from frail health. I am thankful I was improved enough to make this visit. It hardly seems possible that I am the one Papa called his "Little Quicksilver," the one so full of life who romped about Astley climbing all the trees. Only when reading and writing my verses could I sit still. Now I am so physically weak, so broken in health, that I fear there are not many years left in which to serve my Savior. I do so want to glorify him in every step of my way.

My first remembrance of searching for God was at the age of six. Perhaps you remember also a terrifying sermon we heard about the terrors of hell and judgment

1 day. The sermon stayed on my mind day and night. I
 2 sought relief in prayer, but could not find words to
 3 express my feelings to anyone. When I finally approached
 4 a curate at the church, he thought I was simply homesick
 5 because our parents had moved into a new rectory. He
 6 advised me to be a good child and to pray. After this, I
 7 did not open my heart to anyone for about five years,
 8 although I was under deep concern about my soul most
 9 of the time.

10 Remember what a blow it was to both of us when
 11 Mother died. At that time I was twelve, at an age when
 12 I needed my mother so much. But it was a blessing that
 13 I was sent to a school like Mrs. Teed's. She was a godly
 14 woman, so filled with the Holy Spirit herself that a great
 15 revival broke out in her school. Most of her pupils were
 16 converted to Christ. This deepened my conviction of sin.
 17 I expressed to sweet, kind Miss Cook how willing I was
 18 to give up everything if I could only find Christ as my
 19 Savior. Her answer was, "Why, cannot you just trust
 20 yourself to him at once?" Then and there I *did* commit
 21 my soul to my Savior. I had fears and tremblings, but I
 22 did trust the Lord Jesus, and earth and heaven seemed
 23 bright from that moment.

24 How happy we were when that same Miss Cook later
 25 became our stepmother!

26 From the time of my conversion, I tried to live a very
 27 earnest Christian life. I was blessed with a good
 28 education, studying Latin, Greek, French, German,
 29 Hebrew and music. While at the university in Germany,
 30 I was the only converted person among the hundred and
 31 ten young ladies in my school. Though suffering some
 32 persecution there, I tried to take a firm stand for Christ
 33 and won some of my classmates.

34 I sought to serve God by teaching in Sunday schools,
 35 singing in churches, visiting the needy, memorizing

1 scripture. By the age of twenty-two, I could quote the
 2 whole of the gospels, epistles, Revelation, Psalms and
 3 Isaiah by heart. Yet I felt that I was only a little child in
 4 the spiritual life. I asked the Lord to direct my writing,
 5 to give me every word, but still I longed for a deeper,
 6 richer, fuller Christian experience. During this time,
 7 about 1858, at the age of twenty-two, I wrote "I Gave My
 8 Life for Thee." That line "what hast thou given for me?"
 9 revealed the deep longings of my heart to be more fully
 10 consecrated to Christ.

11 Now after fifteen *more* years of my Christian
 12 pilgrimage, I do see clearly the blessedness of true
 13 consecration. There must be *full* surrender before there
 14 can be *full* blessedness. I was not trusting in the *keeping*
 15 power of Jesus. It was on Advent Sunday of this
 16 December that I was shown the verse: "The blood of Jesus
 17 Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," and then it was
 18 made plain to me that he, who had thus cleansed me, had
 19 *power* to keep me clean; so I just utterly yielded myself
 20 to him, and utterly trusted him to keep me. It was that
 21 one word "cleanseth" which opened the door of hope and
 22 joy to me. I had never seen the force of the *tense* before,
 23 a continual present, *always* a present tense. It goes on
 24 cleansing. Not a coming to be cleansed in the fountain
 25 only, but a remaining in the fountain, so that it may, and
 26 can go on cleansing. I request that this verse be placed
 27 upon my tombstone: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son
 28 cleanseth us from all sin."

29 My whole life is now lifted to a higher plane. I pray
 30 these remaining few years of my life will be rich in service
 31 to my Lord and King. I feel a new spiritual power in my
 32 witnessing. I want to wear myself out ministering to
 33 others in my Savior's name.

34 When coming to this house five days ago, there were
 35 ten persons in the house. Some were unconverted and

1 long prayed for. Some *were* converted but not rejoicing,
 2 victorious Christians. God placed this prayer upon my
 3 heart, "Lord, give me *all* in this house!" And he has done
 4 just that! I leave tomorrow and I have seen all ten of
 5 these make a commitment to Jesus. Now you understand
 6 why I am too happy to sleep!

7 Tonight while reflecting on this victory and all that
 8 God has done in my life, this poem came to me. These
 9 little couplets formed themselves and chimed in my heart
 10 one after another, till they were finished with, "Ever,
 11 only *all* for Thee!" (*She quotes stanzas 1 and 2.*)

12

13 Take my life and let it be consecrated,
 14 Lord, to Thee.

15 Take my hands and let them move at the
 16 impulse of Thy love.

17

18 Take my feet and let them be swift and
 19 beautiful for Thee;

20 Take my voice and let me sing always,
 21 only for my King.

22

23 (*She continues to write as an unseen lady's voice sings,*
 24 *unaccompanied, stanzas three and four of this hymn. During*
 25 *stanza four, FRANCES sits with bowed head.*)

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One Whom Jesus Called

SCENE I

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5 **TIME:** 1832
6 **PLACE:** Dublin, Ireland
7 **AT RISE:** MAJOR JOHN HUMPHREYS enters. He is middle-aged,
8 and dressed in an old-fashioned army-like uniform as an officer
9 in the Royal Marines.
10 **MAJOR HUMPHREYS:** I am glad to see that all of you came
11 promptly at the appointed time for our family meeting.
12 I heard that you thought a serious infraction of the
13 rules had been committed, causing me a rage of temper
14 and putting a spirit of fear and dread into the hearts of
15 my beloved family!
16 Oh, my dear ones! Have I truly put too strict a system
17 of army regulations into the running of our household?
18 Then, I must relax my measure, for it is never my
19 intention to frighten you. Always remember that your
20 father loves you very much. I want only the best and
21 happiest of times for all my precious family.
22 Perhaps I get overly exuberant when following St.
23 Paul's admonition to let all things be done "decently and
24 in order."
25 Today, my children, I am pleased to report that I
26 have no complaints at all as to the way things are going
27 about the household. Everything has been running most
28 smoothly indeed. Rather, I must report on a very strange
29 treasure which has been discovered right here in our
30 own house.
31 Yes, a most strange happening indeed!
32 One morning last week, I was awake very early, as is
33 my custom, to go out before breakfast for my walk and
34 to collect my newspaper. Passing through the back
35 hallway, I almost stumbled upon a large bulge in the

1 carpeting. Lifting this floor covering, I discovered a
 2 packet of small papers. Written upon these papers were
 3 some verses. There was such a touching quality about
 4 those lines that I quite forgot my newspaper. I took the
 5 verses immediately to my good friend, Reverend John
 6 Keble. Reverend Keble is a fine scholar and poet. He has
 7 taught poetry writing at Oxford. We detected from the
 8 handwriting that the author of these poems must be a
 9 child. After careful study, Reverend Keble reported that
 10 this child is surely a born writer.

11 Who is this mysterious "born writer" living right
 12 here in the Humphreys family? It is none other than Miss
 13 Cecil Frances Humphreys, our own nine-year-old
 14 daughter, little Fanny!

15 Yes, come to your Papa, Fanny. You've had problems
 16 with your pretty eyes, being somewhat nearsighted. I
 17 think this may have made you sometimes shy and
 18 reserved, but within your soul, God has given you a gift
 19 of poetic expression.

20 From now on every Saturday evening the family will
 21 gather like this to hear any new poems that you write
 22 during the week, Fanny. We shall all encourage you to
 23 develop this talent to the Lord's glory.

24 Now I will proudly read aloud the poems written by
 25 our own Cecil Frances Humphreys. (*Hymn "Once in Royal
 26 David's City" sung while curtains close or stage darkens.*)

27 28 SCENE II

29
30 **TIME:** 1847

31 **PLACE:** Strathbane Parish, Northern Ireland

32 **AT RISE:** Enter CECIL FRANCES HUMPHREYS, who is in her
 33 twenties. She wears a long plain dress and severe hairstyle of
 34 the nineteenth century. She wears wireframe round glasses.
 35 She has come to visit at the bedside of a very ill young girl.

1 **MISS HUMPHREYS:** How is Mary, Mrs. O'Neal? No better?
 2 Oh, you have had bad news from the doctor? I'm so sorry.
 3 Is she awake now? Yes, I want to sit with her if I may. I
 4 am prepared to stay all night.

5 Mrs. O'Neal, you must get your rest. Save your
 6 strength, for your whole family will be depending on you.

7 I'll just sit here quietly by Mary. If she awakens, I'll
 8 talk with her and try to keep her quiet.

9 We do miss her in our Sunday school class. She has
 10 told you about the class? She especially enjoys my poems?

11 Yes, I do enjoy writing poetry. I've found that by
 12 singing my poems as hymns, the children can remember
 13 the Bible truths I am trying to teach. I want to appeal to
 14 the quick imaginations that children have. Through the
 15 hymns I try to paint a picture or tell a story in simple
 16 language any child can understand.

17 Yes, the publisher does plan to have a collection of
 18 my hymns ready next year. I think we will title it *Hymns*
 19 *for Little Children.* (Pause)

20 Oh Mary, are you awake? Yes, it is Miss Humphreys.
 21 I came to stay with you for a while. Do you want me to
 22 tell you about Sunday school?

23 I know that you have missed many Sundays and are
 24 afraid that you are behind in your Bible studies. You
 25 need not worry, dear Mary. I shall tell you about our
 26 lessons. Just lie quietly and rest while I share our last
 27 study.

28 Here, have a cool drink of water. No, don't try to talk
 29 or excite yourself. Yes, I will sing some of my hymns if
 30 you want. Also you can close your eyes if you like. No,
 31 I'm not leaving you for a long time. I will be here all night.

32 Let me think about what the lesson was last Sunday.
 33 We had gotten to the part of the Apostle's Creed which
 34 says that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was
 35 crucified, died, and buried. Our text was John 19:16: "Then

1 delivered Pilate Him therefore unto them to be crucified.
2 And they took Jesus and led Him away.”

3 Oh, what a deep spiritual concept, the Atonement of
4 Christ! How can I explain about the suffering of our Lord
5 to children, to you, dear child? Yet I know that *you* have
6 suffered, little Mary, you are in pain now in your illness.
7 Just remember that you are not alone in pain. Jesus
8 knows. He alone, more than any other person on earth
9 knows and understands your pain and suffering. But
10 because he suffered upon that cross, because he died, the
11 penalty for our sins is forgiven. We can be at peace with
12 God.

13 It is a great mystery how it all happened, but God
14 planned it all. Jesus took our place that day long ago
15 when he gave up his life upon that cross. But he arose
16 from the dead. Now because he lives, we live. We have
17 his promise of eternal life in that heavenly home. Jesus
18 is there now, Mary where he is preparing that special
19 and beautiful home for us. He said that it was full of many
20 mansions.

21 Yes, it is a true story. It really did happen just as the
22 Bible says. We can believe his promises. The place is still
23 there outside of Jerusalem, that place where Jesus was
24 crucified . . . Golgotha, the place of the skull . . . Calvary.

25 What happened that day? You mean the day that
26 Jesus died? Well, it was something like this. You see . . .

27 There is a green hill far away
28 Without a city wall,
29 Where the dear Lord was crucified
30 Who died to save us all.

31
32 We may not know, we cannot tell
33 What pain He had to bear
34 But we believe it was for us,
35 He hung and suffered there.

1 (She bows her head as a hidden woman's unaccompanied voice
2 sings stanzas three and four and then refrain of "There Is a
3 Green Hill Far Away." The curtains close or lights dim.)
4

5 SCENE III

6
7 **TIME:** 1851

8 **PLACE:** County Tyrone, Northern Ireland

9 **AT RISE:** Enter a SERVANT of the rectory, who could be male or
10 female: a maid, housekeeper or butler of any age and dressed
11 appropriately for his (her) position.

12 **THE SERVANT:** Good day to you, Martha O'Keefe. Wait up
13 one moment and I'll walk with you the rest of the way to
14 market.

15 You've been away so long, a year nearly? And with
16 your poor ill mother in Londonderry, you say? We've
17 surely missed you.

18 What's the latest news here in County Tyrone, you
19 ask? Oh, there's much excitement all through the parish
20 over our new rector.

21 Yes, he's a fine young gentleman, he is! We did get a
22 distinguished churchman this time, Dr. William
23 Alexander. Even though this is only a country parish, it
24 is already rumored that he will be next Bishop of all
25 Derry before long. But, fine as he is, I tell you that his
26 finest asset at the rectory is that sweet wife of his.

27 Martha, I can not praise highly enough our new
28 mistress, Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander. No, she is not
29 pretty in a physical sense. She is rather plain, really.
30 That's because of her severe nearsightedness. But a
31 kinder, more gentle nature you will never find.

32 It is her joy to visit all the poor and needy of our
33 parish. She goes about in all sorts of weather, taking
34 comforts about to the sick and sorrowful. Yes, I've seen
35 her go, when it was not fit for her to be out!

1 **They say that she is quite famous in the city among**
 2 **all Anglicans known in London. That is because she is a**
 3 **poet, a hymn writer. She told me that she just wrote little**
 4 **hymns to teach her Sunday school children at first, but**
 5 **now adults in all churches are singing her hymns.**

6 **She says that now she is married, her husband's**
 7 **ministry will be her calling also. Now she only writes to**
 8 **help him. She studies and writes as often as he, preparing**
 9 **new poems to go with his sermons. And he will read her**
 10 **poems too, right in the middle of the sermon, or the**
 11 **congregation will sing her words as a hymn. It does make**
 12 **the sermon more interesting.**

13 **Look, here she comes. Now you can see Tyrone's own**
 14 **angel of mercy, herself! From one poor home to another,**
 15 **from one bed of sickness to another, from one sorrow to**
 16 **another, she goes. And Christ is ever with her. The Lord's**
 17 **mercy, love and light shines through her life. We all feel**
 18 **her influence and are blessed by her.**

19 **Her hymns may be beautiful, but, I think her life**
 20 **itself is even more beautiful! (Sing hymn "All Things Bright**
 21 **and Beautiful" as curtains close or lights dim.)**

22
 23
 24

SCENE IV

25 **TIME:** Around the 1870s

26 **PLACE:** Londonderry, Northern Ireland

27 **AT RISE:** Enter DR. WILLIAM ALEXANDER, who is middle-aged.

28 **He is dressed in a black suit with a clerical collar.**

29 **DR. ALEXANDER:** **Where are you, Cecil Frances, dear wife?**
 30 **Still writing? That's where I left you this morning.**

31 **Yes, it's been a long exhausting day! Who said that**
 32 **being Archbishop of Ireland would be a mostly honorary**
 33 **office? I'm beginning to long for those quiet days when I**
 34 **was just a country parish priest.**

35 **But you, my love, at least fill your office as first lady of**

1 the Irish church with grace, as I knew you would.

2 Now tell, have you finished all the tasks I set forth
3 for you today? Have you sold the cow? Have you shown
4 the gardener how to prune the roses? Have you directed
5 the feeding of the pigs properly? Have you finished that
6 poem? Yes? Then, let us come into the study and I will
7 criticize it ferociously! (*He laughs.*) Never fear, I shall not
8 change one word you've written. It is always perfect. As
9 you always say, "What I want to say is *just so*, and nothing
10 else!" You have no patience with those who would try to
11 "improve" your hymns. I believe you consider attempts
12 to tamper with words of any hymns as "literary
13 sacrilege." Yet, you must be the only well-known poet
14 who ever lived who dislikes to hear her poems praised!

15 I read to you words of lofty, almost impassioned
16 commendation from men of genius or holiness, of rank
17 and position and you listen without one word, with
18 almost a frown.

19 Well, here is something different I found today
20 which you must hear. It is a newly published English
21 tract. Well done, I say, even if it is by one of those
22 independents, a nonconformist. He tells of a great
23 change of heart and life of a very worldly man. This man
24 heard your hymn, "There Is a Green Hill Far Away." This
25 awakened feelings and longings, yearnings in his heart
26 which proved to be the starting point of a new life.

27 What reaction is this from you? You actually sprang
28 from your chair saying, "Thank God! I do like to hear
29 that!" Yes, that pleases you most, that your hymns are a
30 witness.

31 Now, do show me your work of today, the poem for
32 this Sunday's sermon. Did you remember that it will be
33 St. Andrew's day? My text shall be Mark 1:16-18: "Now as
34 he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and
35 Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they

1 were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come after me,
 2 and I will make you become fishers of men. And straightway
 3 they forsook their nets and followed him.” (He picks up
 4 paper to read her words.)

5 Jesus calls us o’er the tumult
 6 Of our life’s wild, restless sea;
 7 Day by day His sweet voice soundeth
 8 Saying, Christian, follow me!

9
 10 Yes, you captured just the picture I need in closing the
 11 sermon:

12
 13 As of old, Saint Andrew heard it
 14 By the Galilean lake,
 15 Turned from home and toil and kindred
 16 Leaving all for His dear sake.

17
 18 Oh, sweet Fanny, my modest, shy wife! How God has used
 19 you, and I, your grateful husband, am proud of you.

20 In the sight of the world, I may now hold a high
 21 position, but I predict that some day I will be known *only*
 22 as the husband of the great hymn writer, Cecil Frances
 23 Alexander. (He bows head as a hidden man’s unaccompanied
 24 voice sings stanza one of “Jesus Calls Us O’er the Tumult.” Then
 25 the congregation sings the entire hymn, “Jesus Calls Us O’er the
 26 Tumult.”)

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1 **The Story of “How Great Thou Art”**

2

3 **AT RISE:** Three men, **STUART HINE**, **GEORGE BEVERLY**
 4 **SHEA**, and **CARL BOBERG**, are seated at Stage Center with
 5 the **NARRATOR** to one side. Each man stands and moves to
 6 the center when it is his turn to speak, then returns to seated
 7 position.

8 **NARRATOR:** The great hymn of God’s majesty, “**How Great**
 9 **Thou Art**” is probably the most popular hymn among
 10 evangelical people of the United States during this last
 11 half of the twentieth century.

12 In tracing the origin of this influential hymn, we
 13 take a journey of adventure and romance going back for
 14 almost one hundred years and leading into six different
 15 countries and four different languages.

16 Our odyssey begins in Montseras, Sweden with the
 17 Reverend Carl Boberg, a well-known preacher, religious
 18 editor and statesman who served for fifteen years as a
 19 senator in the Swedish parliament.

20 **CARL BOBERG:** How well I remember that Sunday morning
 21 when I first heard and responded to that miracle of grace!
 22 I was a youth of nineteen: son of a carpenter who worked
 23 in the shipyards of our southeast coastal town. Very
 24 reluctantly I had gone to church service that Sunday
 25 morning, but I soon fell under the spell of the preacher
 26 and his message of sin and grace. The next few weeks I
 27 struggled and prayed to find my way to spiritual peace
 28 of mind and heart. It was **John 14:13** which became my
 29 prayer and caused me to take that final step of trust in
 30 my Saviour: “**And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name,**
 31 **that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.**”

32 After two years training at a Bible school, I began
 33 my ministry here in Montseras when I was only twenty-
 34 two.

35 About four years after beginning this ministry,

1 while still a young preacher, I went with some friends
 2 visiting to a neighboring community. On the way home,
 3 we were caught in a violent thunderstorm. After reaching
 4 home safely that night, I recalled the glorious sight of
 5 the colorful rainbow and how it is a symbol of God's
 6 promise. Thinking of all God's beautiful creation in the
 7 natural world, I began to sing songs of praise to our
 8 Creator. I was overcome by the mystery and magnificence
 9 of God's creative power. Then I reflected with awe on
 10 how even in his power, he yet had love for sinful mankind:
 11 such love that he sent his Son to become our Saviour.

12 I began to write of my thoughts and feelings in verse.
 13 My poems ended in a refrain which burst forth in a song
 14 of praise for the greatness of God. I gave this work the
 15 title "O Store (store-ay) Gud" which translates "O Mighty
 16 God" or "O Great God" from the first three words of the
 17 first stanza. The year was 1886.

18 The poem later appeared in a religious periodical.
 19 I almost forgot all about my poem, but some years later
 20 I went to another province to attend a religious meeting
 21 where to my great surprise, I heard the congregation
 22 singing my words to a familiar native folk tune: a melody
 23 which is hauntingly beautiful. We have never been able
 24 to determine who put these words and the tune together,
 25 but the words and this tune fit wonderfully well, as
 26 though they were made for each other. I had no intention
 27 of writing a hymn: certainly never dreamed that my
 28 words would become a popular hymn known and loved
 29 around the world.

30 In 1890, I became editor of a Christian weekly paper
 31 and then published the words and music of this hymn in
 32 this magazine. A few years later it was put in a new
 33 hymnal. But in the next printing, another editor put it
 34 with an entirely different tune which did not fit the words
 35 nearly so well. The hymn almost disappeared from use in

1 its native Sweden.

2 **NARRATOR:** By the beginning of this century, Boberg's
3 hymn "O Store Gud" seemed to be on its way to oblivion
4 in its native Sweden. An early English translation
5 entitled "O Mighty God" never caught on either. It took
6 many more years of travel through linguistic barriers
7 and across a continent before we received "How Great
8 Thou Art" as we know it today.

9 We meet next, Mr. Stuart K. Hine, a British missionary.

10 **STUART HINE:** I was born in London in 1899 and was
11 educated at the Cooper's Company School. My dreams of
12 attending Oxford University never came true because
13 during World War I, I was sent with the military to
14 France. After the war, I was ordained to the Methodist
15 ministry and answered God's call to go as a missionary
16 to the western Ukraine of Russia, Romania, Poland and
17 Czechoslovakia. With the coming of another war in 1939,
18 we returned to England where we worked with the
19 thousands of displaced persons of eastern Europe who
20 fled to England during the war years. Now in my
21 retirement years, I live in Somerset, England.

22 When my wife and I first arrived in the Western
23 Ukraine in 1923, we heard Russian Christians singing an
24 unusual and outstanding hymn which we had never
25 heard before. We assumed that it was a native Russian
26 hymn. We did not think at that time about trying to
27 translate the hymn into English. We discovered that the
28 Russian hymn was a translation from the German version
29 called "Wie Gross Bist Du."

30 The German hymn was translated in 1907 from the
31 original Swedish by Manfred von Glehn who lived in
32 Estonia. In 1912 a powerful Russian preacher, Ivan
33 Prokhanoff who was known as the "Martin Luther of
34 Russia" made the Russian translation from the German.
35 Prokhanoff published the hymn in St. Petersburg in a

1 book of spiritual songs translated from various
2 languages. It was published in New York City in Russian
3 by Prokhanoff's friends of the American Bible Society.
4 This hymnal of Russian evangelical hymns was a book
5 which Mrs. Hine and I used widely in our evangelistic
6 ministry in the Ukraine.

7 It took many years to complete my English version
8 of the hymn. Various experiences inspired the different
9 stanzas:

10 The first stanza was completed after a tremendous
11 storm in a mountain village in Czechoslovakia where I
12 had sought shelter for a night.

13 In the mountain country of Romania I heard a group
14 of Christian youth singing the Russian version of this
15 hymn and they inspired my version of the second stanza.

16 Stanza three expresses my personal thanksgiving
17 to the Lord for my salvation in Jesus Christ.

18 It was not until we returned to England in 1948 that
19 I completed the last stanza. While working with the
20 refugees who had lost their earthly homes and lands, I
21 was reminded that only when we arrive in our heavenly
22 home will Christians really be fully able to realize the
23 greatness of God.

24 In 1949 I published the completed song in a Russian
25 gospel magazine. Reprints were requested by
26 missionaries all over the world. Since we were sending
27 out copies free upon request, this distribution became
28 difficult to bear. By faith we continued printing and
29 giving away copies and soon "How Great Thou Art" was
30 being sung in India, New Zealand and throughout the
31 world.

32 **NARRATOR:** It was 1957, however, before our hymn reached
33 the United States in force. It was brought into New York
34 City by Southern Baptist evangelist, Billy Graham, who
35 had found the hymn in England. We are honored to have



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