

**CHRISTIAN HYMN WRITERS
COME ALIVE**

by Mayrene Bobbitt



CHRISTIANPUBLISHERS

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**CHRISTIAN HYMN
WRITERS COME ALIVE**

By Mayrene Bobbitt

*To my parents, Irene and
Walter Harrington, who
first introduced me to
the joy of dramatics.*

FOREWORD

Most of the names attached to the hymns we sing in our churches are just that — names without any association or identification. We have not had the opportunity, nor have we taken the time, to identify these persons. Had we done so, we would find them to be devout Christians who were inspired to write the words and music of our hymns.

In Mayrene Bobbitt's monologs, the actor assumes the personalities of those whose hymns we have sung. The author has ingeniously reconstructed the lives of these individuals out of her own careful reading and study. She has closely captured their personal characteristics and spirit to help us understand more clearly the person behind the hymn.

In her penetrating presentations, Mayrene Bobbitt has re-created Fanny Crosby, Eliza Hewitt, the mother of Isaac Watts, and the wives of Martin Luther and John Newton.

It is hoped that she will enlarge this repertoire of historical characters who have contributed so significantly to our Christian song.

William J. Reynolds

Associate Professor of Church Music
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, Texas

PRODUCTION NOTES

Martin Luther: This monologue is about 15 minutes long. An alternate costume to the "peasant look" is to give Katherine a pilgrim look by using a long black or dark blue dress with white collar, cuffs and apron. In portraying Katherine, remember that her personality should be that of an energetic, practical, down-to-earth woman who was an admirer and strong supporter of her husband, whom she loved very much. An appropriate time for presenting this monolog in a church worship service is Reformation Sunday (the fourth Sunday of October), but it can easily fit into any worship experience or devotional program. Have the congregation sing stanzas one and two of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" as Katherine enters, and the fourth stanza at the end as she exits. She can stand in any convenient area of the chancel, as no scenery or props are required.

Mother of Isaac Watts: This monologue is only five or six minutes long. No scenery is required. The character of Mrs. Watts can be enriched by a slight cockney accent, not too heavy to detract from her message. However, the accent is not necessary. For her costume, any plain long dress or skirt in a solid color can be given a 17th century look with a dust-mop cap and apron. She may carry a basket as if going to market. If your church will be using this monologue in a worship service, have the congregation sing Isaac Watts' hymns. This monologue, being more entertaining and educational than devotional, is excellent for banquet programs or all music programs. This drama covers only the beginning of Watts' hymn-writing.

Fanny Crosby: This has been the most requested of all my dramas. I have performed it over 150 times. The length is around 20 minutes. The rocking chair is very important to the atmosphere, but no scenery is necessary. The dark glasses should be round, wire frames. The performer should enter and exit in character, walking very slowly, bent over, using the cane for guidance as would a blind person. Be careful not to look directly into the eyes of the audience,

PRODUCTION NOTES (Cont.)

keeping the eyes closed while seated. Cock head from side to side during pauses as if listening for questions from the interviewer.

Mrs. John Newton: The same person may present the entire monologue, giving the impression of changing age by a quick change of wig, dust-mop cap, apron or other articles of clothing or props. Make all changes quickly Onstage during singing of the hymn. Mrs. Newton's dress and hair style should be of the eighteenth century. Four different ladies of different ages could appear in the four scenes. Or two different ladies could present two scenes each; the younger lady for the first two scenes, and a middle-aged lady, scenes 3 and 4. An Offstage man's voice may be used to read the words of John Newton from the letter in scene 2 or play a recording of his voice as Mrs. Newton pretends to read the letter. Use a narrator to give the year and place setting of each scene. Before the narration, the congregation, a soloist or a choir sings the appropriate stanza of the hymn, "Amazing Grace."

Eliza Hewitt: This monologue is approximately 10 minutes long. Have the congregation, choir or soloist sing Eliza Hewitt's most familiar hymns before the monologue. These would probably be "When We All Get to Heaven," "There Is Sunshine in My Soul Today" and "More about Jesus." The line "Since I have become a Baptist" may be changed or deleted according to your situation. I felt I was able to tell more about Eliza Hewitt by being a student of hers and not actually portraying her in person. The idea could easily be changed to a first-person portrayal of Eliza Hewitt by changing the beginning, deleting all reference to the obituary and having Eliza sitting on the park bench in Fairmont Park and reminiscing about her life.

— *Mayrene Bobbitt*

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The Mother of Isaac Watts*

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(Enter a middle-aged woman dressed in colonial costume of the period.)

MOTHER OF ISAAC WATTS: Good morrow, Good Wife Johnston. It's good to see you out to market this bright, sunny day. So glad that you're feeling better of your vapors now. I surely missed you at chapel last meeting day. Oh, yes, you missed a fine and unusual service at Above Bar Congregational Church. We celebrated the recent passing by parliament of the Toleration Act. Ah, this Toleration Act of 1689 means a new day for all us dissenters in the free and independent chapels. Now our members are free to preach and assemble where they like and our men can vote and hold public office.

Why, I remember when I was just a young bride how my own good husband, Deacon Watts, was thrown in jail three times right here in downtown Southampton. Yes, right in jail, mind you, with all the criminal scum, drunkards and debtors. And that was just for preaching the gospel in his own neighborhood. I held little Isaac up to the window of that jail to see his father. Yes, it's about time us dissenters are recognized for the good citizens that we are. Now maybe our dedicated congregational young folk will stop this running away across that terrible water to those God-forsaken colonies.

Speaking of rebellious young folk, Goody Johnston, did you overhear any of the ruckus that went on at our house after services last Lord's day? Well, I'm thankful that you did not; I would have been

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1 embarrassed to death.

2 Now our Isaac is usually such a good boy.
3 Never caused me any worry, except over his being
4 so frail and sickly. He gets his lessons so well. Knows
5 his Latin and Greek and his French and Hebrew.
6 . . . Yes, Deacon Watts started teaching him when
7 he was only four years old. . . . He just reads all
8 the time. I'm afraid he'll put his eyes out.

9 But now Isaac is going on sixteen. And you
10 know how that age is. After services, Isaac began to
11 complain about the doleful psalm-singing in our church.
12 Yes, he said it was *dull and boring* and he wasn't
13 going back, mind you. Well, Deacon Watts got so mad
14 . . . I really feared he'd strike the boy on the
15 Sabbath. The only other time I remember him getting
16 so mad at young Isaac was when, at about age seven,
17 Isaac was continually making up those rhymes.
18 Everything the boy said just came out in rhymes.
19 Yes, Deacon Watts threatened that if Isaac didn't stop
20 that rhyiming, he was taking Isaac out behind the shed.
21 Well, little Isaac just looked up so pitiful-like and
22 said, "Oh father, do some pity take and I will no
23 more verses make."

24 Well, this time I knew my good husband was
25 most irritated and impatient over Isaac's complaining
26 about the psalms, for our chapel is quite strict to
27 follow the Calvinist teaching of singing only the
28 metrical psalms. . . . No hymn of "human composure"
29 is allowed. But to my amazement, Deacon Watts, in
30 a calm voice, just said, "Well then, why don't you
31 give us something better, young man?" And you
32 know, Isaac did too. He sat down that very
33 afternoon and wrote a new hymn which we sang
34 for evening service. You might just think I'm a
35 bragging mother, but it was good, too — good as any

1 of those Calvinist psalms. Here's how it starts out:
 2

3

Behold the glories of the Lamb

4

Amidst His Father's throne

5

Prepare new honors for His name

6

And songs before unknown.

7

8

Why, thank you, Goody Johnston. I'm glad you like

9

it. Yes, I think my Isaac will make his mark in the

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world . . . if husband and I can just live through

11

the next few years.

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NOTE: The numerals running vertically down the

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left margin of each page of dialogue are for the

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convenience of the director. With these, he/she may

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easily direct attention to a specific passage.

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Monologue of Fanny Crosby*

SETTING: Fanny Crosby is 88 years old, so she should look so in her face and hair color. She is dressed in a long dark dress of the early 1900s. She wears dark glasses and carries a cane. She enters during the singing of any Fanny Crosby hymn, walking very slowly and bent over. She sits in a rocking chair at Stage Center.

FANNY CROSBY: Come in, my dear. You're fortunate that my good niece Florence Booth would let you come in this house. She takes such good care of me and usually turns away most of the visitors who come here from the newspapers.

But yesterday was a special day: March 24, 1908. Now I am eighty-eight years old. I guess that makes me quite an old lady! No, I don't mind having birthdays . . . the more the better, I say.

Since coming here to Bridgeport, Connecticut, I always celebrate my birthday at the First Methodist Church. Here is the watch I received for my birthday. See, monogrammed on the back, my initials, F.J.C., and inscribed: "Presented to Fanny Crosby on her eighty-eighth birthday by the Young People's Societies and other friends of Connecticut." Someone told me that it cost \$175. That's almost sinful, having a gift so expensive as this, but I shall treasure it always.

Now, what was it you wanted to know? Yes dear, most people ask about my earliest remembrances and how I became blind. No, I was not born blind. When I was six weeks old, my eyes became inflamed.

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1 Our family doctor could not come, so another doctor
 2 came and applied hot poultices to my eyes. It was a
 3 tragic mistake. I was blinded for life.

4 My father died when I was a baby. Mother had
 5 to go to work as a housekeeper to support us; so it
 6 was my grandmother who provided most of my early
 7 training. She described all the beautiful sights in
 8 detail to me. How I loved walking outside, learning
 9 all the names of the flowers, recognizing them by
 10 their fragrances, recognizing birds by their intricate
 11 melodies. I could climb the tallest trees and ride
 12 horseback so well that people never knew that I
 13 was blind.

14 I loved hearing Grandmother read the scriptures
 15 and sing the old hymns. Yes, it is true: by the time
 16 I was ten years old, I could quote by memory the
 17 first four books of the Old Testament and the four
 18 gospels of the New Testament. Verses ran through my
 19 mind continually. My first little poem was published
 20 in our country paper in upstate New York when I
 21 was eight years old. The title was *Content*:

22
 23 Oh, what a happy child I am
 24 Although I cannot see.
 25 I am resolved that in this world
 26 Contented I will be.
 27 How many blessings I enjoy
 28 That other people don't.
 29 So weep or sigh because I'm blind,
 30 I cannot, nor I won't.

31
 32 The prayer I prayed the most, kneeling by
 33 Grandmother's rocker, was: "Dear Lord, please help
 34 me to learn like other children." My prayer was
 35 answered. At the age of fifteen, I went to the New

1 York Institute for the Blind in New York City. I was
 2 terribly homesick at first. The teachers wanted me to
 3 stop writing my verses and become disciplined to study
 4 what they wanted me to study. I'm afraid I was a
 5 problem student. One subject I never did learn to like
 6 was arithmetic. I called it the "monster" and wrote
 7 this verse:

8

9

I loathe, abhor, it makes me sick
 To hear the word arithmetic.

10

11

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The blind school was my home for many years,
 for I remained there as a teacher. I even taught my
 own husband when he first entered the blind school.
 Yes, you are surprised. Many people, I find, never
 realized that I was married. My husband, Alexander
 Van Alstyne, later was music teacher at the school.
 Van insisted that my literary name remain as it was.
 We were married forty-four years before he passed
 away. My greatest sadness was the death of our only
 infant child.

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My most happy remembrance? That would have
 to be my conversion. I accepted the Lord as my
 personal Savior at the Thirtieth Street Methodist
 Church. After going to the school, I had grown
 indifferent to the Lord. I agreed to attend revival
 services, and played for them on the condition that
 they would not call on me to speak. I realized that
 something was lacking in my life. I felt empty and
 incomplete. For two nights, I went to the altar to
 pray, but came away without assurance. Then one
 night, the congregation started to sing the old Isaac
 Watts hymn: "Alas and Did My Saviour Bleed." When
 they sang that line: "Here Lord, I give myself away,"
 I realized that I had been trying to hold on to the

1 world with one hand and on to God with the other.
 2 Jesus won the victory in my life that night.

3 How did I begin writing hymns? Well, I almost
 4 missed my entire career as a hymn-writer! I was forty-
 5 four years old before I wrote my first hymn. I had
 6 had several books of poetry published and was
 7 somewhat well known as a lyricist of secular songs.
 8 The pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church on Twenty-
 9 third Street asked me to write a poem for their New
 10 Year's watch night service. He later introduced me to
 11 William Bradbury, the famous composer and publisher.
 12 Mr. Bradbury said, "Fanny, I thank God that we
 13 have at last met, for I think *you* can write hymns
 14 and I have wished for a long time to talk with you."
 15 Mr. Bradbury was a great help and inspiration to me.

16 Well, the hymns began to flow. I was under
 17 contract to write three hymns a week. I have no idea
 18 how many I've written . . . around eight thousand, I
 19 guess . . . I used about two hundred different pen
 20 names.

21 Sometimes they gave me a title or subject, or a
 22 melody to fit words to, but more often I selected my
 23 own subject. I never undertook a hymn without first
 24 asking the Lord to be my inspiration.

25 Once, Mr. Philip Phillips, who was associated
 26 with Dwight Moody, sent me a list of forty titles,
 27 asking that I write words. I composed all forty hymns
 28 and retained them in memory; none were written
 29 down until all were completed. I never put any portion
 30 of a poem on paper until the entire poem is completed
 31 in my mind and needs no revision. I think God
 32 blessed me with the ability to memorize. My blindness
 33 enables me to block distractions out of my mind.

34 My most embarrassing moment? Well, that would
 35 have to be that summer at Northfield Assembly when

1 Ira Sankey led a hymn I was most impressed with
 2 entitled, "Hide Me, O Saviour, Hide Me." I did not
 3 recognize the hymn at all and kept inquiring about
 4 it to Mr. Sankey. He thought I was joking, but when
 5 I kept insisting that he must tell me who the author
 6 was, he replied, "Really, don't you recall who wrote
 7 that hymn? You ought to remember, for you are the
 8 guilty one."

9 Once they called on me to speak at Northfield
 10 Convention and after giving my testimony, I closed
 11 with verses of a hymn I'd written several years before:
 12

13 Some day the silver chord will break,
 14 And I no more as now shall sing.
 15 But O the joy when I shall wake
 16 within the palace of the king.
 17

18 Afterwards, Mr. Sankey began to inquire about this
 19 hymn and found it stored in a safe at Biglow and
 20 Main Company. That hymn, "Saved By Grace," was
 21 almost lost to the world. This might have happened to
 22 some of my other hymns.

23 Now tell me, my dear, which of my hymns do
 24 *you* like best? Ah, that one. My good friend, Phoebe
 25 Knapp, is a devout Christian and skilled musician. I
 26 went over to visit her one day. She sat at the piano
 27 and played a beautiful melody which she had composed.
 28 As she started to play it the second time, she asked,
 29 "Fanny, what does the music say to you? Do you
 30 hear any words?" As she continued to play, these
 31 words began to form in my mind:
 32

33 Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine,
 34 Oh what a foretaste of glory divine.
 35

1 The words poured out almost exactly as they appear
2 in the hymnal today.

3 For what am I most thankful? I am thankful
4 that the Lord permitted me to be blind. That poor
5 doctor always regretted the terrible mistake with my
6 eyes. I was told that it was a great sorrow of his life.
7 But it was no mistake of God's. I believe it was God's
8 intention that I live in physical darkness so as to
9 better sing his praises and proclaim them to the
10 world; for if I had not been blind, I would never
11 have written all these hymns. Now after being blind
12 all these years, the first face I am going to see is the
13 face of Jesus.

14 *(She sings "Saved by Grace" stanza one and refrain.*
15 *Bows head. Congregation sings "Blessed Assurance"*
16 *immediately, unaccompanied. FANNY CROSBY exits*
17 *slowly during singing.)*

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NOTE: The numerals running vertically down the left margin of each page of dialogue are for the convenience of the director. With these, he/she may easily direct attention to a specific passage.

Martin Luther as Seen by Katherine, His Rib

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3 *TIME:* Summer of 1530.4 *PLACE:* The Black Cloister, an old monastery at

5 Wittenburg, Germany.

6 (*KATHERINE LUTHER is a middle-aged woman*7 *dressed in a peasant's blouse and long, full skirt with*8 *an apron. A scarf covers her hair.*)9 **KATHERINE LUTHER:** Oh, Aunt Magalene, it is so

10 lonesome here, with Doctor Luther in Coburg for so

11 long. It is so boring here when my husband is away.

12 The days are so monotonous. Nothing exciting or

13 different ever happens when he is gone.

14 At first I thought I would be quite relieved to

15 be rid of that army of students, that horde of hangers-

16 on, that multitude of Martin Luther's admirers who

17 follow him about. But now it is so quiet in this old

18 monastery, even though I have enough work to keep

19 me busy. I am housekeeper, manager of this

20 expanding household in this old Augustinian monastery

21 — the Black Cloister. What a spooky name! I know

22 that I should be grateful to God for any roof over

23 our heads, but this monstrosity has forty rooms on

24 the first floor alone, with cells above for sleeping.

25 At times, every room is full with our six children,

26 dozens of nieces, nephews and other relatives, some

27 students and some children orphaned by the plague.

28 I have tried to bring order to this chaos. I plant

29 the garden to raise the food, tend the chickens, milk

30 the cows, prepare the food, set the tables, wash the

31 dishes, wash the linens, make up the beds with fresh

32 straw, tend the children, nurse the sickly ones. Oh,

33 Auntie Lena, thank God you left the convent also

34 to come here and help me! Then, I have to keep the

35 books and manage the money to cover all our bills.

1 My dear husband never learned to manage money. I
2 have to hide money from him, or he would give it
3 all away! He once said, "God divided the hand into
4 five fingers so that money would slip through."

5 My gregarious Luther does thrive in this bustling
6 atmosphere. In spite of my objections, his favorite
7 time to receive questions and give answers is at
8 mealtime. These students have the benefit of his
9 formal lectures in theology and the Bible during the
10 day at the university. Then they ply him with questions
11 during the supper hour. When I found out that the
12 students were taking notes which they intended to
13 publish, I wanted to charge them admission for note-
14 taking privileges. Often, Doctor Luther spends the
15 entire supper hour talking. Once I asked, "Doctor, why
16 don't you stop talking and eat?" He answered, "Women
17 should repeat the Lord's prayer before opening their
18 mouths."

19 I suppose he is thinking of that first wife, Eve,
20 when he calls me Katherine, his "rib." He has also
21 said, "In domestic affairs, I defer to Katie. Otherwise,
22 I am led by the Holy Ghost."

23 Even so, I am a happy, contented woman,
24 because I know I am in God's will for my life. I
25 have a temper and Martin Luther has a temper, but
26 we are partners in building a Christian home. This is
27 a holy calling indeed. It requires much patience.

28 Luther realizes that patience is not his strongest
29 virtue. He says, "All my life is patience. I have to be
30 patient with the pope; I have to be patient with the
31 heretics; I have to be patient with my family; and I
32 even have to be patient with Katie!"

33 Well, I have to be even more patient with my
34 genius husband. He is a man of many moods; he is
35 often melancholy and is in continuous poor health.

1 Once, he locked himself in his study for three days
 2 and nights and refused to come out until I called a
 3 carpenter and had the door removed! Once when he
 4 was so despondent and depressed I dressed in black
 5 mourning clothes with a heavy black veil covering
 6 my face. When Doctor Luther asked who had died,
 7 why was I in mourning, I sadly observed how
 8 terrible it was that God was dead! That surely God
 9 was dead, or Martin Luther would use his great faith
 10 in his Savior.

11 But I am not content, Aunt Lena, to be only a
 12 Martha, always at work in garden or kitchen. I should
 13 like to be a Mary, also. I have started to read the
 14 Bible through. Martin has promised me fifty guilder
 15 if I finish by Easter. So I dedicate myself, Aunt Lena,
 16 not only to Luther's physical well-being, but to the
 17 spread of his ministry as well. When the Lutheran
 18 pastors come seeking his guidance and he is not home,
 19 I try to help them, as this morning, when that pastor
 20 from the country church came. Herr Pflieger (*FLEE-ger*)
 21 had questions about use of the German scriptures. There
 22 are some teachings I shared with him.

23 Doctor Luther's German translation is easy to
 24 understand. It speaks to us common folk. He wanted
 25 this Bible to be *spoken* rather than bookish or written
 26 German. Before any phrase was put on paper, it had
 27 to sound right to his ear. He constantly stopped people
 28 in the streets to ask how they would express a certain
 29 thought.

30 While working on the translation of the prophets,
 31 he wrote, "What a hard and difficult task it is to
 32 force these writers, quite against their wills, to speak
 33 German. They have no desire to give up their native
 34 Hebrew in order to imitate our barbaric German." It
 35 was the emperor Charles V who said that the German

1 language was suited only for speaking to horses, but
2 Luther has made it speak to God.

3 When laymen could read scripture for themselves,
4 the priests were challenged in their role as mediators
5 between laymen and God. Martin Luther never intended
6 to start a revolution. He only wanted to make people
7 aware of what the scriptures really say: that the just
8 shall live by faith. He wanted to stop the gross abuses
9 and errors in the church, such as the sale of indulgences.
10 Men and women felt that, since they had purchased
11 indulgences, they no longer had to worry about their
12 relationship to God. Martin Luther began teaching and
13 writing that every Christian who is truly repentant for
14 his sins could receive God's forgiveness for Christ's
15 sake, even without letters of indulgence. You *are* a
16 Christian, not because of your good works, but because
17 you trust Christ, who alone can make you what you
18 want to be.

19 Almost overnight, Luther had become an important
20 voice the people were heeding. He constantly tells the
21 people not to call themselves Lutherans. He does not
22 like it. He does not want it. He would rather they
23 call themselves Christians. He says *Luther* did not die
24 on the cross for their sins. *Luther* was not crucified
25 for them.

26 Herr Pflieger's other questions were about the
27 use of music in the worship services.

28 I personally think that Martin Luther's greatest
29 contribution to the Christian church is the gift of
30 music. For hundreds of years, the people had not
31 sung in church; only the clergy sang. He restored the
32 gift of song to the people, in their own language, as
33 part of their worship. He said, "I intend to make
34 German psalms for the people — spiritual songs, so
35 that the Word of God, even by means of song, may

1 live among the people.”

2 Luther is musically talented himself. He has
3 always loved music. Starting as a boy soprano in the
4 choir, he continued to study music theory and
5 composition, the playing of the flute and the lute.

6 When he is despondent and discouraged, I urge
7 him to play and lead the household in singing. Luther
8 believes that music is an effective means of combating
9 Satan. He says, “The devil flees before the sound of
10 music almost as much as before the Word of God.”

11 Luther has been criticized for taking secular
12 tunes into the church. But he says, “Why should the
13 devil have all the good tunes for himself?” He has
14 adapted a few well-known folk tunes so that the
15 people are not forced to learn new words and new
16 music at the same time. He puts the priority on
17 congregational singing and calls congregational rehearsals
18 sometimes during the week to learn new hymns. He
19 thinks the main function of the choir should be to
20 help the congregation learn new hymns.

21 Luther also considers music an essential part of
22 a pastor’s training. He said, “We should not ordain
23 young men into the ministry unless they have become
24 well acquainted with music in the schools. Those who
25 have mastered this art are made of good stuff; they
26 are fit for any task. There is no art which can be
27 compared to music, for it alone, after theology, gives
28 us rest and joy.” Luther called music the “handmaiden
29 of theology.”

30 During those dark days at the beginning of the
31 Reformation, when many of his followers were executed
32 and he was in hiding, his own life in danger, these
33 words of Psalm 46 were his solace: “God is our refuge
34 and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Music
35 was also his comfort, so he began to sing the words

1 of this great psalm in his words and to his own tune:
 2

3 God is the fortress of the soul;
 4 Christ is the champion of the soul;
 5 Although Satan is the enemy,
 6 the ultimate victory belongs to God.
 7

8 This great anthem became the marching song of the
 9 Reformation.

10 Recently one of Luther's enemies has been
 11 complaining that "Luther has damned more souls with
 12 his hymns than with all his sermons." In later years,
 13 I believe that the hymns of Martin Luther may prove
 14 *more* significant than his sermons, because few may
 15 read his writings, but his sermons through his hymns
 16 will continue to be preached by congregational singing
 17 wherever Christians are gathered to worship.

18 *(The congregation stands and sings stanzas one*
 19 *and two of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.")*
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25
 26
 27
 28
 29
 30

31 *NOTE: The numerals running vertically down the*
 32 *left margin of each page of dialogue are for the*
 33 *convenience of the director. With these, he/she may*
 34 *easily direct attention to a specific passage.*
 35

**Memories of Mrs. John Newton:
The Story of "Amazing Grace"***

1
2
3 *(Before the monolog begins, the congregation, a soloist*
4 *or a choir sings the following stanza of "Amazing*
5 *Grace:")*
6

7 Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound,
8 That saved a wretch like me!
9 I once was lost, but now am found,
10 Was blind, but now I see.

11
12 *SCENE 1*

13 **SETTING:** The year is 1743; the place is the village of
14 Chatham in Kent, England. POLLY is 13½ years old.

15 **POLLY:** This has been the strangest three weeks of my
16 life. I realize that I am not yet fourteen years old and
17 have not yet had many experiences, but if I live to be
18 one hundred, I know these weeks shall always remain
19 in my memory as the most strange happening of my
20 life.

21 One day three weeks ago, a young man of about
22 seventeen years came knocking at our door and
23 presented himself to my mother as the son of her
24 dearest friend. Mother could hardly believe that he was
25 John Newton, for his mother had died when he was
26 only six and my mother had heard nothing of him
27 since her death. His father is a seafaring man, and he
28 took young John to sea with him. The father had
29 remarried and allowed no communication between his
30 family and ours.

31 My mother had grieved for her friend, telling me
32 many times of how pious and godly Elizabeth Newton
33

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1 was. She was an educated woman, teaching young
2 John to read at an early age, emphasizing the scriptures,
3 classics, hymns and all Christian principles.

4 The two mothers had planned that this son and
5 my mother's oldest daughter would someday marry
6 and unite these two families officially! That daughter
7 would be me, Mary Catlett, nicknamed Polly.

8 I am most thankful that this is no longer the
9 custom — parents choosing our mates for us.

10 I can hardly believe that this John is the son of
11 such a genteel person. He is a sailor, uncouth, and he
12 seems totally uneducated. I have heard it said that he
13 curses, blasphemes, drinks and gambles — running with
14 quite a wild group.

15 But he *is* quite handsome, in a wild sort of way.
16 He has a nice singing voice. I enjoy his company.

17 Father was not at all pleased to have him here.
18 Father murmured about bad influences upon his
19 daughters. My parents told John at his leaving that
20 he would not be welcomed in their house again unless
21 *I* were away from home.

22 John was supposed to stay for only three days.
23 Now *his* father is angry that he stayed so long because
24 he has missed his ship.

25 I cannot believe that he is gone. How could he
26 become so important to me in so short a time? He
27 told me that he loved me and would return to make
28 me his wife. Mother says that is nonsense; we are
29 entirely too young for so serious a matter.

30 But I do have this strange feeling . . . that God
31 has planned it so . . . that someday we will be together
32 . . . for always.

33 ALL: (*Sing.*)

34
35

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear

1 And grace my fears relieved;
2 How precious did that grace appear
3 The hour I first believed!
4

5 SCENE 2

6 **SETTING:** The year is 1748, five years later; the place is
7 Chatham in Kent. POLLY is 18.

8 **POLLY:** Was that the sound of the mail coach? No longer
9 do I run to meet it every day. I have almost despaired
10 of ever hearing from John again. My family tells me
11 that it is no use. His ship has not been heard from in
12 eighteen months. They are considered lost at sea.

13 But John has come through many disasters which
14 seemed hopeless. He was impressed into the royal navy,
15 where he spent time in the guardhouse, kept in chains
16 for trying to escape.

17 During one trip to Africa on a slave ship, the
18 captain treated him very cruelly. He almost starved
19 them; he was near death with a fever.

20 Once he almost fell overboard during a drinking
21 bout at sea, when at the last instant someone caught
22 hold of his clothing from behind and pulled him in.
23 It was an amazing rescue, as he cannot swim.

24 So many disasters seemed to befall him that one
25 captain called John a "Jonah," saying that all their
26 troubles were due to his being on board. (*She bows*
27 *her head in prayer.*) Oh God, protect John. You must
28 have a design, a purpose for him. Help him realize
29 that "It is *not* in man that walketh to direct his
30 steps." (*After a slight pause with bowed head, she*
31 *looks up.*)

32 Yes, sister, did you call? What? A letter from
33 John? Can it really be true? (*She picks up a letter*
34 *and opens it to read. Voice of John Newton.:*)

35 **VOICE:** Dearest Polly,

1 On March 10, 1748, the Lord sent from on high
 2 and delivered me out of the deep water. In a violent
 3 storm, the cabin filled with water. The ship was going
 4 down — sinking. As I ran onto the deck, the captain
 5 commanded me to return for my knife. The person
 6 who went up to deck in my place was washed
 7 overboard and lost.

8 In our darkest hour, I began to feel *some* glimmer
 9 of hope: for after hours of pumping with no rest, food
 10 or water, I saw that the ship was at last secure. I
 11 thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favor
 12 and I began to pray. But my prayer to God was not
 13 the prayer of faith, but only like a raven's cry. I began
 14 to think of that Jesus whom I so often derided. I
 15 recalled all I could of his life and death, and how I
 16 wished that it were all true. I knew that there never
 17 was, nor ever could be, such a sinner as myself. I
 18 concluded at first that my sins were *too great* to be
 19 forgiven. But I remembered how he promised to give
 20 the Spirit to those who ask: I must therefore pray, and
 21 *if it is of God, he will make good his own word.* I can
 22 see no reason why the Lord singled me out for mercy
 23 . . . unless it was to show by one astonishing instance
 24 that with him nothing is impossible.

25 POLLY: (*She looks up from letter.*) Oh, praise God! John
 26 has been converted. I knew that he was reading the
 27 book *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, as
 28 well as the Bible. How I have prayed that the truth
 29 of it would reach him!

30 ALL: (*Sing.*)

31
 32 Thro' many dangers, toils, and snares,
 33 I have already come;
 34 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
 35 And grace will lead me home.

SCENE 3

1
2 **SETTING:** Ten years have now passed. The year is 1758;
3 the place is Liverpool. POLLY is 28.

4 **POLLY:** John was unusually quiet at supper tonight. When
5 I pressed him, he revealed that he had heard from the
6 bishop. They have again refused his ordination. Oh God,
7 for what purpose is this delay? After years of struggle,
8 he finally realizes God's calling, and then to be refused!

9 How I hoped after he was so miraculously saved
10 from the storm, that in his turning to the Lord, he
11 would surrender completely. Every March tenth, he
12 spends time in meditation on his salvation. From that
13 date on, he was completely freed of his ingrained habit
14 of swearing. But it took more years of struggle and
15 separation, for even after we were married, he returned
16 to the sea. This time, he was commander of his own
17 ship and again engaged in the horrible business of
18 slave trading in Africa. He never had the least scruple
19 at *that* time that it was wrong. He considered rather
20 that he was a sort of jailer. I prayed that the Lord
21 would place him in a more humane calling.

22 The long separations were hard to bear. Once,
23 he was gone for fourteen months. Another time, my
24 letters to him were misdirected to the wrong port.
25 Because I was always punctual in writing, he concluded
26 by not hearing from me that I was surely dead. He
27 even grieved for me.

28 What a blessing when he received the office of
29 tide surveyor here in Liverpool! This afforded us much
30 more time together.

31 For the first time, John was brought under
32 powerful preaching by the Wesleys and George
33 Whitefield. Finally, he has answered the Lord's calling,
34 fulfilling his dear mother's desire that he enter the
35 ministry. She was a dissenter, and it was John's first

1 thought to join them, but he and I really prefer the
 2 Church of England, deciding that the established
 3 church was the best route to reach and influence the
 4 most people.

5 Some clergymen have refused to endorse John,
 6 calling him a man who mixes with Methodists. Another
 7 reason for their refusal is that he does not have an
 8 Oxford or Cambridge degree.

9 Our Yorkshire friends urged John to open an
 10 independent chapel of his own, where he is already
 11 holding small informal services. He has even been
 12 offered ordination in a Presbyterian church.

13 We must be patient. John seems to have been
 14 selected to show what the Lord can do. Few have
 15 ever been recovered from such a dreadful state as he was.

16 As John says in his testimony, he was a dreadful
 17 wretch. He once was lost, but like the prodigal son,
 18 *now* he is found. He was blind, but *now* can see.

19 ALL: (*Sing.*)

20
 21 When we've been there ten thousand years,
 22 Bright shining as the sun,
 23 We've no less days to sing God's praise
 24 Than when we first begun.

25
 26 *SCENE 4*

27 *SETTING:* It is now 21 years later; the year is 1779; the
 28 place, the village of Olney. POLLY is 49.

29 POLLY: There, the last box is packed. At last we are
 30 ready to move. How can I bear to leave Olney? It has
 31 been our home for almost sixteen years, our only
 32 parish since John's ordination.

33 The people of Olney are our friends though they
 34 are poor, ignorant and suffer from many hardships.
 35 Most of them toil long, hard hours by hand to make



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