

A CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR SALLY GWYNE

Charles Wesley's First Subscriber

Dec. 18, 1743.

By the Rev.
Frank Baker

PROPOSALS FOR PRINTING BY SUBSCRIPTION, TWO VOLUMES

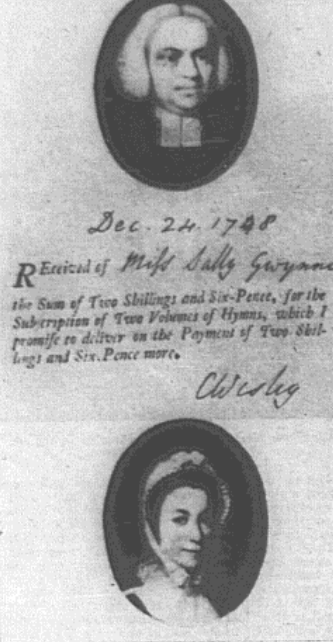
Hymns and Sacred Poems.

CONDITIONS.

- I. EACH Volume will contain upward of 300 Pages in large Duodecimo.
- II. The Price of the Two Volumes will be 5s. half to be paid down, the rest on the Delivery of the Books, in Quires.
- III. The whole Work is ready for the Press and will be Printed immediately.
- IV. Bookfellers subscribing for six Copies, will have a seventh Gratis.

SUBSCRIPTIONS are taken in by T. Tye, near Gray's Inn Gate, Hill-barns; and at the Foundry in Upper-Abchurch-Lane, London.—In Newcastle upon Tyne, by R. Atkinson.—In Bristol, by Felix Farley, in Collyer Green; J. W. Jones, Book Seller, in Wineshop Lane.

THESE CRIBBERS are desired to send in their Names and Places of Abode.



The prospectus issued by Charles Wesley when his first volume of "Hymns and Sacred Poems" was published in 1748. His signature is appended to the receipt of Miss Sally Gwyne, who became his wife. The portraits of Charles and Sally Gwyne were not, of course, printed on the page; they have been superimposed for the purpose of this picture.

CHRISTMAS, 1748, marked the last of Charles Wesley's forty winters of bachelorhood, the last of his many years of complete dependence upon his brother John. For Charles Wesley was deeply in love, and striving hard to prove both to himself and others that he could stand alone in providing for the needs of a hypothetical family.

He had first met lovely Sally Gwyne, almost twenty years his junior, in August, 1747, and a year later there was an "understanding" between them. She came of a well-to-do Welsh family, however, and it was obviously not going to be easy to convince her of her eligibility as a suitor. On December 5, 1748, he had airily suggested £100 a year as his provision for Sally. Mrs. Gwyne, with whom her husband had left the decision, was very well satisfied with this—until she discovered that the only security Charles could offer was his hymns.

Gradually her resistance was worn down. John Wesley entered into a bond promising £100 per annum to his brother as his share of the profits from their books. Charles writing defensively to Sally, "All the Verses are mine already, which alone bring in above £100 a year; so that in accepting that I only accept of my own." The Rev. Vincent Perrott added his testimony, that the writings of the two brothers were "works which will last and sell while any sense of true religion and learning shall remain among us." Eventually this and other obstacles were surmounted, and on April 8, 1749, John Wesley joined together in matrimony the hands of his brother Charles and Sally Gwyne.

EVEN before cautious Mrs. Gwyne had had a chance of raising objections about her prospective son-in-law's financial soundness, however, Charles had set out to provide for his hoped-for responsibilities almost perhaps with a half-formed idea at the same time of shaking off something of his brother's dominion over him. He had been preparing for publication a collection of poems whose profits were to come to him alone, and which—unlike the scores or so of hymn books already published jointly by the two brothers—were not to be touched by John Wesley's correcting pen. There is perhaps a gentle rebuke to be read into a passage in John's Plain Account of Christian Perfection, written nearly twenty years later: "In the year 1749, my brother printed two volumes of Hymns and Sacred Poems. As I did not see these before they were published, there were some things in them which I did not approve of."

Charles had found a willing subscriber in his "most beloved Friend," Sally Gwyne, to whom he wrote on November 2, 1748: "In your next be so kind to send me the first line of every hymn in the last Written-hymnbook. Write you in Order, if you please, like an Index." Although no index of first lines actually appeared in the 1749 Hymns and Sacred Poems, being first added to the second edition of 1754-6, it seems fairly certain that it was this work, or at least the nucleus of it, that Charles had in mind.

When, on December 5, Charles Wesley had been tentatively accepted by Mrs. Gwyne as her future son-in-law, he walked on air. It would surely be simple to raise enough money to keep his future bride in something like the comfort to which she had been accustomed. His pen would provide the wherewithal. He would publish his sermons, his Journals. (As a matter of fact he did neither.) His "New Version of the Psalms" would surely be profitable. (Actually this scheme never matured, though some of his verifications appeared in Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures (1762), and others were left in manuscript.) And then there was the collection of manuscript hymns already in hand, for which Sally was compiling an index. He would get on with that straight away. Some tangible profit that he was not only a preacher and a poet, but a man of business acumen, would surely be a welcome Christmas present for Sally!

LEAVING his betrothed at Garth on Monday, December 12, he set off for Bristol, arriving there on the Tuesday, and probably depositing the first instalment of his manuscript with Felix Farley, the printer. After spending the Thursday at Bath, he reached London on Saturday, December 17th. The next day he drew up the official announcement of what was to be his first great publishing venture, which he designed to be by the common eighteenth century method of securing subscribers. These were desired to pay half-a-crown on sending their names and addresses to one of the four

agents named (in addition to the Methodist headquarters at the Foundry, London) and the other half-a-crown on receipt of the two volumes, unbound. The "Proposals" also stated that "The whole Work is ready for the Press, and will be Printed immediately." Actually he was to make one or two additions yet, such as the lengthy hymn on the death of Alexander White, which he wrote on December 31, but the bulk of the material was certainly already in shape.

By the end of that week, on Christmas Eve, in fact, Charles had received printed copies of his "Proposals," setting aside the first two for Sally, though it was now too late to get them to her for Christmas. In each case, after dating the receipt form on the

verso "December 24, 1748," he filled it in with the name "Miss Sally Gwyne" and added his own signature. It was not until after the Christmas week-end, however, that the infrequent postal services carried his present to Sally, together with a letter which began—

"Dec. 27. Tues. Even.—
"The Enclosed shows you my First Subscriber: whom I set at the Head of my List as a Good Omen. Many have followed your Example already; being reader to part with their Money than I to take it."

The little notebook in which Charles kept account of the 1,145 copies which were subscribed shows that his brother John swallowed whatever resentment he may have felt, and helped in promoting the sale of the two

volumes, for one entry reads, "Recd. by J.W. for 64 Recs. £8." The preachers also assisted by gathering names—and half-crowns. Apparently it was not until several months later that the volumes eventually appeared, a copy presented to two of Sally's sisters being inscribed "Marg. and Ellis Gwyne, Bristol, Sept. 1, 1749," the date when the five-month-married Charles and Sally first set up house in Bristol. But the Hymns and Sacred Poems of 1749 were well worth waiting for.

THE volumes were certainly miscellaneous in character. There were hymns for various phases of the Christian life, mostly springing from Charles Wesley's own spiritual ups and

downs, a large proportion bearing such titles as "The Trial of Faith" or "Hymns for one fallen from grace," and even eleven headed "Desiring Death." Others echoed the vicissitudes of a preacher's life, such as "For a Minister going forth to preach," and the magnificent "For a person called forth to bear his Testimony," comprising nine verses of twelve lines each, two of which form hymn 584 of the Methodist Hymn Book. There are hymns reflecting his pastoral practice—"For one in a declining State of Health," "O the Death of a Child," twenty-two "Hymns for Widows," and one "For an unconverted Child." And there are, of course, some of the unique love-poems with which he has courted Sally Gwyne, their personal origin thinly disguised to take their place among the "Hymns for Christian Friends," including the well-known

"Two are better far than one
For Counsel, and for Fight;
How can one be warm alone,
Or serve his God aright?"

Some of the hymns were still of far too personal a nature, or for other reasons would not lend themselves to public worship. Yet when, in 1780, John Wesley published his famous Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists, out of 825 hymns 486 were by Charles Wesley, and of that 486 no fewer than 143 came from these two volumes of 1749. Even in the present Methodist Hymn Book almost a quarter by Charles Wesley hymns come from the Hymns and Sacred Poems of 1749, 56 of them in all, together with eight extracts in the selection of verses at the end. We can name but a few of these which we owe to Charles Wesley's pre-marital industry:—

"Jesus, the Name High over all" (50), six out of 22 verses entitled "After preaching in a church."

"Thou hidden source of calm repose" (58), one of his "Hymns for Believers"; "See how great a name aspires" (203), written "After preaching to the Newcastle Colliers," as was also "Ye neighbours and Friends of Jesus, draw near" (329), while "The God of Love, to earth He came" (372) comprises the closing two of eighteen verses written "Before preaching to the Colliers in Leicestershire."

"My God I am Thine" (406), "Soldiers of Christ, arise" (484), from a sturdy poem entitled "The whole Armour of God," four more of its sixteen verses being used for "Pray, without ceasing pray" (541).

"Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I go" (580), entitled "The Lord's Prayer."

"And are we yet alive" (709).
Assuredly the worship of the world has been immeasurably enriched by that love-inspired project launched by Sally Gwyne's fiancé, a Christmas time two hundred years ago.

Christmas Tree Land By Crichton Porteous

I LIVE in a countryside of Christmas trees. Here and there on the hills they grow in thousands, in long, neat ranks, like slim green soldiers. The men call them spruce firs, or English spruce, and at the eve of November begin to dig them up in great numbers. The first are for coppices and gardens; the great Christmas harvest does not begin till December, so that the trees may still be fresh for the 24th.

The spruce fits accommodatingly—not too particular where he lives. He is very content with poor soil, and is said to grow a fresher green there. On good land his hair is darker, and does not glow as nicely under the Christmas lights. About here he is set very often over a thousand feet up, in shallow, peaty soil, and yet usually grows beautifully erect and balanced. In fact, I think there is no tree that in spring gives a better idea of upright, fearless honesty. The tall, new-fledged conical shoots point to the pale blue sky like fingers, making one think of hope and innocence; and their scent is as sweet as any in this world—a free gift for all.

Yet in winter sometimes these trees look bowed with care, and sad with great sadness. For on the moor edge the winds may sweep unchecked from the far North Sea—one of the nurseries is called Siberia—and sometimes these winds bring sleet and snow and fling it over the young trees, then freeze it, so that the shoots are locked in ice, like solid clubs of glass. As thaw begins the weight increases, and all the slim trees droop, as if to weep over the despoiling of their youth and beauty. But in a little while sunshine comes, as with a touch of love, and the trees take hope again, and straighten; it is even as though they have gained from hardship, for they seem to glow more brightly than at any other time.

THE seeds come usually from Scotland or Norway, and are broadcast in narrow beds of fine tilth. They are slow to sprout, and come up like fine green hairs. Men must squat patiently day-long to pull the tiny weeds from

among them, for infant spruce smother easily. When they are four or five inches tall the young trees are lifted with hand forks into baskets for setting out. They may be "pegged" by using metal dibbers, or drilled with spades. Either way, they are all put in the straight lines, eighteen inches or two feet apart. I have been told that twenty thousand seedlings being pegged in one day by one man, but work is not done so quickly now.

For the first year or two the trees must be carefully hoed; as they reach above grass height they begin to be able to care for themselves. They will be five or six years old before they get two feet tall, and then must be thinned or they will crowd and lose their shapes. The young trees that are taken out can be sold easily nowadays, but before the war thousands were burnt in some years.

As the remaining trees grow, they must be moved every two or three years, or their roots will mat with the roots of their neighbours. A good tree should have its roots compact, as in a ball. Some country people keep the same tree from year to year, like a friend whom they invite in, as it were, every Christmas to spend party time with them. Afterwards the tree is put quite philosophically. Trees moved every year cannot make much growth of course. All the better, or they would outgrow the house!

I think it is nice to let the trees go back like this to where they really belong—out-of-doors. It is sad to see sometimes in shops trees kept too long, their fine green gone brown and falling. Though they may be decked with tinsel and cotton-wool "snow" and mica "frost," and festooned by electric lights that sparkle in and out, how unkind it seems to have let them die.

Sometimes in the country tree thieves come along and on a moonlight winter night pluck the young spruce up by the roots and bungling them anyhow into their vans. If the trees are too big to drag up they saw them off a foot or so from the soil, and then the stumps (they



"For on the moor edge the winds may sweep unchecked from the far North Sea . . . bring sleet and snow and fling it over the young trees." The picture shows the Christmas Tree Plantation, Hall Dale, near Matlock.

always die) stay an eyesore and reminder of the theft for years.

Another worry of Christmas time in the country are the holy thieves. A robust and shapely holly, bright with berries, a picture in the hedgerow at dusk, may be found at dawn a stricken stump, the hedgerow smashed all round. Of course it is perhaps impossible for a countryman to guess the temptation that a berries tree puts to the townsman; and do those who can go out into the woods and return with a back-load of evergreens, free, think enough how fortunate they are?

WHAT a pleasure to see a room every picture tilted forward under a crest of dark green leaves, pointed with scarlet berries and silver paper; the head of the grandfather clock nearly covered with foliage, as if it were a tree; and in the centre of the table the brightest berries holly of all. All round the table the fairy lights. They were only nightlights on glass saucers in bell-shaped tops of glass, each with a little hole in top to let the heat out. But the glass domes were of different colours—emerald green, royal blue, rose pink, gold—

and the lights twinkled in a kindly way, washing the low ceiling with warmth and restful tints that really made one think that there might be fairies there. Maybe it was the contrast of the dark shadows in the room corners that made the lights seem to gleam; so all I know is that to-day's brightest electric bulbs do not seem anything like as gay as those simple glass hives did.

And yet, after all, I suspect that it is not the kind of decoration, or illumination, that is most important, but the state of mind one brings to the festival. In childhood one is trusting, ready to accept the simplest things with wonder and happy gratitude, so that nightlights may be as exciting as bonfires. In age, too often we have grown so hard that we want so much of life that we can never be satisfied. Shall we try this Christmaseve to get back once more to the simple joys of love and gratitude, of giving and accepting; and when we look at the children's Christmas trees may we not smirk and feel superior, but remember the courage and hopefulness of the trees when they were merely spruce firs fighting gales and sleet and ice on the moor edge whence they are from?

“A Christmas Present for Sally Gwynne.” *Methodist Recorder* (December 23, 1948): 8.

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By the Rev. Frank Baker

¹*HSP* (1749), 2:309.