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Charles A. Green  
*Assistant Editor*

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# The Metamorphoses of Charles Wesley's Christmas Hymns, 1739–1788\*

Frank Baker

John and Charles Wesley hold a remarkable record as collaborating hymn-writers, some five hundred hymns published under their joint names between 1739 and 1746 forming the “classic hymns” of Methodism.<sup>1</sup> This has led to one of the major literary problems of the eighteenth century, the attempt to distinguish between the verse of the two brothers: John or Charles?<sup>2</sup> The last but one of these jointly published volumes was the epochal *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, printed in the spring of 1745. The last was known familiarly by its sub-title as *Hymns for Whitsunday* rather than by its ponderous title, *Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father*. This appeared in May 1746. Intervening between these two hymn-pamphlets was *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord*, published in December 1745. But why was this pamphlet, which passed through three times as many editions as *Whitsunday Hymns*, not an “official” joint publication of the two brothers? We can offer no concrete proof, but it seems likely that Charles was cooling to the discipline of collaboration, especially if it involved joint *composition* as well as publication.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, John Wesley was nothing like as enthusiastic as his younger brother about publishing Christmas hymns, in spite of Charles's strong emphasis on the theological significance of the Nativity. The Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ in human flesh was a miracle upon which Charles never ceased to dwell, often in unforgettable phraseology: “Being's Source *begins to be*, / And God Himself is *born*”—“Th' Incarnate Deity, / Our God contracted to a span, / Incomprehensibly made man.”<sup>4</sup>

Charles Wesley, far more than his brother John, was a devotee of the Church's Year, and almost all their verse celebrations of its anniversaries were owing to him, including the *Whitsunday Hymns* of 1746—though here a few may in fact have been written by John. Charles's first major collaboration with his brother John, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1739, contained a handful of hymns dedicated to the Incarnation. One of these he commissioned William Strahan of London to reprint for him at Christmas 1743, under the title which it bore in the 1739 vol-

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\*This article was presented as a paper on October 11, 1991, at the Second Annual Meeting of The Charles Wesley Society in Princeton, NJ.

<sup>1</sup>See Frank Baker, “Charles Wesley's Productivity as a Religious Poet,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, XLVII, 1–12 (Feb. 1989), especially pp. 1–2.

<sup>2</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists*, pp. 31–38, by O. A. Beckerlegge; Frank Baker, *Charles Wesley's Verse* (London: Epworth Press, 1988), pp. 102–115.

<sup>3</sup>For some clues to the overlapping of the brothers' writing cf. Baker, *Charles Wesley's Verse*, pp. 105, 128.

<sup>4</sup>*Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1745), Hymns 4 (2:7–8), 5 (1:4–6).

ume, “A Hymn for Christmas Day.”<sup>5</sup> The following Christmas (December 20, 1744) Strahan printed for Charles Wesley a penny collection of *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord*, which again was thumbed to pieces that not a copy now remains. And then at Christmas 1745 Charles commissioned from Strahan a completely independent collection of eighteen hymns under the same title—though Strahan’s ledger refers to it simply as “Hymns for Christmas.” This work contained some of Charles’s best compositions, from which we quoted above, though also (according to his brother John) some of his weakest: the best emphasizing the mystery and the marvel of the Incarnation, the less successful ones the more sentimental side of Christmas.

The 1739 Christmas hymn and its 1743 reprint seem to have represented the larval stage of what Charles Wesley was planning, the penny pamphlet of Christmas hymns the pupal stage. Charles longed for the culmination, the metamorphosis into a creative winged song to the glory of God in Christ. He pulled out almost all the stops for this little book, his third attempt to a personal hymnodic salute to the Incarnation. Two earlier ones had disappeared or were rapidly disappearing. This new one, however, could hardly be classed as the “definitive” collection of his Christmas hymns, for it lacked “Hark, how all the welkin rings,” still on sale in its penny predecessor.<sup>6</sup> Almost from the outset, however, the two-penny *Nativity Hymns* was dogged by misfortune. A very peculiar publishing mishap spread its gravely unsettling results over no fewer than sixteen years, and led to a quarter of the twenty-eight known editions being seriously defective. It may have been—however unlikely this seems—through Charles Wesley’s extreme carelessness in handling his manuscripts for the 1745 *Nativity Hymns*. Certainly he could not match his brother John in meticulous administration, and some momentary lapse may well have brought upon him endless and fruitless labors in trying to stem the flow of faulty editions. Whether by way of atonement or out of true zeal, however, he continued to tinker at the text for forty years. Almost every edition through which it passed saw change of some kind or another. The final edition in his lifetime (1788) was different in dozens of deliberate details from the first—as well as introducing one obvious though short-lived error in Hymn 15, line 19, the omission of “thy” from “Didst thou not in thy person join”—surely due to a faulty printer rather than to a failing Charles.

This was probably Charles’s favorite small collection of hymns, which went through many more editions than any other. Yet in spite of all its great merits, after two centuries it is hardly known outside Methodism, and very little within.

<sup>5</sup>*Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker (London: Epworth Press, 1962), pp. 12–14. Strahan’s ledgers charged for the paper and printing on Dec. 23, 1743, a thousand copies. It used half a small sheet of paper for each copy. No copies have survived.

<sup>6</sup>One of Strahan’s catalogues of the Wesleys’ publications, printed on Dec. 23, 1743, advertised both items together, and the same pairing appeared in Samuel Powell’s Dublin list of 1748. (Frank Baker, *A Union Catalogue of the Publications of John and Charles Wesley* [Durham, NC: The Divinity School, Duke University, 1966], Nos. 94, 737, 741).

We shall attempt to reconstruct the strange story of these four embodiments of Christmas hymns, and dozens of editions, we will look at the constant revision to which Charles subjected the work, and then briefly examine each of the eighteen 1745 hymns in turn.

We find no earlier manuscript or printed forms of these eighteen hymns, any such items apparently having already been incorporated in the doomed tiny 1744 collection. From Charles's standpoint it was a newly created religious work of art. It was typically varied both in language, in imagery, in versification—fourteen different metrical patterns in eighteen hymns, including four rollicking anapaestics. On December 17, 1745, Strahan charged him for a large London edition—three thousand copies.

Charles was apparently anxious to have it appear almost immediately in good numbers in Bristol also in time for Christmas 1745, the date which it bears on a much more elaborate title-page describing it as "The Second Edition." That Christmas, however, both John and Charles Wesley remained together in London for much longer than Charles intended. The reason for the delay may well have been pastoral anxiety over the London Methodist Society, for although Bonnie Prince Charles turned north from his march on London on December 6, the city continued in something near panic, and the Wesleys were also anxious about their brother-in-law, Westley Hall, who was dithering in his loyalty. From whatever combination of circumstances, Charles did not leave London for Bristol until a week into the New Year, John two weeks later still.

Charles seems to have prepared another manuscript, including several revisions of the text, and probably sent it off to Felix Farley for printing in Bristol shortly after he had handed his original text to William Strahan in London. (Our assumption is that this manuscript for Strahan had indeed included all the original eighteen hymns, though it is just possible that the eighteenth was added at the last moment, and therefore not inserted in the manuscript already on its way to Farley.) Nor did Charles add to the Strahan manuscript the revisions later inserted in the second edition for Bristol. However it actually happened, something went sadly astray, and for its first two Christmas appearances in 1745 there was a London edition with eighteen hymns and a Bristol one with seventeen, some of which were slightly revised.

This defective Bristol edition was in turn reproduced by Samuel Powell in Dublin (as the 3rd edition) in 1747, and again in 1751 as the 4th in Dublin. This 17-hymn edition was again reprinted in Bristol as late as 1756 (as the 5th) by the deceased Farley's widow, by Powell again in Dublin (as the 6th) in 1760, and by William Pine in Bristol (as another 6th) in 1761.<sup>7</sup>

Charles had apparently discovered the absence of hymn 18 from the Bristol edition soon after returning there in January 1746. Speedily he sought to set

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<sup>7</sup>See Stemma at the end.

things at least partially straight by reprinting several of Strahan's original copies, which he carried around with him—though he does not seem immediately to have transcribed into these the revisions which he had earlier made in his first Bristol manuscript. Nor was he able to keep track of or to amend the continuing series of faulty 17-hymn reprints, which led a life of their own, though some cross-fertilization seems to have taken place at various points. One of these Strahan copies he almost certainly utilized to secure the printing of a Newcastle edition in 1746 when he spent some months there later this year,<sup>8</sup> probably another for a Cork edition in 1748,<sup>9</sup> and a fully corrected 3rd Bristol edition in 1749, for the housewarming of his bride in their new home in Charles Street, Bristol.<sup>10</sup> The 3rd Bristol edition has completely disappeared, but surely upon this would be based the 4th Bristol edition of 1750, to a copy of which John added his own editorial comments. It was apparently earlier in this same year of 1750 that Charles supervised the preparation of the 10th edition, by Henry Cock in London.

It was not until a decade later, however, as they were nearing Christmas 1761, that John Wesley had any inkling of the publishing tribulations through which Charles had been passing. John had just seen the sixth of the 17-hymn editions, printed by William Pine of Bristol in 1761. On December 26 he wrote somewhat caustically to Charles in Bristol: "Pray tell R. Sheen I am hugely displeas'd at his reprinting the *Nativity Hymns*, and omitting the very best hymn in the Collection, "All glory to God in the sky, etc." I beg they may never more be printed without it. Omit one or two and I will thank you. They are *Namby-Pambical*." (It should be pointed out that Ambrose Philips [1675?–1749] was a minor poet who was satirized as "Namby-Pamby" because of a child's poem of his beginning "Dimply damsel, sweetly smiling.") John Wesley's own copy of the 4th Bristol edition of the *Nativity Hymns* marks the passages which he particularly disliked, in hymns 6, 12, and especially 16. It seems fairly clear that Charles Wesley was not *directly* responsible for this curtailed Bristol 6th edition, but he was at least indirectly responsible for the confusions which had bred it. And it spurred him to even more feverish activity to remove the stain from his reputation.

We, in this very different age, may well be amazed at the numbers—and the numberings—of these editions of which we hear, and by the temerity of a textual

<sup>8</sup>Although Charles alone was surely responsible, this new edition was advertised in the *Newcastle Journal* for Dec. 20, 1746, as to be published "the beginning of next week . . . By the Rev. Mr. John and Charles Wesley." No physical trace of it remains, though there is an oblique reference to the composer of three tunes for it, J. F. Lampe, in a letter by Charles Wesley dated Dec. 11 from Newcastle to Ebenezer Blackwell in London.

<sup>9</sup>Charles had answered an urgent call to lead a revival in Cork in 1748, was befriended by the Cork printer, George Harrison, and apparently left basically Strahan's text for him to reprint. See edition E.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Wesley had married Sarah Gwynne of Garth on April 8, 1749, but he continued with his preaching itinerancy until their new home in Bristol was ready. He preached in the New Room, Bristol, on Sunday, Dec. 24, and on Christmas Day conducted a special service from four to six, the theme being Isa. 9:6—see Hymn 17.

researcher who can demonstrate that severely flawed editions may continue to circulate for a decade and a half after the publication of the original; and also such a researcher is prepared to accept as correctly numbered a purported tenth edition while being unable to point to editions numbered seventh, eighth, or ninth. What was really going on in those days? Is it possible to unravel the convoluted history of the text of Charles Wesley's *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord*? Was the printer's devil employed by Felix Farley and other printers only an innocent if grubby errand-boy? Or were some dark imps secretly concocting this grand confusion of editions, aptly termed Pan-Demonium?

First we must understand that the pamphlets of both John and Charles Wesley—and of other pamphleteers of their day—were subject to horrendous wear and tear, and that instead of being surprised at how many items have completely disappeared we should be surprised at how many have survived, if only in their ones and twos and threes. One thousand copies of Charles Wesley's 1743 *Hymns for Christmas Day* were printed by William Strahan in London: none have survived. Strahan printed fifteen hundred copies in 1744 of the penny *Nativity Hymns*: not one has survived. Of the first edition of the two-penny *Nativity Hymns* of 1745 Strahan prepared no fewer than three thousand copies. In this instance we are more fortunate: eighteen are listed in libraries throughout the world, and probably there are a few others which will eventually surface, perhaps enough to make the total thirty—a survival rate of one per cent. Of no other edition during the lifetime of the Wesleys can we record any more than eight extant copies. We have actual examples of twenty-six editions of the *Nativity Hymns* issued between 1745 and 1791, good evidence of the actual publication of at least two other early editions, and the likelihood that Charles Wesley himself informed Henry Cock in 1750 that the London edition which he was then printing should be described as the tenth—though the probability is that not even Charles himself could have confidently identified its nine supposed predecessors.

The printing ledgers of William Strahan are invaluable in listing several hymn pamphlets which he had printed for Charles Wesley, but of which no copy now remains; on the other hand, not even those ledgers are infallible; some Wesley publications bearing Strahan's imprint fail to appear in his ledgers. The many printers who worked for Wesley in other cities left no such records at all. Yet in spite of the many gaps in our knowledge of the reprints of this rare bundle of eighteen hymns, so zealously preserved by Charles Wesley; in spite of the impossibility of being absolutely sure about the links between each edition and its predecessors, we can deduce with some certainty Charles Wesley's later activities during the forty years that he was revising and reprinting them, constantly striving, not only to keep them in print and free from error, but also to insure that the latest edition was always an improvement on its predecessor, and that the last was incomparably better than the first.

### The Text

The text of the 1745 *Nativity Hymns* underwent a host of minor transformations during Charles Wesley's lifetime. Some changes were normal reactions against poor printing, but most were in response to Charles's revising zeal as new editions were needed. What about the influence of John Wesley? It seems clear that he had very little direct effect on the text, though he did voice some critical comments. John's penciled notes in his copy of the 1750 Bristol edition may possibly have been mentioned occasionally in private conversation or letters, and in some instances may have surfaced years later as "spontaneous" revisions by Charles himself. In 18:5:1 the anapaestic rhythm clearly indicated a metrical fault in "no horrid alarm of war," which John correctly altered to "no horrid *alarum* of war"; this Charles had apparently spotted for himself, and incorporated in the London 1750 edition.<sup>11</sup> In the last hymn (18:1:7), in "Once more to thy creature return," John suggested reading the plural, "Once more to thy *creatures* return," which Charles quickly accepted—in 1755. But in Hymn 10, stanza 1, line 3, Charles had written, "From our fears and sins relieve us," which John's note altered to "release us," rhyming with "Jesus"; this Charles accepted eventually—twenty-five years later, incorporating it into the text from 1777 onwards.

Charles would flatly turn down, however, two other corrections offered by his brother in two other hymns: in 14:4:4, "His nature is sinless perfection below," which John wanted to change to "spotless perfection," and in 15:8:1, where John would discard his pet hatred, "dearest Lord," in favor of "gracious Lord." Nor was Charles ready to expunge even one of the ten stanzas from the "namby-pam-bical" hymns which John had struck through. He had laboriously brought them to birth, and he felt unable to sacrifice them, even on the altar of his older brother's taste, however discerning. It seems likely, however, that John's criticism did arouse Charles to a more assiduous polishing than might otherwise have been given. This detailed revision continued through forty fruitful years, though the differences were in nuance rather than in radical innovation.

All eighteen hymns underwent change. More than fifty lines were altered, usually in small points, but often undergoing major revision—altogether some ten percent of the book. Thirty-four lines were demonstrably different in 1788 (the year of Charles Wesley's death) from the urgency of their first creation in 1745. One incidental result of this host of variants and their ramifications is that it is possible, albeit with some hesitancy on occasion, to construct a relatively reliable stemma of the known editions, which itself offers its own graphic demonstration of the spread of editions across the British Isles and even across the Atlantic to Philadelphia.

<sup>11</sup>The 1748 Cork(?) edition [E] inserts "u" in the manuscript within "alarm"; it is difficult to accept that Charles himself was responsible for the makeshift alteration in the 1750 Bristol edition [G], "No horrid alarm of dread war."

Some of the normal touching up of spelling and even of vocabulary may well have been the modernizing work of printers or copy-editors, such as the alteration of “hath” to “has,” “thine” to “thy,” or “quire” to “choir.”<sup>12</sup> Other verbal changes, however, were turning the clock backward rather than forward, surely to make the lines more euphonious, as in changing “swaths” to “swathes,” “burden” to “burthen,” and especially “chant” to “chaunt.”<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly the reason that John Wesley wished to remove stanza 3 from Hymn 12 was the unfamiliar dialect word “cratch”—“a rack or crib to hold fodder,” otherwise a manger; eventually in 1761 Charles forsook this for a word which completely altered his original meaning—“church”: “Cast we off our needless fear,/Boldly to his *church* draw nigh.”<sup>14</sup>

Eventually Charles Wesley also came to terms with one of his major metrical problems, the presentation of the Holy Spirit in one syllable, truncated to “Sp’rit.” This he used regularly in “That we his Sp’rit may gain” (9:3:6) from 1745 until 1777, when he left his metrically educated congregations to fend for themselves in “That we his Spirit may gain.”

Many improvements were quite minor, some even doubtful. Others come as sudden revelations. The collection opens with the angel appearing to the shepherds:

Ye simple men of heart sincere,  
Shepherds who watch your flocks by night,  
Start not to see an angel near,  
Nor tremble at this glorious light.

It was not until 1782, that the angel himself was revealed as the source of the radiance, “the glory of the Lord” concentrated in the messenger: “*this* glorious light” (1:1:4) was transformed to “*his* glorious light.” One of Wesley’s most pleasing changes appeared in the accident-prone second edition. Strahan’s first and only edition read: “Infant of days he here became,/And bore the *loved* Immanuel’s Name.” This remained the text for four later editions, apparently based mainly on the copy of Strahan carried about by Charles Wesley. Eventually, however, Charles rescued from the 17-hymn editions his original 1745 revision, “the *mild* Immanuel’s Name”—a conscious return to the euphonious adjective employed in his first Christmas hymn, “Hark how all the welkin rings,” as part of the angel’s song, “Peace on earth, and mercy mild,” and in his own heralding of the Savior’s self-emptying purpose:

Mild he lays his glory by,  
Born—that man no more may die,  
Born—to raise the sons of earth,  
Born—to give them second birth.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>6:4:7; 10:2:5,7; 12:4:3.

<sup>13</sup>“Wrapped in swathes th’immortal Stranger” (3:5:1, 1772); “Every hour burthened soul release” (11:2:6, 1770); “Humbly chaunt Immanuel’s name” (12:8:2 in [H], 1750).

<sup>14</sup>This may have been the somewhat despairing acceptance of a copy-editor’s (R. Sheen’s ?) suggestion in the defective 1761 Bristol edition [M], 12:3:2.

The edition which may be regarded as the standard line divider between the old and the new text was that which brought a close to thirteen variously numbered editions from five different cities, an end also to the six 17-hymn editions, and the beginning of Charles's most careful attempts to appease his brother John. This edition, Bristol, Pine, 1762, reveals the introduction of more variants than most, though not all are of major importance. Pine 1761 [M] had rescued "the mild Immanuel's Name" from Wesley's 1745 revisions; N marks a similar rescue: "thine all-*restoring* merit" instead of "all-redeeming merit"—a prayer for individual salvation altered to search for general restoration.<sup>16</sup> Another change was quite new, the preference of a more active ending: "Come, thou desire of nations, come, / And take us all to God" becomes: "And take us *up* to God!"<sup>17</sup> Another subtle revision occurs when "Bring peace to us poor worms of earth, / And take us *up* to God!" is altered to "Bring peace to us poor worms *on* earth."<sup>18</sup>

For both Wesley brothers Robert Hawes was a favorite London printer, and one of the last to print for them before they were able to set up their own publishing house there. (It was Hawes who economized in the production of the *Nativity Hymns* by removing the running headlines, and thus reducing the number of pages from 24 to 23.) Charles handed over three editions of the *Nativity Hymns* to Hawes in the 1770s, and each of them displayed tasteful "modern" printing, and revealed that Charles Wesley was becoming if anything more subtle about his punctuation and the careful articulation of his verse. If we seek—as we surely must—to discover what Charles really sought in the structure of his punctuation, we must be happy to find the sensitive response of little-known printers like Hawes and the Paramores. Another subtle and faintly theological revision took place in 15:5:1–6.

In my weak flesh appear,  
 O God, be manifested here,  
     Peace, righteousness, and joy:  
 Thy kingdom, Lord, set up within  
 My faithful heart; and all sin  
     The devil's works destroy.

This faithfully reproduced the running on of the sense between lines 4 and 5, which was first made clear in Pine's edition of 1762; Hawes's first edition (*ca.* 1774) also printed for the first time a deliberately abridged closing line, "The devil's *work* [singular] destroy."

Other revisions appear in this same hymn. Stanza 6 dealt with the hope of Christian perfection at the Second Coming of Christ.

<sup>15</sup>Hymn 5:2:6. Cf. *Representative Verse*, pp. 8–9.

<sup>16</sup>11:3:5.

<sup>17</sup>9:5:8.

<sup>18</sup>15:3:1–3.

I long thy coming to confess,  
The mystic power of godliness,  
The life divine to prove:  
The fulness of thy life to know,  
Redeemed from all my sins below,  
And perfected in love. (15:6:1–6)

This was apparently strengthened by the change from “all my *sins* below” (in all the 17-hymn editions) to “all my *sin* below,” but in preparing Pine’s 1762 edition Wesley returned to its original “sins,” and retained this to the end. In stanza 7 his original had read:

O Christ, my hope, make known *in me*  
The great, the glorious mystery,  
The hidden life impart:

A decade later, however, in Hawes’s first edition, Charles altered the opening line to read “make known *to me*,” and retained this more modest expectation to the end (15:7:1). In the last stanza of the following edition came an adventurous experimental change of more doubtful relevance. The previous edition read:

Come quickly, dearest Lord, that I  
May own, though antichrist deny,  
Thy incarnation’s power,  
May cry, a witness to my Lord,  
“Come in my flesh is Christ the Word,  
“And I can sin no more.” (15:8:1–6)

This remained in 1777 and 1778, but from 1782 to the end the perilous semicolon was dropped. Whether this was an infelicity of Charles or of one of his copy-editors, or a printer’s error, remains uncertain.

Far more acceptable, but still somewhat startling, was the transformation brought about by the punctuation and alteration of a word in the closing stanza of hymn 17 on the Magi’s search for Christ. Until Pine’s 1770 edition it began thus:

Lord, *we* receive the grace and thee,  
With joy unspeakable receive, . . . (17:10:1–4)

In 1772 this was subtly transformed by a run-on line to an ascending double gift:

Lord, we receive thy grace, and thee  
With joy unspeakable receive,  
And rise thine open face to see,  
And one with God for ever live.

John Wesley’s favorite nativity hymn, as we have seen, was No. 18, “All glory to God in the sky.” In this Charles introduced very few revisions. There was John’s own suggestion of praying for Christ’s return to his creatures rather than

to his creature (18:1:7); a miscalculated alteration claiming that “heaven was open on earth” (rather than “opened”), which was restored after lasting for over a decade (18:2:4); a couple of corrected printing errors (“nation” for “nations” [stz. 3] and “alarm” for “alarum” [stz. 5]; and the removal from 1750 onwards of the italics in, “The world was *united* to bless” [18:2:6]).

So far we have emphasized the lengthy and careful processing of Charles Wesley’s revisions. It is important also to visualize his collection as a collection, with its varying themes and versification and pace, and an occasional emphasis upon some special points. First, perhaps, we should mention that the *Nativity Hymns* remained on continuous sale at the Methodist Book-Room until John Wesley’s death in 1791, when the inventory showed on hand a total of 1200 copies, as well as 450 “in sheets.”<sup>19</sup>

### The Hymns of the Collection

**No. 1.** The first hymn in the collection, “Ye simple men of heart sincere,” is a simple paraphrase of the herald angels addressing the shepherds, four verses in a steady iambic long meter, 8.8.8.8. **No. 2.** The second, “Ye heavenly choir,” announces that we must echo the angels’ song, in two stanzas of lilting anapaestics, 5.5.5.5.6.5.6.5. **No. 3.** “Angels speak, let men give ear,” is set to music by in Charles Wesley’s *Hymns on the Great Festivals* (1746, see *A Union Catalogue of the Publications of John and Charles Wesley*, No. 124), with rather florid tunes by Handel’s friend, John Frederick Lampe (1703?–1751), entitled “The Shepherd’s Song.” It is in an unusual staccato trochaic metre, 8.3.3.6, whose ten stanzas are presented by *Hymns on the Great Festivals* in five pairs, of which the last is:

9. Sing we with the host of heaven,  
Reconciled  
By a child  
Who to us is given.
10. Glory be to God the giver,  
Peace and love  
From above  
Reign on earth for ever.

The emphasis of **No. 4**, “Glory be to God on high,” is the self-emptying of Christ, the *kenosis* (Phil. 2:7), expressed in a rich assortment of paradoxes in mixed iambic and trochaic verse (7.6.7.6.7.7.7.6):

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<sup>19</sup>From 1793 onwards it was combined with No. 176 in *A Union Catalogue of the Publications of John and Charles Wesley*, whose joint title appeared from 1792 as *A Collection of Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord; and New Year’s Day*. This continued in print until 1816.

2. Him the angels all adored,  
    Their maker and their king:  
Tidings of their humbled Lord  
    They now to mortals bring:  
Emptied of his majesty,  
    Of his dazzling glories shorn,  
Being's source *begins to be*,  
    And God himself is BORN.
3. See th'eternal Son of God  
    A mortal son of man,  
Dwelling in an earthly clod  
    Whom heaven cannot contain!  
Stand amazed, ye heavens, at this!  
    See the Lord of earth and skies!  
Humbled to the dust he is,  
    And in a manger lies!

No. 5, "Let earth and heaven combine," echoes the same marvel of Immanuel, the Hebrew for "God with us," which is Wesley's constant awed refrain noted earlier, and here in the second stanza of this iambic metre (6.6.6.6.88):

1. He laid his glory by,  
    He wrapped him in our clay,  
Unmarked by human eye  
    The latent Godhead lay;  
Infant of days he here became,  
    And bore the mild Immanuel's name.

In the opening paragraph of this essay we quoted three of the unforgettable opening lines of this hymn, but perhaps it is well to remember that its central phrase is a fruitful borrowing from George Herbert's "The Pulley":

    When God at first made man,  
    Having a glasse of blessings standing by;  
Let us (said he) poure on him all we can:  
Let the worlds riches, which dispersed lie,  
    Contract into a span.

About Hymn No. 6, "Join all ye joyful nations," John Wesley was doubtful. Its unusual iambic verse-form (7.7.4. 4.7.7.7.4 4.7) was apparently originated by Charles himself (and hardly ever imitated), in his robust celebration of Christian martyrs, "Head of thy Church Triumphant." For this J. F. Lampe wrote a tune in *Hymns on the Great Festivals* (No. 20), which has continued in the 1983 British *Hymns and Psalms* (No. 818, with Lampe's tune named DYING STEPHEN). Although John Wesley wished to discard 3 and 4 of the six stanzas of "Join all ye joyful nations," on a more generous day he would probably have raised no more quibble than he did with the first, of which the closing lines may well furnish a worthy title:

1. Join all ye joyful nations  
Th'acclaiming hosts of heaven!  
This happy morn  
A child is born,  
To us a Son is given;  
The messenger and token  
Of God's eternal favour,  
God hath sent down  
To us his Son,  
An universal Saviour.

Hymn **No. 7**, "All glory to God, and peace upon earth," is another lilting anapaestic (5.5.5.5.6.5.6.5) emphasizing the fulfillment of biblical promises. The second of five stanzas rejoices thus:

2. Then let us behold Messias the Lord,  
By prophets foretold, by angels adored;  
Our God's incarnation with angels proclaim,  
And publish salvation in Jesu's name.

Also in joyful iambic-anapaestic **No. 8** (5 5. 5 11) tells in eight varied images the old story of God's reconciliation with sinful man.

1. Away with our fears!  
The Godhead appears  
In Christ reconciled,  
The Father of mercies in Jesus the child. . . .
4. The Ancient of days  
To redeem a lost race,  
From his glory comes down  
Self-humbled to carry us up to a crown.
5. Made flesh for our sake,  
That we might partake  
The nature divine,  
And again in his image, his holiness shine.

In **No. 9**, "Father, our hearts we lift," Charles moves to a double short meter (6.6.8.6.6.6.8.6), a simple universal song of praise for the peace and love brought by "the previous gift of thine incarnate Son":

4. | His kingdom from above  
He doth to us impart,  
And pure benevolence and love  
O'erflow with faithful heart:  
Changed in a moment, we  
The sweet attraction find,  
With open arms of charity  
Embracing all mankind.

The two trochaic stanzas of **No. 10** (8.7.8.7.8.7.8.7) form one of the best known prayers for the universal birth of the Savior, and one of the least subject to revision, the only major change being “release us” for “relieve us” in 1777.

1. Come, thou long expected Jesus,  
Born to set thy people free,  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in thee:  
Israel's strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth thou art,  
Dear desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.
2. Born thy people to deliver,  
Born a child and yet a king,  
Born to reign in us for ever,  
Now thy gracious kingdom bring:  
By thy own eternal spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone,  
By thy all-sufficient merit  
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

**No. 11**, “Light of those whose dreary dwelling,” in exactly the same trochaic verse as the previous one, forms a companion piece, a prayer for the spread of the gospel:

2:5–6 Come, thou universal Saviour,  
Come, and bring the gospel grace.

**No. 12**, “Sing, ye ransomed nations, sing, / Praises to our new-born King,” is a rapidly flowing hymn in nine relatively straightforward trochaic verses (7 7.7 7) intended for unsophisticated congregational song:

6. Will his majesty disdain  
The poor shepherd's simple strain?  
No; for Israel's Shepherd, he  
Loves their artless melody.

**No. 13** is addressed to the angels, “Let angels and archangels sing,” in his favorite six-eight iambic meter (8.8.8.8.88):

3. Angels, behold that infant's face,  
With rapt'rous awe the Godhead own:  
'Tis all your heaven on him to gaze,  
And cast your crowns before his throne;  
Tho' now he on his footstool lies,  
Ye know he built both earth and skies.

The awesome search for Christian perfection in God is the crowning theme of **No. 14**, “O astonishing grace,” in a breathless iambic-anapaestic measure (5 5.5 11), closing with a memorable epigram:

4.     And shall we not hope,  
        After God to wake up,  
        His nature to know?  
        His nature is sinless perfection below.
5.     To this heavenly prize  
        By faith let us rise,  
        To his image ascend,  
        Apprehended of God, let us God apprehend.

**No. 15**, “All-wise, all-good, almighty Lord,” is more steadily and theologically meditative, in eight stanzas of another favorite iambic metre (8 8.6.8 8.6). Again the *kenosis* of Phil. 2:7 is the predominant theme, but Wesley also explores the Being of God:

4.     Didst thou not in thy person join  
        The natures human and divine,  
        That God and man might be  
        Henceforth inseparably one?  
        Haste then, and make thy nature known  
        Incarnated in me.

We come now to the most questionable of Charles Wesley’s *Nativity Hymns*, **No. 16**, “O mercy divine,” fifteen fully rhymed iambic-anapaestic stanzas (5 5 11). With such severely limited material Charles was doubtless tempting providence, but he was nothing if not dangerously inventive in his use of verse. To put the author of “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild” to the test we will jettison some of the continuity, and quote only the seven verses rejected by John:

4.     Our God, ever blest,  
        With oxen doth rest,  
        Is nursed by his creature, and hangs at the breast.
5.     So heavenly-mild  
        His innocence smiled,  
        No wonder the mother should worship the child.
6.     The angels, she knew  
        Had worshipped him too,  
        And still thy confess adoration is due. . . .
10.    The wise men adore,  
        And bring him their store,  
        The rich are permitted to follow the poor.
11.    To the inn they repair  
        To see the young heir:  
        The inn is a palace; for Jesus is there. . . .

13. Like him would I be,  
My Master I see  
In a stable!—a stable shall satisfy me.
14. With him I reside:  
The manger shall hide  
Mine honour; the manger shall bury my pride.

No. 17 follows the travels of the Magi in the search of the baby, “Where is the holy, heaven-born child?” There are ten long-meter stanzas (8.8.8.8) following the narrative of their study and inquiry step by step, until the staccato of discovery:

7. See there! The new-born Saviour see,  
By faith discern the great I AM;  
'Tis he! The eternal God! 'tis he  
That bears the mild Immanuel's name.

Wesley reminds us of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6:

8. The Prince of peace on earth is found,  
The Child is born, the Son is given,  
Tell it to all the nations round,  
Jehovah is come down from heaven.

The last, No. 18, “All glory to God in the sky,” a much more sinewy anaapaestic (8.8.8.8.8.8.8.8), was claimed by John as indubitably the best of this collection. This was the only one which he welcomed into his classical 1780 *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists*, No. 211, in the section, “For Believers Rejoicing.” This was the hymn he began to sing, after a restless night, on March 1, 1791, his last full day on earth. The dying John Wesley could not quite struggle to the end of the five long stanzas, but we will conclude, in full, with this tribute to his brother and his Lord:

1. All glory to God in the sky,  
And peace upon earth be restored!  
O Jesus, exalted on high,  
Appear, our omnipotent Lord!  
Who meanly in Bethlehem born,  
Didst stoop to redeem a lost race,  
Once more to thy creatures return,  
And reign in thy kingdom of grace.
2. When thou in our flesh didst appear  
All nature acknowledged thy birth;  
Arose the acceptable year,  
And heaven was open on earth;  
Receiving its Lord from above,  
The world was united to bless  
The giver of concord and love,  
The prince and the author of peace.

3. O wouldst thou again be made known,  
    Again in thy Spirit descend,  
And set up in each of thine own  
    A kingdom that never shall end.  
Thou only art able to bless,  
    And make the glad nation obey,  
And bid the dire enmity cease,  
    And bow the whole world to thy sway.
4. Come then to thy servants again,  
    Who long thy appearing to know;  
Thy quiet and peaceable reign  
    In mercy establish below;  
All sorrow before thee shall fly,  
    And anger and hatred be o'er,  
And envy and malice shall die,  
    And discord afflict us no more.
5. No horrid alarum of war  
    Shall break our eternal repose,  
No sound of the trumpet is there,  
    Where Jesus's Spirit o'erflows:  
Appeased by the charms of thy grace,  
    We all shall in amity join,  
And kindly each other embrace,  
    And love with a passion like thine.

*Hymns for the Nativity: Stemma*

[\* = 17 hymns]

A	London	[Strahan]	1745	-----					
B*	2	Bristol	Farley	1745	-----				
C	Newcastle	Gooding	1746	[no known copy]		C			
D*	3	Dublin	Powell	1747	-----				
E	[Cork?	Harrison?	1748?	-----		E			
F	3?	Bristol	Farley	1749	[no known copy]		F		
G	4	Bristol	Farley	1750	-----		G		
H	10	London	Cock	1750	-----			H	
I*	4	Dublin	Powell	1751	-----				
J	11	London	Foundry	1755	-----			J	
K*	5	Bristol	Farley	1756	-----				K
L*	6	Dublin	Powell	1760	-----				
M*	6	Bristol	Pine	1761	-----				M
N	Bristol	Pine	1762	-----				N	
O	Bristol	Pine	1764	-----				O	
P	Bristol	Pine	1766	-----				P	
Q	Bristol	Pine	1768	-----				Q	
R	Philadelphia	Dunlap	1769	-----					R
S	Bristol	Pine	1770	-----				S	
T	Bristol	Pine	1772	-----				T	
U	London	Hawes	[ca. 1774]	-----				U	
V	London	Hawes	1777	-----				V	
W	London	Hawes	1778	-----				W	
X	London	Paramore	1782	-----				X	
Y	London	Paramore	1784	-----				Y	
Z	London	Paramore	1787	-----				Z	
2A	London	New Chapel	1788	-----					2A
2B	London	Paramore	1791	-----					2B

*N.B.* The stemma provides a kind of genealogical table for multiple editions of works. The vertical lines indicate *probable*, though at times uncertain, links between editions. The horizontal lines indicate the more certain links between them. Clues to links between editions are also provided by repeated revisions and (more convincing still) repeated errors. Often, as here, the numbering of the editions is flimsy evidence, sometimes misleading, because the Wesleys used so many printing centers. Notable revisions are recorded in the descriptions of most of the editions. In addition to the two conjectural editions noted (C and F), there may well have been others.



# A Consideration of the Undated *Hymns for Children*\*

E. Ann Buckroyd

## Introduction

Detective stories set in bygone periods are always popular and the tale to be unfolded is just that—a mystery with clues worthy to tax the intuition of Sherlock Holmes, or the “little grey cells” of Hercule Poirot. There is one difference: this story is true, it is not fiction.

From the days in Georgia in the late 1730’s John and Charles Wesley produced a variety of written materials for children. Their publications included hymns for specific occasions and collections of a more general nature. The earliest of the latter type of work appears to be an undated book entitled *Hymns for Children*. It is a slender volume of twelve pages with no cover or title page, and the details of author, publisher, date and place of publication are all missing.

Unlike most Wesley publications, this book is not well documented, and herein lies the mystery. Who compiled this small book for children, and why? The prime “suspects” are the Wesley brothers: John and Charles.

Before examining the evidence, the background to children’s hymnody at this period needs to be considered.

## *Background*

On the whole the hymns most clearly remembered by adults are the ones they learned as children. This is partly because as children the memory is at its most retentive power but also because most children respond in a positive way to music. Combine these two facts and the result should be a highly successful method of teaching. Modern educators have made good use of this knowledge. In the eighteenth century the Moravians had already taken advantage of this educational technique. When John Wesley visited them in Germany in 1738, he recorded in his Journal details of life at their center of Herrnhut, including Point 12 of their Consultation which contains these words:

Our little children we instruct chiefly by hymns; whereby we find the most important truths most successfully insinuated into their minds.”<sup>1</sup>

John Wesley did not comment on this statement, but obviously thought it worth noting.

As hymnody can be such an effective teaching medium, it might be expected that some special provision would have been made for children within the music of the Christian community. In fact, there is little evidence of hymns being written for children until the seventeenth century. Following the Protestant

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\*This article was presented as a paper on July 24, 1993, at the Fourth Annual Meeting of The Charles Wesley Society in Cambridge, UK.

<sup>1</sup>John Wesley, *Works*, 1:145.