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S T Kimbrough, Jr.
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Charles A. Green
Assistant Editor

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Charles Wesley as Correspondent

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Charles Wesley in Stone

Oliver A. Beckerlegge

In these days of cremation, when headstones, if any, give little room for a message, it is perhaps difficult to realize the extent to which two hundred years ago people left records of their loved ones engraved on their last resting place. For the stone not only gave biographical details, but very often a message to the passer-by. And particularly in the years from roughly 1800–1850 that message was very often expressed in verse, whether quoted or original and, succeeding as it did the great evangelical revival of the previous century, by no means yet a spent force, that verse very often, in Britain at any rate, was the verse of Charles Wesley. For people who had found Christ through the preaching of the Wesleys and their collaborators, and who had sung of their conversion, their hopes and fears, their temptations and triumphs, their debt to their Lord and Savior, in the words of Charles Wesley and the translations of Brother John, nothing was more natural than that they should express the faith in which they had not only lived and died, in those same words.

They had expressed that faith not infrequently in the words of Watts and other early hymn writers, but the model *par excellence* was Charles Wesley. The source, of course, was John's *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780), and that included one hymn of his elder brother Samuel. Samuel's best known hymn, found in some British hymnbooks as late as in the twentieth century, was "The morning flowers display their sweets"¹—"Occasioned by the Death of a Young Lady." Lines from that hymn are by no means uncommon on gravestones:

Let sickness blast, let death devour,
If heaven must recompense our pain,
Perish the grass and fade the flower
If firm the Word of God remain.

These lines are found on the grave of Elizabeth Shipley, 1873, in York Cemetery.² Also in York Cemetery are found the following lines:

Nipped by the wind's unkindly blast,³
Safe from diseases and decline.

¹ First published in *Miscellaneous Poems, published by several hands* (np: David Lewis, 1724), pp. 83–4, with the title "On the 6th and 8th Verses of the 40th Chapter of Isaiah, occasioned by the Death of a Young Lady;" later published in Samuel Wesley's *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: E. Say, 1736), pp. 47–8. The quatrain quoted here is original stanza 6.

² This author quotes the date, name, and place of the incidence of the quotations as indications of their genuineness. Too often books on epitaphs afford nothing that will give verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative.

³ *Ibid.*, 2:1 and 5:4.

They appear on the grave of John William Hick, 1880, and in Cornwall at various places, often on the graves of young people between 1860 and 1867. At the beginning of the nineteenth century (1809–1824) six children of the Lyth family, all of whom died in infancy, were buried in St. Laurence’s Churchyard, York, and their headstone bore another stanza from the same hymn:

Yet these, arising from the tomb,
With luster brighter far shall shine,
Revived with ever during bloom,
Safe from disease and decline.

That same stanza is also found in Cornwall in Camborne Centenary burial ground on the graves of the brothers Richard and Thomas Henry James, who died in 1864 at ages seventeen and five years respectively. It is found as well in Bedford, E. Yorks on the gravestones of James Dunn (1810) and three infants and in Penmon Priory, Anglesey on the gravestones of four children of James and Esther Adamas (1837–1850). The Methodists of those days knew their hymnbooks, and they knew how to choose appropriate lines for the epitaphs of their dead.

It has been suggested more than once, and perhaps with a measure of truth, that Charles Wesley was obsessed by death, that there was a melancholy strain in his makeup. On the other hand, his hymns on death are full of expressions of Christian joy. “Rejoice for a brother deceased” is the best known opening line and sums up his attitude. Hence, quotations from this hymn are widely found, such as:

Our brother the haven hath gained,⁴
Outflying the tempest and wind,
His rest he hath sooner obtained,
And left his companions behind.

Adapted to “our sister . . .”, it is found in Bryher, Scilly Isles (Rebecca Jenkin, 1855) and in St. Neot, Cornwall (Margaret Rundle, 1877).

Other lines from the same hymn were also popular:

The voyage of life’s at an end,⁵
The mortal affliction is past,
The age that in heaven they spend
For ever and ever shall last.

They are found as late as 1898 at Langton Matravers, Dorset (William Saunders) and even later in 1915 in York Cemetery (Sarah Watson), in Bunbury, Cheshire (Joseph Hughes, 1849), in the remote Tosside, W. Yorks (Margery Whipp, 1864), in Warleggan, Cornwall (Mary Ann Knight, 1889), and in Hemingbrough, E.

⁴ First four lines of stanza 2: *Funeral Hymns* [London: Strahan, 1746], p. 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:5–8.

Yorks (Mary Annelley, 1861). Charles Wesley stressed this joy whether he was celebrating the death of an old soldier of the Cross or an infant:

Angels rejoice! a child is born⁶
Into your happier world above;
Let poor short-sighted mortals mourn,
While on the wings of heaving love
An everlasting spirit flies
To claim his kindred in the skies.

These lines appear on the grave of a sixteen-month-old James Moor in St. Denys' Churchyard, York in 1823.

Perhaps the most notorious hymn welcoming death is "Ah lovely appearance of death," though I have never come across the first lines on a headstone. Later lines, however, are far from uncommon, the most popular being:

This languishing head is at rest,⁷
Its thinking and aching are o'er;
This quiet, immovable breast
Is heaved by affliction no more.

This is found up and down England: in York Cemetery and in neighboring villages, comparatively late in the nineteenth century (sometimes with the next four lines); in St. Breward, Cornwall, dated to "Their languishing heads . . .," on the headstone of Richard and Jane Hambley in 1876, and Jane Tippett (1850) in Padstow; on the grave of Catherine Legg (1851), aged twenty-two, in St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly, and many others.

This theme of joy arising out of release from the troubles and pains of this life, as well as out of the meeting with Christ, is frequently found. Thus one finds:

The winter of trouble is past,⁸
The storms of affliction are o'er;
Her struggle is ended at last,
And sorrow and death are no more.

These lines from "Give glory to Jesus our Head" are found in Bryher (Mary Weber, 1851), Minster Lovel, Oxon. (Mary Ann Cross, 1903), Amlwch, Anglesey (Daniel McLean, 1903), and in the Congregational Churchyard at Galow, Derbys (William Limb, 1880).

⁶ *Funeral Hymns* (London: [Strahan], 1759), p. 41: stanza 1 of Part 5 of Hymn 24.

⁷ *Funeral Hymns* [1746], p. 7: 4:1-4 of Hymn 5.

⁸ *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1749), 2:215: 1:4-8 of Hymn 19 [Hymns for Widows]; henceforth cited as *HSP* (1749) followed by volume and page numbers.

Another hymn with the same dual theme of release from the pains of earth and delight in the joys of heaven is “Blessing, honor, thanks, and praise.” Here are some chosen lines from it:

Lo, the prisoner is released,⁹
 Lightened of her fleshly load,
 Where the weary are at rest,
 She is gathered unto God!

(Mary Oliver, 1861, and adapted, John Hawken, 1888), found at Gerrans and St. Breward, both in Cornwall. Others have chosen the last lines of that hymn:

Lo, the world bewail their dead,¹⁰
 Fondly of their loss complain,
 Brother, friend, by Jesus freed,
 Death to thee is greater gain.

These lines appear on the grave of Elias Maidment (1856) at Tarrant Rushton, Dorset.

Other hymns are of a questioning nature, though they turn from apparent doubt to an expression of faith and trust:

Waked by the trumpet’s sound,¹¹
 I from my grave shall rise,
 And see the Judge with glory crowned,
 And see the flaming skies.

These lines are from “And am I born to die?” are found on the grave of Thomas Roberts (1837) at Ruan Laniorne, Cornwall.

One of the most frequently chosen hymns of this type is “Shrinking from the cold hand of death” with the following stanza often used:

Numbered among thy people, I¹²
 Expect with joy Thy face to see;
 Because Thou didst for sinners die,
 Jesus, in death remember me.

A late example is on the grave of Susan Grigg (1906) at Edgcumbe, Cornwall. Others are for Alice Clark (1858) in York Cemetery, Elizabeth Welburn (1848) in Brandesburton, E. Yorks.

⁹*Hymns and Sacred Poems* (Bristol: Farley, 1742), p. 129: 2:1–4 of “Another” [A Funeral Hymn]. Cited henceforth as *HSP* (1742).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 5:1–4. The original first line reads: “Let the world bewail their dead.”

¹¹*Hymns for Children* (Bristol: Farley, 1763), p. 52: 1:1–4 of Hymn 59.

¹²*Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1762), 1:33: 5–8 of the eight lines of Hymn 102. In the original line 8 reads: “Thou wilt in death remember me.” Cited henceforth as *Scripture Hymns* (1762) followed by volume and page numbers.

A similar hymn is:

Pass a few swiftly fleeting years,¹³
And all that now in bodies live
Shall quit like me the vale of tears,
Their righteous sentence to receive.

This quatrain is found in St. Just in Roseland, Cornwall (Joseph Dash, 1841, and William Hick, 1827) together with the second stanza); Bunbury, Cheshire (Thomas Davenport, 1828); Perranzabuloe, Cornwall (Joanna Lowry, 1889); and St. Breward (William Whiteing, 1848).

The conjunction of joy at the safe arrival in the Lord's presence with relief from the pains of earth is expressed in these words:

Hark, a voice divides the sky,¹⁴
Happy are the faithful dead;
In the Lord who sweetly die,
They from all their toils are freed.

(Notice the contrast in lines 2 and four.) The first half stanza was favored by Ann Langdon Tregunna (1883) in Veryan, Cornwall, the whole stanza by Mary Dufton (1853 in York Cemetery, and the second couplet on the grave of Elizabeth Jenkin (1859) at St. Agnes, Cornwall.

A half stanza from this hymn appears on the grave of Mary Toothill (1874) at St. Margaret's Church, Whitnash, Warwicks:

Justified through faith alone,¹⁵
Here she knew her sins forgiven,
Here she laid her burden down,
Hallowed and made meet for heaven.

Yet another half stanza is found on the grave of William and Elizabeth Slater (1859) in York Cemetery:

Jesus smiles and says, "Well done,"¹⁶
Good and faithful servant thou,
Enter and receive thy crown,
Reign with me triumphant now.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1–4 of eight lines of Hymn 387, p. 124. Line 3 in the original reads: "Shall quit, like me, the vale of tears."

¹⁴ *HSP* (1742), p. 130: 1:1–4 of "Another" [A Funeral Hymn]. Line 1 of the original reads: "Hark! A voice divides the sky!"

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:5–8. The pronoun "she" in lines 2 and 3 = "they" and "meet" in line 4 = "fit" in the original text.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4:5–8.

It is also found in Acomb, York, as late as 1927 on the grave of Ann Elizabeth Martin and in Holsworth, Devon (George G. Petherick, 1880).

Another favorite for headstones was one or other of the quatrains from “Again we lift our voice,” particularly the second stanza:

Our friend has gone before¹⁷
To that celestial shore;
She hath left her mates behind,
She hath all the storms outrode,
Found the rest we toil to find,
Landed in the arms of God.

These lines were chosen for Sally Spargo (1862) in Centenary Chapel, Camborne, for Richard Opie (1888) in Stithians Hendra Methodist churchyard, Cornwall, and for George Long (1839) in Ripley, Yorks.

A later stanza of the same poem was used for Elizabeth Spavin (1871) in Haxby, York; for John Venning (1862) at Altarnun, Cornwall; for Amos Venning (1882) at Tregeare, near Launceston, Cornwall; and for Edith Mary Whale (1902) at Tregadillet, Cornwall:

Thou in thy youthful prime¹⁸
Hast leaped the bounds of time;
Suddenly from earth releast,
Lo! we now rejoice for thee,
Taken to an early rest,
Caught into eternity.

On the headstone of Elizabeth Nicholls (1811) at Altarnun Parish Church the hymn “Give glory to Jesus our Head” is represented by the stanza:

The soul has o’ertaken her mate,¹⁹
And caught him again in the sky,
Advanced to her happy estate,
And pleasure that never shall die;
Where glorified spirits by sight
Converse in their holy abode,
As stars in the firmament birght,
And pure as the angels of God.

So far as the hymns quoted have all been taken from the 1780 *Collection* and many of them are found in the *Pocket Hymnbook* (New York, 1786), in the Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnbook of 1849, and no doubt in many others of

¹⁷ *HSP* (1749), 2:74: stanza 2 of Hymn 11, “On the Death of Samuel Hitchens.” Lines 3 and 4 of the original read: “He hath left his mates behind, / He hath all these storms outrode.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:75; stanza 5.

¹⁹ *HSP* (1749), 2:215: stanza 2 of Hymn 19, “On the death of a Widow.”

that period. These books contain a few hymns that did not appear in the 1780 *Collection*, but which, having earlier appeared in various hymn pamphlets of Charles Wesley, were known to British Methodists, and others, and so were used as epitaphs. One such is “And let this feeble body fail,” with its half-stanza:

O what are all our sufferings here,²⁰
 If, Lord, Thou count me meet
 With that enraptured host t’appear
 And worship at thy feet.

This is found at Aldborough, Yorks (Thomas and Mary Medley, 1878), at Great Malvern, Worcester (James Cann, 1844), at Altarnun (Robert Martin, 1884); with the second half of the stanza in York Cemetery (William Wilson, 1851), and, very much altered, at Ashwell, Herts (Louisa Fuller, 1865).

Another hymn not included in the 1780 *Collection* is:

Happy soul, thy days are ended,²¹
 All thy mourning days below;
 Go, by angel-guards attended,
 To the sight of Jesus go.

This stanza was used for Elizabeth Foster (1872) at Dunnington, York; for Ann Kay (1854) at Long Marston, York; for Nicholoas Gall (1788, an early use) at St. Clement’s Truro, and William Henry Bradley (1825) at St. Mary’s Truro; and for Francis Colwell (1890) at Altarnun Wesley Chapel. Outside Cornwall it is to be found at Stoke on Trent Parish Church for Henrietta Hulme (1877); at St. James’s, Taunton for Grace Ashton (1876); and (two lines only) for James Rhodes (1836) at Carver Street Methodist Chapel, Sheffield.

When wanting to choose some words to express the faith in which a believer had died and by which he or she had lived, the faith by which a class leader had taught his class or by which a preacher had preached, the family, or the deceased was by no means restricted to the hymnbook section on death and judgment. One could choose from the whole book. Some would simply select a favorite hymn or a portion thereof. Others would deliberately seek to continue to preach the gospel to a passer-by. So in 1875 the family of Mary Spink at Riccall, near York, chose a stanza from “How happy every child of grace”:

O what a blessed hope is ours²²
 While here on earth we stay;
 We more than taste the heavenly powers
 And antedate that day.

²⁰ *Funeral Hymns* (1759), p. 6: 9:1–4 of Hymn 3.

²¹ *HSP* (1749), 2:75: 1:1–4.

²² *Funeral Hymns* (1759), pp. 3–4: 7:1–4.

Another quatrain from the same hymn was used for the grave of Mary Ann Bridgman of Treneglos, Bethel Methodist Chapel in 1867:

What is there here to court my stay,²³
Or keep me back from home,
While angels beckon me away
And Jesus bids me come.

It was also chosen for William Grigg (1834) in Padstow Churchyard.

In Treneglos there are shorter quotations from the hymn “Jesus hath died that I might live.” As recently as 1956, the family of Alice Uglow chose the couplet:

Thy presence makes my paradise,²⁴
And where Thou art is heaven.

From the great proclamation of the gospel in “Arise, my soul, arise” the grave of Loveday Stacy (1872) bears the lines:

My God is reconciled,²⁵
His pardoning voice I hear,
He owns me for His child,
I can no longer fear.

A great though neglected hymn is “Come on, my partners in distress” and from that hymn the family of Charles R. Watson (1912), again in Riccall, used two lines for his gravestone:

All that to the end endure²⁶
The Cross, shall wear the crown.

One of Charles Wesley’s loveliest hymns is “Thou Shepherd of Israel and mine,” and from that hymn the parents of Robert Briggs (1877), aged ten, at Long Marston, York, selected these lines:

Thy love for a sinner declare,²⁷
Thy passion and death on the tree,
My spirit to Calvary bear,
To suffer and triumph with Thee.

The number of hymns at the disposal, so to speak, of the mourner increased with the publication of the “Supplement” to the hymnbook in 1830 and still more

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 3: 4:1–4. The original line 2 reads: “To hold me back from home.” Line 4 ends with a question mark.

²⁴ *HSP* (1742), p. 96: 13:3–4 of poem based on Acts 16:31.

²⁵ *HSP* (1742), p. 265: 5:1–4.

²⁶ *HSP* (1749), 2:30: 4:5–6 of Hymn 22. Line 5 of the original reads: “And all that to the end endure.”

²⁷ *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 1:294: 2:5–8.

with the “New Supplement” in 1876. Hence, in 1839 the family of Margaret Roberts, at St. Alban’s, Wickersley, Rotherham, used a stanza from “I call the world’s Redeemer mine”:

Then let the worms demand their prey,²⁸
The greedy grave my reins consume,
With joy I drop my mouldering clay,
And rest till my Redeemer come;
On Christ my Life in death rely,
Secure that I can never die.

From another hymn included in the 1830 “Supplement,” “Hosanna to God,” the family of Mary Ann Poulter (1886) placed on her headstone these lines:

“Follow after,” she cries,²⁹
As she mounts to the skies,
Follow after your friend,
To the blissful enjoyments that never shall end.

Her grave is located in Shillington All Saints, Herts., a village churchyard unusually rich in verse epitaphs.

Another hymn that continued in use among British Methodists until recent years is “What are these arrayed in white.” Four lines from this hymn were engraved on the headstone of Thomas and Mary Medley (1878), along with other Wesley lines, at Aldborough, and on the gravestone of John Veal (1892) at Titson, Cornwall.

All these quotations show how sure our forebears were of their faith, how eager they were to proclaim it in death as in life, and how well they knew their hymnbook. As we have seen, they knew other than the main book. Charles Wesley had published more than one collection of *Funeral Hymns*, which, no doubt, were in the possession of some Methodist members. Two stanzas from one of these hymns, “On the Death of Mrs Mary Naylor,” were used to commemorate Isabella (1812), the wife of Alexander Mather, on her headstone at St. Savior’s Churchyard, York:

Inspired with godliness sincere,³⁰
She had her conversation here,
No guile in her was found;
Cheerful and open as the Light
She dwelt in her own people’s sight
And gladdened all around.

²⁸ *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 1:239: stanza 4 of Hymn 750.

²⁹ *Funeral Hymns* (1746), p. 22: 3:5–8 of Hymn 15.

³⁰ *Funeral Hymns* (1759), p. 52: stanza 8 of Part 2 of Hymn 31; p. 53: stanza 4 of Part 3 of Hymn 32 [On the Death of Mrs. Mary Naylor, March 21, 1757].

A nursing mother to the poor,
 For them she husbanded her store,
 Her life, her all, bestowed;
 For them she labored day and night,
 In doing good her whole delight
 In copying after God.

Another stanza from the same hymn was cut on the stone for Mary Jane Parsons' grave (1875) at Altarnun Wesley:

Constant, unwarped from first to last,³¹
 She kept the faith and held it fast,
 From sin and error free,
 Contending for the faith alone,
 The name inscribed on the white stone,
 The life of piety.

There were by no means the only quotations from little known hymns or poems.

Of course, well-known hymns with no funeral connection were often selected. Thus, on the gravestone of Henry H. Outhwaite (1927) in Fuford Cemetery, York, one finds:

And can it be that I should gain³²
 An interest in the Savior's blood?
 'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
 For, O my God, it found out me!

These lines are found together with a stanza of William Cowper on the grave of Sarah Duke (1847) in York Cemetery.

Engraved on the headstone for Mary Ann Tessyman (1859) at Stockton on the Forest, near York one finds:

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast,³³
 Let every one be Jesu's guest;
 Ye need not one be left behind,
 For God hath bidden all mankind.

● On the grave of Isaac Mason (1854) in York Cemetery is found:

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54: stanza 3 of Part 4 of Hymn 33 [On the Death of Mrs. Mary Naylor, March 21, 1757].

³² *HSP* (1739), pp. 117, 118: 1:1–2, 3:5–6.

³³ *Hymns for those that seek, and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* (London: Strahan, 1747), p. 63: stanza 1 of Hymn 50, The Great Supper. Cited henceforth as *Redemption Hymns* (1747).

Cast on the fidelity³⁴
Of my redeeming Lord,
I shall his salvation see,
According to his Word.

Other favorites are found as well. Inscribed on the gravestone of Mark Truran (1900) at Gerrans, Cornwall, are the lines from “Jesus, the Name high over all”:

O that the world might taste and see³⁵
The riches of his grace;
The arms of love that compass me
Would all mankind embrace.

From “All praise to our redeeming Lord” the following stanza appears on the grave of Francis Hender (1889) in Bryher:

And if our fellowship below³⁶
In Jesus be so sweet,
What heights of rapture shall we know,
When round his throne we meet.

Both of the last two stanzas quoted are to be found up and down the country.

Supremely we find, though always late in date, lines from “Jesu, Lover of my soul”: the opening lines at Bishophorpe Old Church, York, on the gravestone of George Shepherd (1892) and in York Cemetery, as well as other places in the neighborhood. The whole of the first stanza, all eight lines, are found on the grave of Maria Grøet (1899) at Gerrans, Cornwall, but various lines from the hymn can be found the length and breadth of Britain.

One must comment that the greatest of all funeral hymns is, of course, “Come, let us join our friends above.” The first four lines are to be found on the headstone of Mary and Nancy Mumford (1877) in St. Pary’s, Isles of Scilly. The opening lines of the next stanza appear at Seaton Ross, Yorks, on the grave of Margaret Watson (1895):

One family we dwell in Him,³⁷
One Church, above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death.

One could go on and on. The reader will have noticed that many of the examples have been culled from Cornwall or from York, not that they are to be found only or chiefly in those areas, but because one person cannot cover the entire

³⁴ *Hymns for the Use of Families* (Bristol: Pine, 1767), p. 54: 1:1–4 of Hymn 54.

³⁵ *HSP* (1749), 1:307: stanza 13 of Hymn 195, “After Preaching (in a Church).”

³⁶ *Redemption Hymns* (1747), p. 43: 3:5–8 of Hymn 32, “At Meeting of Friends.”

³⁷ *Funeral Hymns* (1759), p. 1: 2:1–4 of Hymn 1.

country. One can only quote the areas one knows best and has visited. Let me quote one final example. In 1814 Mary Ann Collins was buried at St. Katherine's, Sedgehill, near Shaftesbury, Wiltshire, and on her grave were inscribed the opening lines of Charles Wesley's epitaph on his mother in Bunhill Fields, London (slightly misquoted):

In sure and steadfast hope to rise,³⁸
 And claim her mansion in the skies,
 A Christian here her Lord did own,
 The cross exchanging for a crown.
 Sure daughter of affliction she,
 Inured to pain and misery.

Early American Methodist burial grounds must also afford some interesting examples. Has anyone explored them? However, check for misquotations!

³⁸ *HSP* (1749), 1:282: 1:1–4, 2:1–2 of poem 176. The original text of these lines reads as follows:

1. In sure and stedfast hope to rise,
 And claim her mansion in the skies,
 A *Christian* here her flesh laid down,
 The cross exchanging for the crown.
2. True daughter of affliction she,
 Enur'd to pain and misery.