

# Stories of Famous Hymns

## From Greenland's Icy Mountains.

**A**N AMERICAN writer once said: "It does not necessarily take a lifetime to accomplish immortality.

"A brave act done in a moment, a courageous word spoken at the fitting time, a few lines which can be written on a sheet of notepaper, may give one a deathless name."

Such was the case with Reginald Heber, known wherever the influence of the Christian religion has penetrated, by his unequalled missionary hymn:

"From Greenland's Icy Mountains."

Although the origin of Bishop Heber's hymn may be as familiar as a household word, its circumstantial story will bear repeating.

A royal letter was issued in 1819 requesting that collections should be made in all churches of England on behalf of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

Reginald Heber, then rector of Hodnet, was visiting his father-in-law, Dr. Shipley, dean of St. Asaph and rector of Wrexham.

Half a dozen friends were gathered in the little rectory parlor, on Saturday afternoon, when Dr. Shipley, knowing the ease with which he composed, turned to Heber and requested him to write some missionary lines to be sung in the church the next morning, as he was going to preach on the subject of missions.

The Rector of Hodnet retired to a corner of the room, remained there in deep thought for a brief time and when

he had rejoined the ministerial party read the first three verses of the famous hymn.

"That will do very well," said Dr. Shipley.

"The sense is not yet complete," replied Heber, who again retired and in a few moments returned with the noble bugle blast of the fourth stanza:—

"Waft, waft ye winds, His story;

And you, ye waters roll,

'Till, like a sea of glory,

It spreads from pole to pole;

'Till, o'er our ransomed nature,

The lamb for sinners slain,

Redeemer, King, Creator,

In bliss return to reign."

The tune to which this hymn is sung has been a powerful aid to the cause of foreign missions, and its story is not less interesting than that of the verses.

In 1823, a lady living in Savannah, Georgia, obtained a copy of the words. She had a desire to hear them sung, but could find no music to which they could be set.

It came to her knowledge that a young bank clerk in the city had quite a local reputation as a composer of church music.

She sent the words to him, with a note in which was expressed the hope that he might be able to adapt them to an appropriate tune.

In the course of an hour, as the story says, the words were returned with the melody.

The young bank clerk was Lowell

Mason, then thirty-one years old; who became the greatest hymn tune composer this country has ever produced.

This may be an exaggerated estimate of the influence of the hymn, but it is not unlikely that it has done more than any other hymn of its class to inspire and strengthen the churches in their efforts to propagate the Christian religion among the heathens of many lands.

Bishop Heber was born in 1783 in Cheshire, England.

When only twenty years old he took the university prize with his poem, Palestine, which was considered the best Oxford poem of the century.

He read it in Convocation Hall at the annual commencement and it was received with an outburst of applause "as probably never before greeted an Oxford student."

Heber was rector of Hodnet sixteen years, where it is supposed he wrote all his hymns.

In 1823 he was made bishop of Calcutta and early one morning in April, 1826, after confirming a large class of natives, he took a cold bath which resulted in instant death.

Bishop Heber wrote fifty-seven hymns, and competent authority says that every one of them is in common use.

That every hymn a writer has produced should find a place in the service of the church is an honor that is paid to no other hymnist in the history of sacred song.

**THE BIRTHPLACE OF A HYMN.**

Where "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" was Sung for the First Time.  
 SAVANNAH, April 18.—The birthplace of a hymn the melody of which has circled the globe passed into ruins during the fire in this city on last Saturday night.



It was in the Independent Presbyterian Church, the most picturesque structure in Savannah, that Bishop Haber's song, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," was first heard. Sixty-five years ago there was a meeting projected in aid of foreign missions. In the course of the services an unfamiliar song was reached. Lowell Mason was at the organ. As his fingers pressed the keys the congregation, that filled the church from end to end, and spread along the aisles, was thrilled with the strange melody. It seemed an inspiration sent not for the first time but for all such occasions, in all places and through all time. Such it has proved to be. The words:

"They call us to deliver  
 Their souls from error's chain,"  
 that these evangelists so long ago sang in "Soul swelling volume upon the broad accents of their forest towns have since resounded throughout man's domain, and many a consecrated missionary leaving friends and home behind, has borne with him to foreign climes the echoes of the music that the organist of the Savannah Church composed and set to the grand words that the historian of Calcutta had written especially for that occasion.  
 There were many other interesting facts connected with the hymn's origin. When it was dedicated on Sunday, May 21, 1819, James Monroe, president of the United States, his cabinet of seven, generals and admirals and other officers of high and low degree, were present, together with distinguished men from surrounding states. It was an audience the like of which Savannah had never before seen. Lafayette, in 1825, stood within and expressed his admiration, and since then many men distinguished in state and national annals have done likewise. In 1882, the centennial anniversary of the birth of George Washington was celebrated. Miss, whose daughter has made her one of Savannah's greatest benefactresses, her general BULLOCK recently restoring the edition of the original plan, which was a copy of St. Martin in the Plaza, England, the architect of which was the great Sir Christopher Wren.

From Greenland's Icy Mountains.  
 The hymn "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" was written by Reginald Haber about 1810. He was, according to the story, as told by The New York Sun, staying with his father-in-law, the dean of St. Asaph's cathedral, when a gentleman present who was to preach a missionary sermon said he would like to have a good hymn for the occasion. Haber went aside and in a short time returned with three verses of the hymn, which he at once set to music. He added the fourth verse, and the hymn was sung the next day. Haber became bishop of Calcutta, including India, Ceylon and Australia, in 1823, and died in 1835.

*M.C.*  
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Reginald Heber.

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Author of "From Greenland's Icy Mountains"

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