

## **John Bacchus Dykes**

**John Bacchus Dykes** was an English clergyman and hymnist, and he is the composer of 14 hymns in our Hymnal. That's more than anyone except Johann Sebastian Bach, to whom is attributed 15 hymns. Oh, and Dykes is tied with "English traditional melodies," which also has 14 hymns. Not only are there 14 of Dykes' melodies in our Hymnal, but most of them are among our best-loved hymns. I thought that a good way to honor the significance of this composer would be to sing as many of his hymns as possible, starting with the most familiar. In the interests of time, we'll just sing the first verse. Let's get started with:

### **Hymn 12**

### **Hymn 37**

Dykes is listed as John B. Dykes in our Hymnal. I guess the Hymnal committee didn't feel comfortable using his middle name of Bacchus, The Greek god of wine and orgies. His father was a banker, but his grandfather was the vicar of a church. Maybe his father, in giving Dykes that middle name, was making a statement to his own father.

### **Hymn 65**

**Hymn 117** (I read that he was given the poem and composed the tune in a half-hour.)

Dykes was born in Hull, England in 1823 (2 years after Mrs. Eddy), the fifth of 14 children. From an early age he learned to play the piano and organ by ear. However, he soon studied piano and organ systematically, eventually learning to play the violin and horn, as well. By the age of 10, he was accompanying the singing in his grandfather's church, and apparently was the principal organist by the age of 12.

### **Hymn 169**

### **Hymn 190**

Dykes was ordained in 1847 at the age of 24, and held increasingly responsible roles in the Anglican Church (curate, canon, precentor, vicar). He held the later position, essentially the parish priest, for the last 14 years of his life. His preference for formality and ritual (similar to those of the Catholic church at the time) led to clashes with his bishop, and it is suggested that this stress contributed to his death in 1876 at the age of 52. But he remained personally popular as evidenced by the fact that after his death, his admirers raised 10,000 pounds to benefit his family.

### **Hymn 317**

### **Hymn 284**

Dykes published numerous sermons and articles on religion; however, he is best known for over 300 hymn tunes he composed – 28 of them intended for children. One of the trends in hymns for which Dykes was responsible, along with others of his time, was to match appropriate tunes to the hymn words. Hymn tunes have meters (example from last hymn); so do the words of a hymn. The early practice was to sing a hymn to whatever tune had the same meter (example). Dykes was influential in marrying hymn words to a single tune.

**Hymn 330**

**Hymn 408**

This quote may explain why Dykes' was such a prolific and successful composer of hymn tunes:  
"A hymn should be in the first place suggested, or inspired from above, and then carefully perfected."

**Hymn 33** (The name of the hymn is St. Oswald. Dykes was vicar of St. Oswald's for the last 14 years of his life. He also named one of his sons John St. Oswald Dykes.)

**Hymn 273**

Hymns not used: 193 & 319