

William H. Monk (1823-1889)

William Henry Monk was an English organist, church musician and music editor who composed many well-loved hymn tunes. He also wrote choral anthems and other music for church services. He was born in 1823 in London, England just two years after Mrs. Eddy. From childhood, he was something of a keyboard prodigy, and at the age of 18 he was appointed organist for a church in London. Let's get right into it and sing one of his hymns, #239. Note though, that this is not the most familiar setting of these words in our hymnal. We have a lot to cover, so we'll sing just verses 1 and 4.

Hymn 239 (verses 1 and 4)

At age 24 William Monk became choirmaster at King's College London and organist 2 years later. He was ambitious and talented and moved up to successively larger churches over the next several years. In 1853 he became organist and choirmaster at St. Matthias' Church in Stoke Newington, where he spent the last 36 years of his life. It was in this church that he established a daily choral service with a voluntary choir. That was some commitment on the singers' part!

Before going further, let's sing another of his hymns, #68. Incidentally, this is not the version of these words that we usually sing. The poet, Charlotte Elliott was a portrait artist and writer of humorous verse in her young life. She suffered a serious illness in her early 30s and her recovery led to a religious conversion. Eventually she wrote about 150 hymns and many poems.

Hymn 68 (all verses)

In 1857 (at the age of 34), William Monk's talents as composer, arranger, and editor were recognized when he was appointed the musical editor of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, a volume first published in 1861, containing 273 hymns. He supervised the addition of supplements starting in 1875 through his death in 1889. *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was immediately popular, and it became one of the best-selling hymnals ever produced, eventually selling 60 million copies.

Of the 273 hymns in the first edition of 1861, Monk wrote 50 original tunes. Among them was his most famous hymn, Eventide, which we know as "Abide with Me." Those words were written by Henry Francis Lyte, an English clergyman, a couple of months before his passing in 1847. Some think that Monk composed the tune in response to the death of his 3-year-old daughter. Another report said that *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was about to be sent to the printer when Monk and others decided that the original music for "Abide with Me" was unacceptable, so he hurriedly wrote the famous tune in 10 minutes. But according to his wife, he wrote it as they watched a beautiful sunset together. See which story you prefer as we sing "Abide with Me" to the words of Henry Francis Lyte.

Hymn 8 (all verses)

Actually, Lyte wrote a couple more verses:

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou Who changest not, abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Of course, to make this acceptable for the *Christian Science Hymnal* those verses were left out, but the editors felt they had to go a little farther. So they included Hymn 7 with words from a poem by Bertha H. Woods that appeared in the March 28, 1901 issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*. The editor of the *Hymnal Notes*, called it a “spiritual interpretation of the original.” Let's compare.

Hymn 7 (all verses)

In addition to his career as a church organist and choirmaster, Monk was an academic. His start was modest: in 1851 he became professor of music at the School for the Indigent Blind. In 1874, he was appointed professor of vocal studies at King's College; subsequently he accepted similar posts at two other prestigious London music schools. Here's another of Monk's less-familiar hymns.

Hymn 398 (verse 1)

Despite his career as an organist, composer and academic, William Monk's major fame came from editing hymnals. After *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, he edited *The Scottish Hymnal* (1876) for the Church of Scotland, *The Children's Hymnal* (1881), and *The Congregational Psalmist Hymnal* (1886). Throughout his life he harmonized existing hymns and wrote new hymns, besides anthems and other music. Let's sing another of his hymns:

Hymn 79 (all verses)

In my research on Monk, I was surprised to find him mentioned in the Internet Movie Data Base – 81 times. These were for movie and TV soundtrack credits, including episodes of several TV series (*MASH*, *Doctor Who*, and *Parks and Recreation*) and movies (*The Full Monty*, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, and *The Last of the Blonde Bombshells*). Actually, only two of Monk's songs were used in all 81 cases: “Abide with Me” and “All Things Bright and Beautiful.” The latter, of course, is not in our hymnal, but it appears in many others. Here's how it goes.

Let's close with one of William Monk's best-loved hymns:

Hymn 135 (both verses)