

The Hymn

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Hymns Old and New



*The message that they heard, we share,
when God seems absent, God is there;
when all is hopeless God is found,
while shaken faith knows solid ground.*

ANDREW PRATT

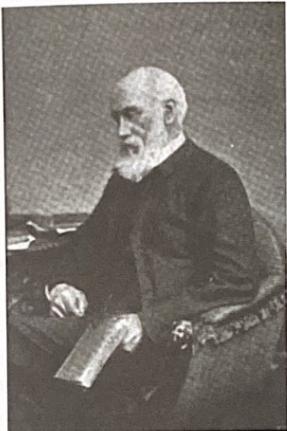
Godfrey Thring: Victorian Hymnwriter of the *Via Media*

BENJAMIN A. KOLODZIEJ

To Americans, Godfrey Thring may be known only through his adaptation of Matthew Bridges' hymn "Crown him with many crowns," while to the English he may be best known for his hymn "Fierce raged the tempest o'er the deep." To one contemporary anonymous critic, Thring's *A Church of England Hymn Book* (1880) amounted to little more than "thick, squat book, in a sad-coloured green cloth binding," the only laudatory comment being the final sentence, "The book is well indexed."² Another reviewer, suggests that Thring's translation of Luther's "Ein feste Burg," rendered as "A fortress sure is God our king," will "probably become the standard translation of that celebrated hymn."³ While scholarly research and analysis has been done on Thring's place within the context of Victorian hymnody, neither his life nor hymnody, neither his theological context within his own cultural milieu nor any seriously-thorough analysis of his work has been undertaken.⁴ This essay does not attempt to rectify the entire research deficit; rather, I have tried to collect and analyze heretofore lost or forgotten information in an effort better to place Godfrey Thring within his historical and theological context.⁵

Biography

Godfrey was born to John Gale Dalton Thring and Sarah Jenkyns on March 25, 1823, in Alford, rural Somerset County. His father was rector at the



Godfrey Thring¹

fourteenth-century village church of All Saints. At the death of Godfrey's grandfather, the family moved from the modest "cottage" rectory across the lawn to Alford House, the mansion built in 1806. Godfrey's brother Henry (1818–1907) was the first Baron Thring and First Parliamentary Counsel; Theodore (1816–1891) became the Lord of Alford House; Rev. John Charles Thring (1824–1909) developed the "Cambridge Rule of Football"; and Edward Thring (1821–1887) was the headmaster of Uppingham School and one of the leading educational theorists of the English public school system.⁶ Only his brother Edward's biography provides any evidence of Godfrey's early life which was probably like many well-to-do and isolated rural families of the time.

Godfrey was educated at Shrewsbury, a noted public school, then began his studies for the ministry at Balliol College, Oxford. He was ordained a deacon in 1846 and a priest in 1847, serving as a curate at Strathfield-Turgis (1845–1850) and then at Strathfield Saye (1850–1853). The next several years are unaccounted for in his official biography, but it seems as though he undertook the tradition of the "Grand Tour" not only of Europe, but also of the Middle East. In a tribute to Thring upon his death, Bishop John Gott (1830–1906) of Truro recalled,

The only thing I remember about Godfrey the boy was his riding a young thoroughbred bareback, with only a halter over a five-barred gate. We first knew one another when ill health sent him to the East, at the age of thirty, and we met one sunrise on the shores of the Gulf of Akabah, going to swim among the sharks. We rode together through the deserts of Petra, through Palestine, and the ruined cities beyond the Jordan. His culture, his many accomplishments, and the poetic grace of his mind was a rare charm in those scenes where hymnody was born, and the piety of his heart was ever in tune with the genius of the Holy Land.⁷

Godfrey Thring seems to have been a “late bloomer,” not only in writing but in his professional career, and the Bishop’s allusion to his ill health may explain why his early incumbencies were relatively short and his accomplishments few. He continued with short curacies at Euston in Norfolk (1856) and Arberfield in Berkshire (1857). According to Anglican polity, livings or salaries were granted to vicars who received certain benefices, or small churches within a larger region, usually attached to an estate home or rectory. Godfrey’s father had introduced the “Thring Estates Bill” as early as 1836 in order to unite the benefice of Alford with the nearby village of Hornblotton. For unknown reasons, this was not fully accomplished until 1858, at which time Godfrey returned to his home, the newly-styled Alford-with-Hornblotton, becoming his father’s curate.⁸

Thring seems to have settled into his new vocation and began writing hymns in 1861. In 1867, he was appointed rural dean of Wells Cathedral, the duties of which included chairing the Deanery Synod, assisting individual congregations within his benefice which were in interregnum, calling and chairing meetings of the Deanery Chapter and co-chairing meetings of the Deanery Synod, caring for the clergy of the Deanery, and acting as liaison between the parishes and the bishop. This same year, his father built Hornblotton rectory, a manor house even more impressive than Alford House, for his son. On 18 January, 1870, Godfrey Thring married Mary Jane Pinney, only daughter of Charles Pinney. Their only child, Leonard Godfrey Pinney Thring, was born on January 22, 1873.

Godfrey’s first work, *Hymns Congregational and Others* (1866), was followed by a series of “Hymns on Creation” in 1868 which would find their way into his first major collection, *Hymns and Sacred Lyrics* (HSL) of 1874. The dilapidation of the medieval St. Peter’s Church, Hornblotton, provided an opportunity for Godfrey and Mary to collaborate on a new church building simultaneously ancient and modern. He and his family were involved with nearby Lovington school where they donated books and other supplies. Anecdotally, it is said that Godfrey donated to the school a harmonium which he used to teach the children music to sing his hymnody.

In 1876, he became prebendary of East Harptree in Wells Cathedral; Prebendary, a title which would be affixed to Thring for the remainder of his life, refers to what other cathedrals call canons, i.e., the governing chapter or staff of the cathedral. His most noted hymnody, both original and edited, was collected and published in 1880 as *A Church of England Hymn-Book Adapted to the Daily Services of the Church throughout the Year*, followed by an altered edition in 1882. The 1881 census lists no fewer than eight staff living at Hornblotton rectory, in addition to young Leonard Thring and Godfrey’s mother, Sarah. Sarah lived at Hornblotton until 1891—dying at the age of 102.⁹

In 1893, Thring retired to Shamley Green, a village outside of London, building a large home similar to Hornblotton in 1895. He died there on September 13, 1903. Mary’s life following Godfrey’s death is unrecorded; a number of hymnal prefaces thank “Mrs Godfrey Thring” for her permission to reprint her late husband’s hymns.

Hymnody

Thring writes about the genesis of “Fierce raged the tempest,” as follows:

I think. . . that this hymn took its origin from my having pictured to myself the scene on the lake of Gennesaret, and thinking it a good subject for a hymn, I thought I would try and put my ideas into poetical form. I was about that time beginning to take a great interest in hymns and hymn-writing, but had never written much. “Fierce raged the tempest” was the third hymn I ever wrote; it was first published in 1861. My first hymn, “We all have sinned and gone astray,” was written in the same year for my mother, who wanted a hymn to a particular tune for which she wished to get an appropriate hymn.¹⁰

Hymns and Sacred Lyrics (1874), nearly failed to come about following a fire at the publisher’s office which destroyed the proofs.¹¹ Thring never associated himself with the Oxford Movement¹² which, by the time of his hymn writing, had run its course and was developing in other directions. If the number of sacramental hymns is any indication, Thring was securely Low Church in 1874, with only one hymn in *HSL* dedicated to baptism (“In the name of God the Father”) and one dedicated to Holy Communion (“All ye who seek a rest above”). In the preface to his *A Church of England Hymn Book*, Thring outlines more specifically his Latitudinarian principles:

Nearly all the hymnals which have obtained any large circulation have chiefly owed that circulation to the fact of their having been put forward by avowed representatives, or those who were supposed to be representatives, of different parties in the Church. Against this system of party hymn-books the Compiler wishes to enter his protest; for not only are congregations thereby deprived of the use of some of the best hymns in our language, but the broad and primitive principles on which our Church is founded are narrowed; while those divisions, which it should be our great object to bring to an end, are encouraged and perpetuated. The Church of England is not the Church of a sect but of a nation; her Prayer-book is the much-prized inheritance of all Churchmen, not of a party.¹³

Just as the Church of England strove to represent a *via media* between Protestantism and Rome, Thring’s second hymnbook would epitomize a similar *via*

media within an Anglicanism that had become rife with partisanship. In contrast to the select eighty-six hymns in the 1874 volume, in his 1880 volume of 667 hymns, Thring indeed makes every effort to include a wide swath of Christian hymnody. There are now fourteen communion hymns, one by Thring himself ("All ye who seek a rest above"), ten by the usual writers (Heber, Montgomery), a Latin hymn ("Draw nigh and take the body of the Lord") and two by Thomas Aquinas. Despite this proof of Thring's effort to include hymnic contributions from the broader Church, one anonymous reviewer of the admittedly high-church *Church Quarterly Review* observes that

the Latin hymns, whatever be the ruggedness of their English form, are far too precious to be abandoned. We notice with great regret that the following among others are wholly omitted: the *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*, the *Creator alme siderum*, the *O filii et filiae*, and the *Sponsa Christi*. The *Dies Irae* appears with ever so many stanzas omitted.¹⁴

These hymns, with the exception of *Creator alme siderum*, all appear in the edition of *Hymns, Ancient and Modern (HAM)* contemporary to Thring, along with many other medieval liturgical hymns, so this particular reviewer's comments are only thinly-guised comparisons to that great volume of Victorian hymnody rather than an acceptance of Thring's hymnal on its own merits.

Clearly Thring sought a different course regarding hymn selection, and never does he state that his objective is to recreate *HAM*. (Although it is possible he was thinking to provide an alternative for those of lower church propensities.) There was tension between Thring and the editors of *HAM*. After thanking a veritable who's who of Victorian hymnody for permission to use their hymns within his volume, "who have without exception given him free permission to use any of their hymns of which they themselves retain the copyright,"¹⁵ Thring continues:

As the absence of one or two well-known hymns cannot fail to be observed, the Compiler feels it due to himself to state that the omission arises from no neglect on his part, but from the fact that the compilers of "Hymns Ancient and Modern" having, unlike other compilers and authors, refused to allow the insertion of hymns of which they hold the copyright.¹⁶

Particularly ironic is that fact that Thring's own hymns had been included in *HAM* since "Fierce raged the tempest o'er the deep" was included in the appendix of the 1868 edition. Two more of his hymns made it into the 1875 edition of *HAM*: "Thou to whom the sick and dying" and "Saviour, blessed Saviour." Part of the tension perhaps resulted from the fact that the editors seemed to ignore the fact that Thring wished to alter the final stanza of "Saviour, blessed Saviour" from

Bliss, all bliss excelling, When the ransomed soul,
Earthly toils forgetting, Finds its promised goal;
Where in joys unheard of Saints with Angels sing,
Never weary raising, Praises to their King.
to the seemingly less ecstatic:

Higher then and higher soars the ransomed soul,
Earthly toils forgetting, Saviour, to its goal;
Where in joys unthought of Saints with angels sing,
Never weary raising praises to their King.

One cannot blame the editors of *HAM* for not wishing to alter a stanza which undoubtedly had passed some poetic and doctrinal review, so in *Hymns and Sacred Lyrics* Thring includes an asterisk by this hymn explaining

The following stanza [referring to a reprint of the *HAM* version] was written at the request of Sir Henry Baker for H.A.&M., before the above [the "Higher then" stanza] was altered to its present form; as well as another which has been adopted by the compilers of the S.P.C.K. [Society for the Preservation of Christian Knowledge] Hymnal and the Hymnary; but I prefer myself to return to the original version, with the slight alterations already mentioned.¹⁷

The *Musical Times* writes of this conflict, Prebendary Thring naturally objected to his hymns being altered without his permission. He once wrote to a daily newspaper saying, 'I am particularly anxious that a correct version of my hymn, "Saviour, Blessed Saviour," shall be adopted, when any portion of it may from time to time be selected for public worship.'¹⁸

Here is evidenced Thring's own development as a hymnwriter, preferring to avoid overly ecstatic language which he might characterize later as "effusions of false sentiment and almost profane familiarity."¹⁹ Replacing "bliss" with a "higher soaring" soul hardly evidences a reticence for overt exuberance, but still betrays a poetic and theological conservatism which hearkens back to John Wesley, who shared similar concerns.²⁰

Thring corresponded prolifically with fellow hymnwriters, theologians, and scholars regarding not only his own hymns but those of others as well. His correspondence about matters theological and hymnological was copious, and he communicated with many of the great hymnists of his time. In the preface to the 1883 edition of *A Church of England Hymnbook*, he mentions not only H.W. Hutton of Lincoln, but his frequent collaborator Major G.A. Crawford, John Ellerton, John Julian, and the Rev. James Mearns.²¹ He certainly knew the great corpus of English hymnody, as he collected much of it for use in his own publications.

For whatever reason, Thring gravitated toward various combinations of 8.7.8.7, but with a complexity which recalls the Wesley brothers and their complicated meters. Lack of an appropriate tune for

FIGURE 1: Godfrey Thring's manuscript of "Fierce raged the tempest"

*Fierce raged the tempest in the deep,
Watch did these angling servants keep,
But thou wast wrapt in quibbles sleep,
Calm and still.*

*'Save, Lord; we perish, was their cry:
'Oh, save us in our agony!—
Thy word above the storm rose high,
'Peace, be still.'*

such meters as 8.7.8.7.8.8.8. suggests that some of his hymns were solely sacred poetry, a fact to which he admits: ". . . the Compiler takes this opportunity of saying, that he has not thought it necessary to bind himself down strictly to the hymn proper, but has introduced some short sacred poems; for such hymns being as a rule required for reading rather than singing."²² "Jesus came, the heav'ns adoring," one hymn which has found its way into many modern American hymnals, has as its meter 8.7.8.7.8.7, while another commonly found in American hymnals, "O God of mercy, God of might," has a meter of 8.8.8.6., and certainly was meant to be sung.

Thring, like many of his generation, generally did not trouble himself with assigning specific tunes to his texts, even though *HAM* had made a progressive statement in attaching a particular tune (or in some cases two or three tunes) to a text, certainly portending future hymnal development.²³ Thring chose instead to cast his lot with the old system, English, continental, and otherwise, which allowed texts to be assigned to tunes interchangeably—assuming the meter was common enough. Whether Thring's conservatism in this regard was simply reactionary to *HAM* is not known, but he suggests in the preface that preparations for such a volume have been made. He continues with perhaps a subtle gibe against *HAM*:

The matter is, however, in his opinion of secondary importance, because every congregation is absolutely bound down to the particular hymn-book which happens to have been chosen for their use, while this is not the case with tunes, since few organists take their tunes exclusively from one book, but can, and do, select those which they think best. Thus a book of tunes adapted to any

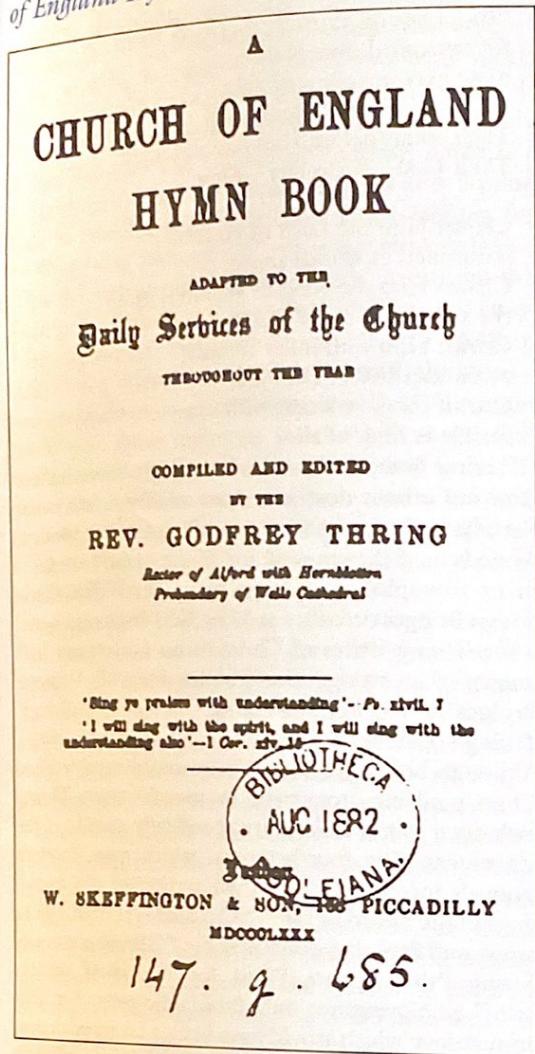
particular hymn-book is not to the public in general of the same consequence as the words of the hymns themselves."²⁴

One wonders whether this statement may be directed at *HAM* and its supporters, for Thring here describes exactly the rationale the editors took when including the hymn tunes. One also presumes that *HAM* was not used in the particular parishes with which Thring was associated, since he describes as common experience something the editors of *HAM* had sought to alleviate and even redress. As conservative in some ways as *Hymns, Ancient and Modern* was, this may indicate its lack of depth and coverage in the rural villages which might have looked askance at liturgical edicts, or books, from cosmopolitan London.

Thring's most famous work in North America may be "Crown him with many crowns," and it is not even mostly his. An analysis of this hymn elucidates a number of Thring's theological and liturgical priorities. The author of the original text, Matthew Bridges (1800–1894), had been raised in the Church of England but had become engrossed in the Oxford Movement to such an extent that he converted to Catholicism in 1848. In 1852 Bridges published *The Passion of Jesus, a Collection of Original Pieces Corresponding with the Five Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary of our Blessed Lady*. In the preface, he elucidates with all the passion of a recent convert his rationale for this book:

Few Catholic devotions have been more misrepresented or ridiculed, by Protestants, than the Mysteries of the Rosary. The favourite Church History of evangelical Anglicans ventures to describe them, "As the spirit of bondage and miserable superstition, the religion of the lips—a self-righteous drudgery of so much devotional work." Statements, equally mendacious, emanating from

FIGURE 2: The title page to the *The Church of England Hymn Book*



one and the same Father of lies, have found their way through the length and breadth of the land.

The subjects treated in the following pages are the Five Dolorous or Sorrowful Mysteries, which constitute the second Chaplet, or division of the Rosary of Our Blessed Lady; —in other words, the Passion of Jesus! This it is that forms the centre and soul of what the Church inculcates on earth, and which will, beyond all doubt, be the theme of her praises throughout eternity.²⁵

Bridges's volume is structured around these Five Sorrowful Mysteries: Gethsemane, the Flagellation, the Crown of Thorns, the Way of the Cross, and the Crucifixion. "Crown him with many crowns" falls within the "Crown of Thorns" section subtitled "Song of the Seraphs," the hymn itself bearing the superscript of Revelation 19:12 ("His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but He Himself.") The

following is Bridges's entire hymn from which three stanzas are typically included in most modern hymnals:

Crown Him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon His throne:
Hark how the heavenly anthem
drowns all music but its own!
Awake my soul, —and sing
of Him who died for thee;
And hail Him as thy matchless King
through all Eternity.

Crown Him the Virgin's Son!
The God Incarnate born,—
Whose arm those crimson trophies won
which now His Brow adorn!
Fruit of the Mystic Rose
as of the Rose the Stem:
The Root, whence Mercy ever flows,
the Babe of Bethlehem!

Crown Him the Lord of Love!
Behold His Hands and Side,—
Rich wounds, yet visible above
in beauty glorified:
No angel in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
But downward bends His burning eye
at mysteries so bright!

Crown Him the Lord of Peace!
Whose power a scepter sways
From pole to pole, that wars may cease
absorb'd in prayer and praise:
His reign shall know no end,
and round His pierced feet
Fair flowers of Paradise extend
their fragrance ever sweet.

Crown Him the Lord of Years!
The Potentate of Time,—
Creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime!
Glass'd in a sea of light,
whose everlasting waves
Reflect His Form,—the Infinite!
Who lives, —and loves,—and saves.

Crown Him the Lord of Heaven!
One with the Father known,—
And the Blest Spirit through Him given
from yonder triune Throne!
All Hail! Redeemer,—Hail!
For Thou hast died for me:
Thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout Eternity!

Bridges's Catholicism is first evident in the second stanza, for the term "Mystic Rose" is a medieval appellation describing Mary's participation in the Holy Trinity. In fact, Cardinal Newman writes specifically about Mary's role as the "rosa mystica," that "more-

over, she is the Mystical, or hidden Rose; for mystical means hidden.”²⁶ The original third stanza graphically and poetically portrays a crucifix, Christ’s eyes gazing “at mysteries so bright,” the cruciform imagery recalling Paul Gerhardt’s “O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden” composed some two centuries before. From a broader perspective, Bridges’s hymn depicts Christ as *Pantokrator*—he is “King,” “Lord of Love,” “Lord of Peace,” the universal “Potentate of Time,” the “Lord of Years,” a supreme and glorious judge radiating mystical wonder. Here mystery overshadows personality, and Christ is seen as Lord rather than in more personal terms as would befit the average low church Victorian Anglican. A variation on this hymn is first found in Thring’s *Hymns and Sacred Lyrics*, to which Thring adds a subscript justifying its inclusion and alterations:

The greater part of this hymn was originally written at the request of the Rev. H. W. Hutton, to supply the place of some of the stanzas in Matthew Bridge’s well-known hymn, of which he and others did not approve; it was afterwards thought better to rewrite the whole, so that the two hymns might be kept *entirely distinct*.²⁷

Thring’s altered text reads:

Crown Him with crowns of gold,
all nations great and small,
Crown Him, ye martyred saints of old,
the Lamb once slain for all;
The Lamb once slain for them
who bring their praises now,
As jewels for the diadem
that girds His Sacred Brow.

Crown Him the Son of God
before the worlds began,
And ye who tread where He hath trod,
crown Him the Son of Man;
Who every grief hath known
that wrings the human breast,
And takes and bears them for His own
that all in Him may rest.

Crown Him the Lord of Light,
who o’er a darkened world
In robes of glory infinite
His fiery flag unfurled,
and bore it raised on High,
In Heaven—in earth—beneath,
To all the sign of victory
O’er Satan, sin, and death.

Crown Him the Lord of Life,
who triumphed o’er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife
for those He came to save;
His glories now we sing
who died, and rose on High,
Who died—Eternal Life to bring,
and lives that death may die.

Crown Him of lords the Lord,
who over all doth reign,
Who, once on earth th’Incarnate Word
for ransomed sinners slain,
Now lives in realms of light
where saints with angels sing
Their songs before Him day and night,
Their God—Redeemer—King.

Crown Him the Lord of Heaven,
enthroned in worlds above,
Crown Him the King to Whom is given
the wondrous name of Love.
Crown Him with many crowns,
as thrones before Him fall;
Crown Him, ye kings, with many crowns,
for He is King of all.

Thring has eliminated that which most reflects Roman Catholic doctrine. Gone are the references to the Mystic Rose, the stanza extolling Christ’s glorious wounds, and the entire tenor of the hymn is reduced in its triumphalism. Thring personalizes that Christ whom Bridges describes as “The God Incarnate born” when Thring writes of Christ “who every grief hath known that wrings the human breast.” Whereas Bridges’s text bears an almost creedal hallmark, Thring’s exhibits a personal response to this credo. Although both hymns are Christocentric and refer to Christ’s salvific atonement in specific ways, Thring includes a stanza which very specifically elucidates the atonement. The fourth stanza, which most modern hymnals incorporate into their setting of the hymn, sings of the “Lord of Life” “who died—Eternal Life to bring, and lives that death may die.” Thring continues noting “th’Incarnate Word for ransomed sinners slain,” employing not only Biblical language but also terminology which would have been a bit more pedestrian to Victorian sensibilities. Bridges’s hymn refers to the atonement only thrice—when he sings “Of Him who died for thee,” when he notes Christ “lives, and loves, and saves” and when his final doxology proclaims, “For Thou hast died for me.” Bridges’s text is couched in poetic grandeur and eschatological mystagogy before it proclaims redemption, while Thring’s text only manages to evoke heavenly splendor after firmly grounding the text within human terms, “all nations great and small.” Whether due to personal maturation or simply a willingness to compromise which may have come with age, in his 1880 hymnal Thring replaces his own first stanza with Bridges’s original first stanza, also reducing the hymn by omitting his stanza three from the 1874 hymnal.

The Aesthetic Movement, Christian Socialism, and Hymnody

From the perspective of over a century, the Victorian era can seem conservative, naïve, and even

monochromatic; indeed, World War I would remove the last vestiges of innocence from a society now firmly rooted in the modern era. Even so, British society, and particularly the Church, was fraught with rifts and fractures, rent by heresies. The social problems which Dickens narrates were joined with a renewed rationalism to which the Church too often responded slowly or insufficiently. The Church of England, much like England itself, had been eclipsed and was now waning from its pinnacle years. The conservative longing for the God “who changest not” often met virulent opposition from elements of society which threatened the social order with radical new ideas. Perhaps not coincidentally during the revolutionary year of 1848 in which even Victoria and Albert feared the consequences of the mob on the monarchy, Cecil Alexander would pen those infamous lines which would find themselves given new wings when reprinted in *HAM*: “The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God made them, high or lowly, and order’d their estate.”²⁸ Politics was never far removed from churchmanship as J. R. Watson explains:

Religion in Victorian times was political. Every gesture, every assumption, every allegiance to a belief, was accompanied by a set of assumptions about society, often unspoken but always present, in ideas about wealth and power, in attitudes to the Empire and its people, in pressure for reform, in attitudes toward education, in temperance movements, or just in the desire to be left alone.²⁹

The social problems which beset the society at large were manifest in the fractures experienced in the church to such extent that, by the later nineteenth century, Christian socialist movements would develop to counter the hegemony of the Church of England. The Fabian Society, founded in 1883 consisted “of men and women who are Socialists, that is to say, in the words of its ‘Basis,’ of those who aim at the reorganization of society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual and class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit.”³⁰ Liturgical and hymnological scholar Percy Dearmer, also an active Christian socialist, would several years later equate Christian theological principles with the principles of Christian socialism, maintaining that their congruence “is so obvious that no representative and responsible Christian body can be found to deny it.”³¹ The Industrial Revolution, which began in the 1750s, had by the mid-Victorian era begun to manifest tendencies toward increased pollution, destruction of natural resources, the rise of an unskilled labor force toiling in factories, and a physical and psychological removal of the worker from his or her handiwork, all fomenting discontent throughout British society.

It was in this highly socially-stratified context that *Hymns, Ancient and Modern* and Godfrey Thring’s

hymn texts blossomed within that *via media* springing from the tension created between conservative and liberal churchmanship. *HAM* defies simplistic categorization; largely a musical product of sophisticated London musicians and a textual production of more provincial country parsons, the hymnal was comprehensive in scope and depth rather than overtly political. Yet, its conservative bias (in this case meaning toward high churchmanship) must have been an additional source of tension between Thring and the editors who excised stanza two from Thring’s original “Saviour, blessed Saviour,” obviously a bit too egalitarian:

Rich and poor together, suppliants young and old,

None shall here be wanting, Pastor or his fold;

One and all uniting, all with one accord,

Men and women bringing incense to the Lord.

Thring writes that the hymn was altered “for *Hymns, Ancient and Modern*, but I have regretted it since, and restored it, with one change of my own.”³² Thring’s populist spirit probably failed to ingratiate him with the hymnal editors, but that did not prevent him from speaking out on populist topics.

In his tract “A Weekly Church Newspaper for the Million: A Paper Read at the Church Congress, Plymouth, October, 1876,” Thring proposes a newspaper which, although run by laity and avoiding overtly theological topics, would nevertheless represent the church in a positive light. He no doubt had the high church in mind when he lambasts them for their attention to theological ephemera, seemingly far removed from daily concerns of the average person:

but even one of our leading Church Journals, whose columns were filled with discussing a single theological point in every conceivable manner for months together, could not give up even half a column to its consideration; and yet it is *the* want of the day: we are in danger of losing some of the masses, and fail altogether in reaching thousands of others, simply because we do not make use of the weapon of our times.³³

Thring may sound populist, but he soundly condemns the left wing social movements that were infiltrating the Church of England, recommending an almost “muscular Christianity” which would buttress the traditional place of the church in society, affirming that in this paper “there should be chapters on the history of the Church of England, showing how much of our political freedom and learning, as well as the high place we have taken among the nations of the world, is due to her influence.”³⁴ Thring’s concern may not have been for the liturgical minutiae which characterized the most zealous proponents of Tractarianism, but neither did he recline into the doctrinal apathy that some have identified in the Broad Church movement, for whom social justice issues far outweighed

catechesis or evangelical missionary efforts, the semi-national concerns of the other two parties. His eschewing of politics is evident as he writes about this potential newspaper:

In politics it must be independent, giving its support to all measures for the good of our church and country from whatever side they may emanate, for the Church is the Church of *England* not of a *party*. So also as to its religious views, it should utter no shibboleths on either side, but should be marked by a good, honest, straightforward Church of England tone, as declared in her prayer book and articles; for the Church is the Church of a *nation* not of a *sect*.³⁵

As exasperating as Thring might have been to the high church enthusiasts, he placed himself squarely within the traditions and doctrines of the Church of England. As an educated scholar and hymnologist, Thring was no doubt familiar with all the contemporary theological currents swirling about and, while it had not appeared in his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* of 1874, Thring included Samuel Stone's hymn "The Church's One Foundation," in which Stone responded to the modernist views of Bishop Colenso with his famous stanza, in his 1880 hymnal:

Though with a scornful wonder
the world sees her oppressed,
By schism rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
Yet saints their watch are keeping;
their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

Thring's low churchmanship and populist concerns, though, would manifest themselves in tangible ways, in this case, in the rebuilding of St. Peter's Church, Hornblotton.

When maintaining the medieval edifice became untenable, Thring and his wife commissioned T. G. Jackson to design a new building which would reflect the nascent ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement. Jackson, a disciple of architects Norman Shaw and John Ruskin, sought to elaborate an architectural style which would articulate Romantic ideas in much the same way as *HAM* had sought to revive medieval plainchant. Scholarly, historical, and liturgical accuracy was less important than a desire to return to a "simpler" era in which the craftsman was directly involved with his or her creation. A sketch in the *Somerset Year Book* of 1923 recounts the building's history:

The Church of St Peter, erected near the site of the old one (the tower of which still remains), was consecrated in February 1874; it is a small edifice, built of orange oolite stone, with Doultin stone dressings, in the Decorated style at the cost of £2832 to the Rector and his wife . . . the chancel is paved with glass mosaic. The walls of the interior are adorned with Sgraffito work, figures

being formed by cutting away an upper coat of light cement, and leaving exposed an undercoat of (here maroon) colour . . . the reredos is of Derbyshire Alabaster, with figures of the four Evangelists on the blue enamel of the panels, the latter being divided by a cross of porcelain with peculiar lustre, the art of which, though known in the Middle Ages, has only been recently rediscovered.³⁶

The Thrings spared no expense on this lavishly appointed little church, the cost of whose adornment is highlighted by the fact that the living at Alford-with-Hornblotton was only £535 per annum.³⁷ The architectural movement of which this building is represented—the so-called British Queen Anne Style—emphasized not only traditional handiwork and craftsmanship, but also revived natural designs such as flowers and leaves, standing in stark contrast to the heavy, seemingly dark and muscular Gothic style that had transfixed church builders from the 1840s onward. Whereas the High Church movement had promoted medieval church design due to its inherently other-worldliness, Thring's lower church tendencies could be exemplified by his economy of scale. He eschewed the vast, soaring Gothic vaults of the medieval cathedrals or their revivalist counterparts in favor of a smaller space fastidiously adorned with motifs of nature—color, light, and visibility were hallmarks of this vernacular theological language which sought to move the Christian heart through simplicity rather than through grandeur.

Conclusion

In some ways, Godfrey Thring was a product of his time, both as a hymnwriter and as a country parson. His wealth and impressive family lineage, his rural life, and his rather esoteric concerns with hymnwriting and churchmanship seem to reinforce the stereotype of the Victorian aristocrat whose small numbers belied their influence on Great Britain in the nineteenth century. Yet, as he manifested his theology through his writings, his hymns, or even his church building, populist concerns were never far removed. His output evidences a mind greatly concerned that all his congregants and readers understand and inwardly digest the Word of God as delivered through the channels of the Church of England. All parties of the Church of England were concerned, in their own way, with heartfelt devotion to Christ and the church. To the Tractarians, this earnest, heartfelt devotion is manifest in the doctrines so evidenced within worship. The Broad Church was no less concerned with matters of the heart—from where else would their concern for the poor and oppressed originate? The Low Church, with their emphasis on evangelism and conversion, and the concomitant devotional materials flowing therefrom, aimed to change the heart in a way which John Wesley

would have lauded. Wherever Thring may have felt himself at any given time in his life on this theological spectrum, his concern was for the common, less-educated individual. His nephew would evaluate his work two decades after his death, writing “there is in everything that Godfrey Thring wrote something which will uplift the mind, train the character, and inspire the truest and the simplest religious thought.”³⁸ Whether it was through his hymnody or his promotion of individual craftsmanship, Thring’s egalitarian social principles never strayed from the truths and doctrines as revealed in Holy Scripture, striving as he always did for the elusive *via media* in doctrine and in life.

Benjamin A. Kolodziej is Dean of the Dallas Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, Organist and Director of Worship at Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Plano, Texas, and organist for Southern Methodist University’s Perkins Chapel weddings.

Notes

¹Picture found in Francis Arthur Jones, “Some Popular Hymns, and How They Were Written,” *Strand Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly* 9 (1895): 587, credited to Elliott and Fry. Available online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=9OUvAAAAMAJ&pg=PA581&lpg=PA581&dq=%22Some+popular+hymns+and+how+they+were+written%22&source=bl&ots=LkM49sTqGK&sig=A9TbQjLBtcwsk6ChqQYqWxns&hl=en&sa=X&ei=sUNLUc2jM6H4yQHK-ICQBg&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=%22Some%20popular%20hymns%20and%20how%20they%20were%20written%22&f=false>

²Anon. review, *The Church Quarterly Review* 19 (1880): 267-269.

³Anon. review, *The Literary Churchman and Church Fortnightly* 28 (May 26, 1882): 211-214.

⁴Few scholars have gone beyond Julian due to the difficulty in obtaining information about Thring. Richard Arnold summarizes the problem when he states, “. . . very little information is available on the life and work of Godfrey Thring, in spite of the fact, paradoxically, that he is editor of the enormously important and amazingly popular *Church of England Hymn Book*.” Arnold, *English Hymns of the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 203. No modern hymnal companion reproduces a picture of Godfrey Thring; however, there are at least three which exist from turn-of-the-nineteenth-century publications. One bears the inscription of “Elliott and Fry,” a photography concern in Baker Street, London, which photographed many of the great statesmen of the time. Their office was bombed during World War II and the subsequent loss of the negative plates from this era probably accounts for the dearth of Thring portraits.

⁵The author wishes to thank Edward and Elizabeth Thring, who still live at the family estate in Alford, for their invaluable assistance in preparing this essay (<http://www.alfordcoachhouse.co.uk/>).

⁶British public schools are what are known in the United States and Canada as private schools.

⁷“Obituary to [sic] Godfrey Thring by the Bishop of Truro in *The Guardian*, September 23rd 1903” as reprinted in the unpublished Hornblotton Parish Church pamphlet, p. 3. Another unconfirmed family source alludes to the fact that Godfrey met Caroline Marie Louise Koch (1822-1907), whom he proposed to marry, in Prussia. His brother, Edward, convinced him not to marry this daughter of Karl Johann Koch, “Steuerrath of His Prussian Majesty’s customs,” after which time Edward proceeded to marry her himself on 20 December, 1853.

⁸*Kelly’s Directory of Somersetshire, with the City of Bristol*. (London: Kelly, 1883), 17. According to this record, “The living was consolidated with the adjoining parish of Hornblotton by Act of

Parliament, styled ‘Thring’s Estate Bill,’ session 1836, and is entitled the rectory of ‘Alford with Hornblotton,’ the gross value is £420 14s yearly with residence. . . a parsonage for the consolidated living was, in accordance with the Act, built at Hornblotton.”

⁹*The Law Journal* 26 (3 October 1891): 623.

¹⁰Arthur Thring, KCB, “A Somerset Writer of Hymns.”

¹¹Jones, “Some Popular Hymns,” 587.

¹²The Oxford Movement (1833-1845) was a movement in the Church of England to preserve High Church principles such as connections with the Roman Catholic church, ceremonial in worship, and a revival of religious community life. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd rev. ed., ed. E.A. Livingstone, 2006, s.v. “Oxford Movement” and “High Church.”

¹³Godfrey Thring, ed., *A Church of England Hymn Book (CEHB)* (London: W. Skeffington, 1880), iv.

¹⁴*The Church Quarterly Review*, 268.

¹⁵Thring, *CEHB*, xi.

¹⁶Ibid., xii.

¹⁷Godfrey Thring, *Hymns and Sacred Lyrics (HSL)*. (London: Henry S. King, 1874), 113.

¹⁸*The Musical Times* (October 1, 1903): 664. This controversy goes at least as far back as John Wesley who famously implored others not to alter his stanzas, while freely altering others’ hymns himself.

¹⁹Thring, *HSL*, v.

²⁰Elsewhere in this preface, Thring acknowledges that he has “ventured to change some of those overly-familiar epithets which are often applied to our Blessed Lord” (viii). This carefully-reduced use of affectional endearments, as well as a more “controlled” and less exuberant emotionalism echoes once again John Wesley’s editorial practice. See Benjamin A. Kolodziej, “Isaac Watts, the Wesleys, and the Evolution of 18th-Century Congregational Song,” *Methodist History* 42 (2004): 236-248.

²¹The University of Glasgow maintains the manuscript collection of James Mearns (1855-1922), a Scottish-born, Church of England hymnologist and assistant editor of *Julian’s Dictionary of Hymnology*, who corresponded with Thring on a variety of theological topics.

²²Thring, *CEHB*, ix.

²³Although the first edition of *Hymns, Ancient and Modern* (ed. William Henry Monk [London: William Clowes, 1876]) did include music, other early editions from the 1860s did not, so ostensibly the inclusion of music was not deemed an integral characteristic of the hymnal by the early editorial committees.

²⁴Thring, *CEHB*, ix.

²⁵Matthew Bridges, *The Passion of Jesus, a Collection of Original Pieces Corresponding with the Five Sorrowful Mysteries in the Rosary of our Blessed Lady*. (London: Richardson, 1852), 7-8.

²⁶John Henry Newman, *Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1903), 65.

²⁷*HSL*, 75.

²⁸*Hymns, Ancient and Modern*, #573.

²⁹J. R. Watson. “Ancient or Modern, *Ancient and Modern*: The Victorian Hymn and the Nineteenth Century.” *Yearbook of English Studies* 36.2 (2006): 1-16.

³⁰Rev. Percy Dearmer, et al., *Socialism and Religion*. (London, A. C. Fifield, 1908), preface.

³¹Ibid., 41.

³²Rev. W. Fleming Stevenson, ed., *Hymns for the Church and Home* (London, Henry S. King, 1873), “Notes on the Hymns for Children” #117.

³³Ibid., 7. Cf. Thring’s preface to *CEHB*, note 19 above.

³⁴Ibid., 10.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶E. R. Kelly, *County Topographies: Somersetshire*. (London: Kelly, 1875), 282.

³⁷Ibid., 283. Thring also demonstrated facility in painting and the visual arts. (See Arthur Thring, “A Somerset Writer of Hymns,” 35.)

³⁸Arthur Thring, “A Somerset Writer of Hymns,” 36.