

“Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” ~ Robert Robinson

Robert Robinson was born of lowly parents in Swaffham, Norfolk, England, on September 27, 1735. His father died when Robert was eight and at the age of fourteen he was sent by his mother to London to learn the barbering trade. Here for the next he was associated with a notorious gang of hoodlums and lived a debauched life. At the age of seventeen he attended a meeting where George Whitefield was preaching. Robinson and his friends went for the purpose of “scoffing at the deluded Methodists.” However, Whitefield’s strong evangelistic preaching so impressed young Robinson that he was converted to Christ. Several years later he felt called to preach and entered the ministry of the Methodist Church. Subsequently, he left the Methodist Church when he moved to Cambridge and became a Baptist pastor. Here he became known as an able theologian through his writings of many theological works as well as several hymns.

The hymn, text, written when Robinson was only twenty-three years of age, contains an interesting expression in the second stanza, “Here I raise mine Ebenezer-Hither by Thy help I’m come.” This language is taken from 1 Samuel 7:12, where the Ebenezer is a symbol of God’s faithfulness. An expression in the third verse, “Prone to wander-Lord, I feel it-Prone to leave the God I Love,” seems to have been prophetic of Robinson’s later years, as once again his life became characterized by sin, unstableness, and an involvement with the doctrines of Unitarianism.

Louis Albert Banks, in his work *Immortal Hymns and Their Story*, writes:

There is a very touching story connected with this hymn and its author, showing that a hymn, which has burst forth from a loving Christian heart as naturally as a fountain gurgles from the mountain side, may afterwards come back as a thorn of remorse to remind the author of the spiritual exile into which he has wandered.

Long before the railroads, when public travel in England was largely by stagecoach, a lady and gentleman who were strangers to each other were the only travelers on the inside of one of these coaches. The lady had been for some time poring over a single page of a little book to which she referred frequently. Turning, at length, to her companion, who did not seem to be engaged in his attention other than to note the changing scenery through which they were passing, she held the open page toward him, and said: "May I ask your attention to this hymn, and ask you to favor me with your opinion of it? Do you know it?"

The hymn to which she had called his attention was,—

“Come, thou fount of every blessing.”

The gentleman addressed glanced down the page, and his face flushed with confusion as he attempted to excuse himself from conversation on the merits of the hymn; but the lady ventured on another appeal.

"That hymn has given me so much pleasure," she said. "Its sentiments so touch me; indeed, I cannot tell you how much good it has done me. Don't you think it very good?"

"Madam! " said the stranger, bursting into tears, "I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I then had."

Robert Hall said of Robinson: "He had a musical voice, and was master of all its intonations; he had wonderful self-passion, and could say *what* he pleased, *when* he pleased, and *how* he pleased." Like many another brilliant and versatile man, he ran a wandering course and was "unstable as water."

It was doubtless a meditation on this sad frailty of his own nature that led him to write with prayerful tenderness, the verse,—

*"Oh! to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be;
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering soul to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it,
Seal it from thy courts above."*

The tune, "Nettleton," was named for the Asahel Nettleton noted American evangelist of the early eighteen century. Its composer, John Wyeth, born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, March 31, 1770, was a printer and lay musician. This hymn first appeared in his hymnal, Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Songs, published in 1813.

*Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.*

*Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.*

*Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of Thy redeeming love.*

*Here I raise my Ebenezer;
Here by Thy great help I've come;
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.*

*Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.*

*O that day when freed from sinning,
I shall see Thy lovely face;
Clothed then in blood washed linen
How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace;
Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,
Take my ransomed soul away;
Send thine angels now to carry
Me to realms of endless day.*