

**THE HYMN "JESUS OF  
NAZARETH  
PASSETH BY" ITS HISTORY,  
AND OTHER VERSES**

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The Hymn "Jesus of Nazareth Passeth by" Its History, and Other Verses by Emma F. R. Campbell

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**EMMA F. R. CAMPBELL**

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EMMA F. R. CAMPBELL

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## THE HISTORY OF THE HYMN

### “Jesus of Nazareth Passeth By”

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“He who voices the thought of the Christian heart in a hymn which becomes familiar in the songs of the church of Christ, is sure of being held in grateful memory.”

S. S. TIMES.

“I believe that I would rather be the author of one good hymn than of anything else in the world, unless it be *sunshine*.”

E. S. PHELPS.

Very wonderful it seems to the author of the simple lines entitled “Jesus of Nazareth Passeth By,” that such honor should have fallen so unexpectedly upon her. Written merely as a metrical description of impressive scenes passing around her, it was farthest from her thought or intention that they should ever be used as a hymn, and be sung with marked effect in just such gatherings as those that suggested them. “Verily it is the Lord’s doing and is marvelous in our eyes.”

The history of the hymn has often been asked for and given incorrectly by compilers of hymns with their origin. It is briefly this: In the Spring of 1864 a remarkable religious awakening

occurred in Newark, N. J.—the writer's birth-place and residence at that time—in connection with the services of the Rev. E. P. Hammond. All classes of the community felt its power, and the largest churches and halls of the city were crowded day and night by eager, earnest men and women, and children as well.

Among those to whom such scenes were new, and who for the first time realized in her own experience the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit in revealing the fullness and freeness of salvation through Christ, was a young Sabbath School teacher whose heart was deeply moved by seeing one after another in whom she was interested become subjects of the Spirit's influence.

At one of the services the topic was the Gospel story of blind Bartimeus, who asking what the noise of the multitude following Jesus meant, was told, "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." Some very impressive comments on the passage were made by Mr. Pardee, the well-known Sabbath School worker of that day, and others, and much deep feeling was manifested. Under the effect of this stirring application of the Scripture instance of Christ's compassion for and ready help to the needy ones thronging His earthly pathway, the verses beginning, "What means this eager, anxious throng," were suggested and written as descriptive of the similar scenes occurring in our streets, with the hope that such a presentation of the fact of Christ's presence in our midst, ready and able to save, might reach some souls unreached by the meetings. They were sent to a

local paper and to the Sunday School Times, and as soon as they saw the light were immediately taken by Mr. Hammond and added to a collection of hymns he was about to publish called "New Praises of Jesus," set to the tune of "Sweet Hour of Prayer," and were so used by him in subsequent meetings. Very soon, however, a new tune was written for what had now become a popular hymn by the lamented Gospel singer and composer, P. P. Bliss, and published in his collection of "Gospel Songs." But this tune did not prove popular, and another was composed by T. E. Perkins, which is the one given in the Gospel Hymns and sung so effectively by Mr. Sankey in Evangelistic meetings all over the world. The verses were first published over the signature of "Eta," a nom-de-plume chosen by the writer from the Greek alphabet, which accounts for its appearance in the earlier hymn-books as by "Miss Eta Campbell." In later editions of the Gospel Hymns the error has been corrected.

In reviewing the record of this simple production of her pen the author of "Jesus of Nazareth Passeth By" is overwhelmed with grateful surprise that it should have been accorded by the Master such an honored place among the agencies at work for Him, and accepted by the Holy Spirit as a medium of His power in awakening souls and winning them to the one Saviour of the world. Unquestionably it was started on its mission by the impressive rendering of the soulful Christian singer, Ira D. Sankey, and that



much of its usefulness is due to his appreciation of its possibilities, and his intensity of desire to make it effective in touching sin-burdened hearts and leading them to the waiting Healer. And who that has heard him sing this hymn or any other can ever forget the tender, earnest tones of that persuasive voice, or wonder that the words should retain to all future time the echo of the thrill thus imparted to them.

Very many instances have been related of the wonderful effect of this hymn as sung by Mr. Sankey at the great revival services of the two greatest evangelists of the last century. I can only mention a few. One writer, the Rev. Duncan Morrison of Canada, who has written sketches of some remarkable hymns, says he can never forget the scene he once beheld in Glasgow, Scotland, when a congregation of three thousand souls were moved by the thrilling tones of that master of sacred song as he sang:

"Too late! too late! will be the cry,  
Jesus of Nazareth has passed by!"

"The latent wail that for the moment rose to the surface,—the revelation of possible despair at the gates of that strange other world to which we are hastening"—was irresistible. In a book by Rev. Dr. Boyd recounting the remarkable career of Moody and Sankey in Great Britain, many incidents are told of the use and effect of this hymn in the immense gatherings in the great cities. In Belfast, at an open-air meeting held for the mill workers, where it was estimated from

ten to twenty thousand were gathered, Mr. Sankey sang "Jesus of Nazareth Passeth By" in his tender, touching style. "While he was singing I could observe in the glistening eye and the deep sighs of those around me that it was even so." In Dublin, after one of the crowded meetings, an old man of seventy threw himself on his knees sobbing as he said, "I was utterly careless about my soul till last night, but have been so unhappy since I could not sleep. I seemed to hear ringing in my ears 'Jesus of Nazareth Passeth By,' and if I don't get saved now, I never shall." In Manchester, Eng., a band of workers was organized to visit every house with a card bearing on one side this hymn, and on the other a short address by Mr. Moody on the text "Behold I stand at the door and knock." At one of the meetings in Philadelphia it is said by one who was present, "As Mr. Sankey was singing this hymn, his voice in the lines 'Ho! all ye heavy laden come,' and afterward 'Too late! too late! will be the cry,' became so low, broken, full of pity, and clear withal that dozens of people half rose from their seats and bent forward toward the stage as if by magnetic attraction."

The key-note of its popularity thus given by Mr. Sankey, and the appropriation of it to His special use by the Holy Spirit, the use and effect of this hymn has not been confined to the large assembly or the magnetic tones of one consecrated voice. In smaller gatherings all over the world and even in the home circle it has proved its

mission of soul awakening and hope inspiring power. One instance from many that have come to the knowledge of the writer is peculiarly touching to her. A condemned murderer heard it sung at the religious exercises held in the prison, and was strongly impressed and led to accept the hope of pardon through a merciful Saviour. During the last days of his life he frequently asked to have it sung; and the day before his execution requested that it might be sung the following Sunday, saying, "Who knows that I may not hear it. If not, it may touch the heart of some other poor fellow as it has mine."

But perhaps nothing in the record of this hymn has brought more real joy and gratitude to the heart of the author than the fact that it is sung by converted heathen in the far lands of India, Syria and other foreign mission fields. A missionary friend in India wrote of having heard it sung by a congregation of five or six hundred natives in their own language—the Marathi—with thrilling effect. She very kindly had a copy of it transcribed for the writer from their hymn-book by a Hindoo pundit—a reproduction of which is appended to this sketch.

Such is the surprising history of this simple production. It is but an illustration of God's wonderful way of using the humble, obscure forces of Christian life and thought to accomplish His great designs—"the weak things of the world to confound the mighty." Written in an hour of spiritual fervor, unconscious of any special inspiration, with no attempt at poetic