

~Other Speakers G-L: Hymn Stories:

Author --Edward Mote, 1797-1874

Composer --William B. Bradbury, 1816-1868

Tune Name --"Solid Rock"

"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:11

Many of our gospel hymns are criticized by theologians as being too subjective and experiential, or for stating one's assurance of salvation and eternal life entirely upon a personal experience--i.e. "You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart" (No. 33). The "Solid Rock" text, however, is quite different in this respect. Note the believer's basis of faith as expressed in this text: Jesus' blood, His righteousness, His unchanging grace, His oath and covenant. Truly, when one has such objective truth upon which to build a life and future hope, "all other ground is sinking sand."

The personal life of this hymn's author is most interesting. Edward Mote was born on January 21, 1797, of very poor, ungodly parents, in London, England. His parents were keepers of an inn or public house in London. In writing of his youth, Mote said, "My Sundays were spent in the streets. So ignorant was I that I did not know that there was a God." He further states that the school he attended did not even allow a Bible to be seen, much less taught. As a youth, Mote was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker and eventually became known as a successful craftsman of that trade. At the age of sixteen, he was taken by his master to hear the esteemed preacher, John Hyatt, of the Tottenham Court Chapel. Here young Edward was genuinely converted to Christ. He later settled at Southwark, a suburb of London, where he became known as a successful cabinetmaker and a devoted churchman.

At the age of fifty-five, Edward Mote realized a life-long dream. Largely through his personal efforts, a building for a Baptist congregation was built in the village of Horsham, Sussex, England. The church members, out of gratitude to Mote, offered him the deed to the property. He refused their offer, saying: "I do not want the chapel; I only want the pulpit, and when I cease to preach Christ, then turn me out of that." Here Mote ministered faithfully for the next twenty-one years until forced to resign because of poor health, one year before he died on November 13, 1874. Just prior to his death, he said: "The truths I have been preaching, I am now living upon, and they do very well to die upon." Edward Mote lies buried in the churchyard of the Horsham church. Near the pulpit in the church is a tablet with this inscription:

"In loving memory of Mr. Edward Mote, who fell asleep in Jesus November 13th, 1874, aged 77 years. For 26 years the beloved pastor of this church, preaching Christ and Him crucified, as all the sinner can need, and all the saint desire."

Edward Mote wrote more than one hundred hymn texts throughout his life. Many of these were included in his collection entitled Hymns of Praise, A New Selection of Gospel Hymns, Combining All the Excellencies of Our Spiritual Poets, With Many Originals, published in 1836.

The "Solid Rock" text was written in 1834, and Mote titled it, "The Gracious Experience of a Christian." The completed hymn text originally consisted of six stanzas. Expressions from portions of these two omitted verses are interesting to observe:

"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; 'Midst all the hell I feel within, on His completed work I lean.

I trust His righteous character, His council, promise, and His power;
His honor and His name's at stake, to save me from the burning lake."

The following account was given to one of the local newspapers by Edward Mote regarding the writing of his hymn:

"One morning it came into my mind as I went to labor, to write an hymn on the "Gracious Experience of a Christian." As I went up Holborn I had the chorus, 'On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.'

"In the day, I had the first four verses complete, and wrote them off. On the Sabbath following, I met Brother King as I came out of the Lisle Street Meeting ... who informed me that his wife was very ill, and asked me to call

and see her. I had an early tea and called afterwards. He said that it was his usual custom to sing a hymn, read a portion, and engage in prayer, before he went to the meeting. He looked for his hymnbook, but could find it nowhere. I said, 'I have some verses in my pocket; if you like, we could sing them.' We did, and his wife enjoyed them so much that after the service he asked me, as a favor, to leave a copy of them for his wife. I went home, and by the fireside composed the last two verses, wrote them off, and took them to Sister King. As these verses so met the dying woman's case, my attention to them was the more arrested, and I had a thousand of them printed for distribution. I sent one to the Spiritual Magazine, without my initials, which appeared some time after this. Brother Rees, of Crown Street, Soho, brought out an edition of hymns, in 1836, and this hymn was in it. David Denham introduced it, in 1837, with Rees' name given as the author.

In his Hymns of Praise collection of 1836, Edward Mote included this hymn and reclaimed its authorship under the title, "The Immutable Basis of a Sinner's Hope."

The music for Mote's text was composed, in 1863, by William Batchelder Bradbury,, one of the foremost composers of early, American gospel music. It first appeared in his collection, The Devotional Hymn and Tune Book, published in 1864, by the American Baptist Publication Society. This was the only, new Baptist hymnal to appear in our country during the Civil War years.

William Bradbury is also the composer for these hymns: "Depth of Mercy" (No. 20), "Even Me" (No. 23), "Sweet Hour of Prayer" (No 82), as well as "He Leadeth Me" (101 Hymn Stories, No. 28), "Jesus Loves Me" (ibid., No. 47), and "Just As I Am" (ibid., No. 52). Other well-known gospel hymns for which Bradbury has contributed the music include: "Tis Midnight--and on Olive's Brow," "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us," and "There Is No Name So Sweet on Earth."

Some song leaders today prefer to use the "Melita" tune (generally used with the navy hymn text, "Eternal (Almighty) Father, Strong to Save--See No. 22) with the "Solid Rock" text, rather than Bradbury's more rhythmic music, feeling that the intensity of the "Melita" melodic line is more compatible with the strength of the lyrics. Interchanging different tunes with comparable meters and familiar texts is a musical practice that occasionally provides a refreshing change for any congregation.

"Life with Christ is an endless hope; without Him a hopeless end." --Anonymous

THE CHRIST

"He is a path, if any be misled;
He is a robe, if any naked be;
If any chance to hunger, He is bread;
If any be a bondman, He is free;
If any be but weak, how strong is He!
To dead men life He is; to sick souls health;
To blind men, sight, and to the needy, wealth;
A pleasure without loss, a treasure without stealth."
--Giles Fletcher, Jr. 1588-1623