

Hymn of the Month

April 2008

MY HOPE IS BUILT

The parables of Jesus have long been the focus of personal study, church sermons, and theological debate. Some scholars and theologians claim they are merely illustrative stories while others claim they are real-life events that Jesus told in a didactic format. However one views the origin of these parables, there is no doubt that their messages form pivotal principles and doctrines in the Christian faith. Interestingly, there is a paucity of church music based on the parables, likely because they are told in “story” format. Our Hymn of the Month, however, is based on the parable of the wise man who built his house upon the rock.

Although there is no evidence to indicate that Edward Mote based his hymn, *My Hope is Built* on this parable directly, the association has long been made by hymnists and congregants alike. Mote was born into poverty in 1797, the son of London pubkeepers. He was raised in a home that was so void of anything religious, he was unaware God existed until his teenage years. During these years, Mote was exposed to the Bible, eventually gave his life to Christ, and was baptized at age eighteen.

As a young man, Mote was apprenticed to become a cabinetmaker, an occupation he had for over thirty-five years. It was during his tenure as a cabinetmaker that he wrote the words to *My Hope is Built*. He recalled that one morning in 1834, “it came into my mind as I went to labour to write a hymn on the ‘Gracious Experience of a Christian.’ As I went up to Holborn I had the chorus...In the day I had four first verses complete, and wrote them off.” The following week Mote was asked to call upon a friend whose wife was very ill. Unable to find her hymnbook, Mote and his two friends sang the verses he had written the previous week, leaving a copy for his friend when he left. He completed the hymn that night and gave the finished product to his friend at a later date. In 1836 Mote published the hymn in his own publication, and a year later it was re-published in an independent hymnal.

Mote eventually became a minister at age 55, and preached every Sunday until his retirement at age 76. He died one year later.

American composer William B. Bradbury, whose other works include *Jesus Loves Me*, and *Sweet Hour of Prayer*, composed the common tune for this hymn in 1863. As a musical specimen, this tune is a perfect example of 19th century American camp songs. Although devalued by some “high musicians” THE SOLID ROCK has long outlasted its critics and remains a popular hymn tune to the present day. Indeed, the alternative tunes MELITA and EVANSTON, while more musically sophisticated and well known with other texts, are virtually unheard combined with Edward Mote’s poetry. Bradbury’s music is engaging, energetic, and repetitious enough to make it memorable to several generations of Christians.

As a hymn, *My Hope is Built* has an important message: no matter where we are; no matter what we do; no matter what danger, fear, or temptation we face, we can rest assured that we are firmly grounded in Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. As we cling to His promises and His Word, we can be certain that everything else will sink away as we stand firm upon the Rock of Jesus.