



10-1-1981

“All Is Well. . .”: The Story of “the Hymn That Went around the World”

Paul E. Dahl

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>

Recommended Citation

Dahl, Paul E. (1981) “All Is Well. . .”: The Story of “the Hymn That Went around the World”, *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 21 : Iss. 4 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol21/iss4/12>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

“All Is Well . . . ”: The Story of “the Hymn That Went around the World”

Paul E. Dahl

The hymn “All Is Well,” or “Come, Come, Ye Saints” as it is commonly referred to, composed on Locust Creek in April 1846, has an interesting history. Although the song was popular with the Mormon pioneers, obscurities in its history need clarification. There have been some misconceptions about the motivation for composing the hymn. Also relevant to its composition is the apparent influence of an old English song, “All Is Well.” Finally, the exact location of the Mormon camp on Locust Creek has never been identified, creating a question as to whether the song was composed in Iowa or Missouri. This paper will examine these problems in an effort to increase the reader’s understanding of the history of this great hymn that was a marching song for the Mormon pioneers and is a hymn sung today by Mormons around the world as well as by members of other faiths.

THE COMPOSER

William Clayton, the composer of “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” was one of thousands of exiles forced from their homes in Nauvoo, Illinois. In early spring of 1846 this group moved westward across Iowa en route to a new, more tolerant home. William, an early convert to Mormonism in Great Britain, was baptized by Heber C. Kimball in the River Ribble on 21 October 1837 and served as a counselor in the British mission presidency. On 8 September 1840 he and his family left their beloved England to make a new home in Nauvoo.¹

The Nauvoo years were busy ones for William. He served as a clerk for the Church and “was necessarily thrown constantly into the company”² of Joseph Smith. Later he was recorder in the Nauvoo Temple.

Paul E. Dahl is the director of the LDS Institute of Religion in Tucson, Arizona.

¹James B. Allen, *Manchester Mormons: The Journal of William Clayton, 1840–1842* (Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, 1974), p. 172; Clayton Family Records, LDS Genealogical Library, Salt Lake City.

²Andrew Jensen, ed., *The Historical Record* (Salt Lake City: Published by author, 1887), 6:225.

These days were to be short-lived, however, for on 27 February 1846, unfriendly “gentile” neighbors forced him and numerous other Mormons to leave Nauvoo. For the journey west, Brigham Young appointed him clerk for the entire “Camp of Israel,”³ an appointment that gave William extra assignments in addition to caring for his family. He was also involved in playing concerts with the camp band at the various settlements as the pioneers traveled west.

Because the first day of the journey was extremely cold, they traveled with difficulty only seven and one-half miles into the bleak Iowa prairie.⁴ The weather in Iowa that year was miserable for pioneer travel. Of the approximately ninety days spent in transit from the Mississippi to the Missouri, George A. Smith records in his diary that they had “thirty-four days of storm, either snow or rain. This was one of the wettest springs that Iowa had had or was to have for some years to come.”⁵ The bad weather affected the health of these pioneers, not only bringing on sickness but also making recovery difficult. The following journal entry by William Clayton is typical of their miseries: “I have been sick again all day especially towards night. I was so distressed with pain it seemed as though I could not live.”⁶

No doubt adding to his distress was the necessity of leaving the youngest of his four wives, Diantha, in Nauvoo. Diantha, the daughter of Winslow Farr, was married to William Clayton on 9 January 1845, in Nauvoo, by Heber C. Kimball. When the remainder of the family left for Iowa, seventeen-year-old Diantha was expecting her first child and was only a month away from delivery. She was therefore in no condition to face the hardships of the journey. It is difficult to perceive the frustration and turmoil that must have faced William during the several months after leaving Nauvoo. The terrible weather and living conditions, plus a large family to care for—including three wives, five children, and his mother—added greatly to these frustrations. He was particularly concerned about Diantha and frequently sent her letters.⁷

³Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 27 March 1846, Library-Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City; hereafter cited as Church Archives.

⁴William Clayton, *William Clayton's Journal* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1921), p. 1.

⁵Lynn Robert Webb, “Contributions of the Temporary Settlements Garden Grove, Mount Pisgah and Kaneshville, Iowa, to Mormon Emigration, 1846–1852” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1954), p. 19.

⁶Clayton, *William Clayton's Journal*, pp. 12–13.

⁷Paul E. Dahl, *William Clayton: Missionary, Pioneer, and Public Servant* (Provo, Utah: J. Grant Stevenson, 1964), p. 68. See also James B. Allen, “One Man’s Nauvoo: William Clayton’s Experience in Mormon Illinois,” *Journal of Mormon History* 6 (1979): 54–55.

Diantha, it appears, was also lonely for her husband. In a letter of 16 March she writes:

My Beloved but absent William

It rejoiced my heart to heare a word from you but it would have given me more joy to have had a line from you but I am thankful for a little you know that is the way to get more.

To tell you I want to see you is useless yet true you are constantly in my mind by day and I dream about you almst every night, as to my helth it is about the same as when you left onely a little more so I often wish you had taken your house a long for it looks so lonesome it seems a long time sinse I saw you but how much longer it will be before I can have the priviledge of conversing with you face to face it is yet unknown to me father is doing as fast as he can he wants to get away soon after conference if possible Mother sends her best respects to you, often says how lonesome it seems dont you think Wm will come to night I expect it would cheer her heart as well as mind to hear your voice once more, dear Wm write as often as you can send, for one line from you would do my heart good

I must draw to a close for I am in haste

I will try to compose myself as well as I can. I never shall consent to have you leave again.

Farewell, Farewell⁸

A NEW HYMN IS COMPOSED

April 15 found the camp located at Locust Creek, about one-half mile west of the middle fork of Locust Creek. However, the exact location of this camp has not, to date, been positively identified, though it is known to have been near the present-day Iowa–Missouri state line, which has a history of changes and disputes from 1816 to 1895. Some evidence suggests that the camp was located just south of the present-day state line in Putnam County, Missouri.⁹ William Clayton records in his journal on 15 April that he spent the previous night on watch and was exceedingly frustrated because the cattle and horses were breaking into the tents. This day, however, brought him good news. The day before, Charles Decker had arrived from Nauvoo with a large packet of letters and messages for the camp. One of the letters, to a Brother Pond, noted that Diantha had delivered a “fine fat boy” on 30 March but “was very sick with ague and mumps.”

⁸Diantha Clayton to William Clayton, 16 March 1846, Church Archives. The letter is printed in Allen, “One Man’s Nauvoo,” pp. 55–56.

⁹See Stanley B. Kimball, “The Iowa Trek of 1846: The Brigham Young Route from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters,” *The Ensign* 2 (June 1972): 42; Webb, “Contributions of Temporary Settlements,” p. 24; *Unionville (Missouri) Republican*, 23 March 1938 and 17 August 1938; Helen Mar Whitney, “Our Travels beyond the Mississippi,” *Woman’s Exponent* 12 (15 January 1884): 126.

It appears that maybe two women received this information from the Pond letter and then, in turn, passed the news on to William. Helen Mar Whitney, wife of Horace Whitney, records the event:

As I learned, through the mail, that Wm. Clayton was the father of a child by his wife, Diantha Farr, who was left with her parents in Nauvoo. I bore the tidings to Wm., whose delight knew no bounds, and that evening Horace, myself and a number were invited over to their camp, Wm. being one of the band, whose encampment was only a short distance from ours, and which event Horace mentions thus: "In the evening there was a grand christening held at Bro. Clayton's camp, in celebration of the birth of his child in Nauvoo."¹⁰

William Clayton, in his journal, says he received the "good news" in the morning from Ellen Kimball and went immediately to Pond's camp. Brother Pond then read him the letter telling about William's wife and new son. William also records that after hearing the news he composed a new song, "All is Well." His complete journal entry for this date reads as follows:

Wednesday, 15th. Last night I got up to watch, there being no guard. The cattle and horses breaking into the tents and wagons. I tarried up then called S. Hales and Kimball. This morning Ellen Kimball¹¹ came to me and wishes me much joy. She said Diantha has a son. I told her I was afraid it was not so, but she said Brother Pond had received a letter. I went over to Pond's and he read that she had a fine fat boy on the 30th ult., but she was very sick with ague and mumps. Truly I feel to rejoice at this intelligence but feel sorry to hear of her sickness. Spent the day chiefly reading. In the afternoon President Young came over and found some fault about our wagons, etc. In the evening the band played and after we dismissed the following persons retired to my tent to have a social christening, viz. William Pitt, Hutchinson, Smithies, Kay, Egan, Duzett, Redding, William Cahoon, James Clayton and Charles A. Terry and myself. We had a very pleasant time playing and singing until about twelve o'clock and drank health to my son. We named him William Adriel Benoni Clayton.¹² The weather has been fine but rains a little tonight. Henry Terry's horses are missing and have been hunted today but not found. *This morning I composed a new song—"All is well."* I feel to thank my heavenly father for my boy and pray that he will spare and preserve his life and that of his mother and so order it so that we may soon meet again. O Lord bless thine handmaid and fill her with thy spirit, make her healthy that her life may be prolonged and that we may live upon the earth and honor the cause of truth. In the

¹⁰Whitney, "Our Travels beyond the Mississippi," p. 127.

¹¹There appears to be a discrepancy between the Helen Mar Whitney and William Clayton accounts as to who informed William about his wife and new baby. Possible explanations might be that they both reported to him and he recorded only one account in the journal or that "Ellen Kimball" mentioned in his journal entry should have been "Helen Kimball (Whitney)" and William made a mistake when recording it in his journal.

¹²In reality the child's name became simply Moroni Clayton.

evening I asked the President if he would not suffer me to send for Diantha. He consented and said we would send when we got to Grand River.¹³

Thus we have the setting for the composition of the hymn "Come, Come, Ye Saints," variously referred to as "the hymn that helped domesticate the American wilderness,"¹⁴ "the hymn that went around the world,"¹⁵ "the Mormon signature hymn,"¹⁶ "the favorite hymn of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Mormons around the world,"¹⁷ and a hymn "worthy to be classed among the great hymns of Christian literature."¹⁸

COMMEMORATING THE BIRTH OF A SON

Clayton's journal entry seems to indicate that the new song was written to commemorate the birth of his new son and the deliverance of his wife through the perils of childbirth.¹⁹ A tradition which is in error, however, has developed within the Church relative to the origin of that hymn. The common misconception claims that Brigham Young came to William Clayton, who was recognized as one of the capable musicians within the Church during his time,²⁰ and asked him to write a hymn that would strengthen and encourage the members of the camp. A typical example of this account comes from an early lesson manual for the women of the Church:

It was at Locust Creek, Iowa, that President Brigham Young, feeling great anxiety, because there were murmurings in the camp of Israel, called Elder William Clayton aside, and said, "Brother Clayton, I want you to write a hymn that the people can sing at their camp-fires, in the

¹³Clayton, *William Clayton's Journal*, pp. 19–20; italics added.

¹⁴Alistair Cooke in the television series "America."

¹⁵Title of the display in the Wayne County Historical Museum at Corydon, Iowa, commemorating "Come, Come, Ye Saints."

¹⁶"When the Latter-day Saints Go Marching In," *Sports Illustrated*, 8 December 1980, p. 87.

¹⁷News release of the Public Communications Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7 July 1973.

¹⁸George D. Pyper, "The Story of Our Hymns," *Improvement Era* 39 (July 1936): 429.

¹⁹This is the traditional point of view taken by members of the Clayton family, according to Alma Clayton, the last surviving child of William Clayton, as told to the writer in an oral interview prior to Alma Clayton's death.

²⁰William Clayton played horn, drum, and violin in the Nauvoo band. Before they left Nauvoo, Brigham Young gave him \$150 to purchase instruments for the brass band to accompany the pioneers on the plains. William Clayton had been called upon regularly with his friends to furnish entertainment at various functions in Nauvoo. In Iowa he made arrangements for concerts for the band in the various settlements through which they passed, he himself playing in the band. (Allen, "One Man's Nauvoo," pp. 49, 55.) After the pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, he helped reorganize the Nauvoo Legion Band. The Pioneer Day program of 24 July 1853 included one of his compositions, "A Home for the Saints." The present hymnal of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints contains, besides "Come, Come, Ye Saints," another hymn that was sung much in prior years, Hymn No. 198, "When First the Glorious Light of Truth," said to have been Brigham Young's favorite hymn (see Heber J. Grant, "Favorite Hymns," *Improvement Era* 17 [June 1914]: 784).

evening; something that will give them succor and support, and help them to forget the many troubles and trials of the journey.”

Elder Clayton withdrew from the camp, and in two hours returned with the hymn familiarly known as, “Come, come, ye Saints.” His personal testimony is to the effect that the Spirit of the Lord rested upon him during the time of its composition, and that the hymn was written under the power and inspiration of the Lord.²¹

No support has been found for this early tradition. It certainly is not included in Clayton’s own journal; the long-held Clayton family tradition does not support it; and a letter written by Heber J. Grant, while serving as the seventh President of the Church, rejects it. President Grant, in a letter dated 28 March 1923 to Victoria C. McCune, a daughter of William Clayton, makes the following comment:

Elder Frank Penrose brought me a carbon copy of a letter dated July 21, 1920, written by yourself to Lillie T. Freeze, with reference to the hymn, “Come, Come Ye Saints.”

I was very glad to have this information regarding the writing of the poem. I had heard that the poem was written at the special request of President Brigham Young, at Winter Quarters. I do not know where I read or where I heard, at this late date, that President Young requested your father to go and write a hymn that would encourage and bless the Saints on their journey from Winter Quarters to Salt Lake Valley, but I have made this announcement time and time again in public, but of course shall do so no more.²²

AN OLD ENGLISH TUNE

Subsequent research by Church musicians reveals that William Clayton was probably acquainted with a tune of English origin called “All Is Well,” a tune “brought down by oral tradition until its appearance in *Union Harmony* and *Original Sacred Harp*, early Southern publications.”²³ It was derived from the folk song “Good Morning, Gossip Joan,” which in Virginia oral tradition is called “Good Morning, Neighbor Jones.” In 1844, two years before the Clayton composition, J. T. White of Georgia revised the song; it appears in *The Sacred Harp* as “All Is Well. P. M.” In “The Story of Our Hymns,” George D. Pyper says, “No doubt it was from this source that William Clayton got the tune and ‘Mormonized’ it to fit

²¹“Latter-day Hymns,” *Relief Society Magazine* 8 (January 1921): 58. See also Grant, “Favorite Hymns,” pp. 777–78; George D. Pyper, “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1939), pp. 21–24.

²²Heber J. Grant to Victoria C. McCune, 28 March 1923, quoted in Kate B. Carter, ed., *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1944), 5:498–99.

²³Pyper, “Story of Our Hymns,” p. 428; J. Spencer Cornwall, *A Century of Singing* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), pp. 301–303.

'Come, Come, Ye Saints.'''²⁴ The rhythm of the White arrangement also appears to have been revised to fit the lines of Clayton's composition. One stanza of "All Is Well. P. M." is as follows:

What's this that steals, that steals upon my frame?
Is it death, is it death?
That soon will quench, will quench this mortal flame,
Is it death, is it death?
If this be death, I soon shall be
From ev'ry pain and sorrow free.
I shall the King of glory see,
All is well, all is well!²⁵

The only similarity between the lyrics of White's arrangement and Clayton's composition, with the exception of the "All is well!" refrains, is the following two lines. The White hymn reads:

If this be death, I soon shall be
From ev'ry pain and sorrow free.

In "Come, Come, Ye Saints" two lines of the fourth verse read:

And should we die before our journey's through . . .
We then are free from toil and sorrow, too.

The four verses of "Come, Come, Ye Saints" epitomize the hardships, courage, and great faith of the Mormon pioneers. A former Church Music Committee member has effectively summarized the meaning of its stanzas:

Stanza I is a challenge to the courage of the Pioneers: though the journey may be hard the grace of God will strengthen them; useless cares will be thrown aside; murmurings will cease. As a recompense, joy! All will be well!

Stanza II spiritualizes the Pioneer endeavor: why mourn? Why expect a reward if they falter? Why shun the fight? "Gird up your loins, fresh courage take, Our God will never us forsake"—another call for fortitude with a glorious promise.

Stanza III gives assurance of temporal joys: that the Saints will find a resting place in the West as foretold by their Prophet. There they will be safe from mobs and violence; there they will swell the air with music and praises to God their King.

²⁴Pyper, "Story of Our Hymns," p. 428.

²⁵The White arrangement of the hymn can be found in a hymnal entitled *Original Sacred Harp*, rev. ed., published by the United Sacred Harp Musical Association of Atlanta, Georgia, in 1911. The hymn "All Is Well" appears on page 122 as "re-arranged" by J. T. White, with the following footnote: "The tune has been published before[;] it was printed in the 'Sacred Harp'. It was named by White for the 'Sacred Harp'. The words are also a part of the old melodies." (J. Spencer Cornwall, "Come, Come, Ye Saints," *Instructor* 105 [April 1970]: center spread.) It has also been published in *Twelve Folk Hymns* by J. Fisher and Bro., New York, 1934 ("Come, Come, Ye Saints," *The Pioneer* 20 [January-February 1973]: 16).

ALL IS WELL. P. M.

J. T. White

slow

1 What's this that steals, that steals up-on my frame! Is it death! is it death! } If this be death, I
That soon will quench, will quench this mor-tal flame. Is it death! is it death! }

2 Weep not, my friends, my friends weep not for me, All is well! All is well! } There's not a cloud that
My sins for-giv'n, for-giv'n, and I am free. All is well! All is well! }

soon shall be From ev'-ry pain and sor-row free, I shall the King of glo-ry see. All is well! All is well!

doth a-rise, To hide my Je-sus from my eyes, I soon shall mount the up-per skies. All is well! All is well!

3 Tune, tune your harps, your harps ye saints on high.
All is well, All is well!
I too will strike my harp with equal joy.
All is well, All is well!
Beneath angels are from glory come,
They're round my bed, they're in my room,
They wait to wait my spirit home.
All is well, All is well!

4 Hark: hark: my Lord, my Lord and Master's voice,
Calls away, Calls away!
I soon shall see—enjoy my happy choice,
Why delay, Why delay!
Farewell, my friends, adieu, adieu,
I can no longer stay with you,
My glittering crown appears in view.
All is well, All is well!

5 Hail: hail: all hail: all hail: ye blood-wash'd throng
Saved by grace, Saved by grace!
I come to join, to join your rapturous song,
Saved by grace, Saved by grace!
All, all is peace and joy divine,
And heaven and glory now are mine,
Loud hallelujahs to the Lamb!
All is well, All is well!

As it appears in *The Sacred Harp*

13

Come, Come, Ye Saints

William Clayton

Old English Tune

Resolutely ♩ = 66

1. Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor la - bor fear; But with joy
 2. Why should we mourn or think our lot is hard? 'Tis not so;
 3. We'll find the place which God for us pre - pared, Far a - way
 4. And should we die be - fore our jour - ney's through, Hap - py day!

wend your way. Though hard to you this jour - ney may ap - pear,
 all is right. Why should we think to earn a great re - ward,
 in the West, Where none shall come to hurt or make a - fraid;
 all is well! We then are free from toil and sor - row, too;

Grace shall be as your day. 'Tis bet - ter far for
 If we now shun the fight? Gird up your loins; fresh
 There the Saints will be blessed. We'll make the air with
 With the just we shall dwell! But if our lives are

us to strive Our use - less cares from us to drive; Do
 cour - age take; Our God will nev - er us for - sake; And
 mu - sic ring, Shout prais - es to our God and King; A -
 spared a - gain To see the Saints their rest ob - tain, O

this, and joy your hearts will swell- All is well! all is well!
 soon we'll have this tale to tell- All is well! all is well!
 bove the rest these words we'll tell- All is well! all is well!
 how we'll make this cho - rus swell- All is well! all is well!

As it appears in *Hymns: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Stanza IV dedicates anew their lives to their task. Living or dying they will be true; if the latter, they will find a celestial home with the just, free from toil and sorrow; if the former, their lives spared, they will shout praises to God, and make the chorus swell with—“*All is well! All is well!*”²⁶

THE HYMN GROWS IN POPULARITY

William Clayton’s “new song” appears to have gained rapid popularity with the members of the Church, for by 1851 it was included in a hymn book published by the Church.²⁷ Another tradition referred to by numerous writers is that the song was sung by pioneer groups at their evening camp fires to give them great encouragement in combating the many troubles and trials of the journey. But this writer has not seen any reference to Clayton’s hymn recorded in any original pioneer journals or writings that he has studied.²⁸

One of the most authentic accounts we have of the inspiration evoked by this song is from a secondary source. Heber J. Grant shares a testimony given by his father-in-law, Oscar Winters, while Brother Winters was visiting at the Grant home:

Brother Grant, I do not believe that the young people today fully appreciate what a marvelous inspiration it was to the Saints in crossing the plains to sing, almost daily, the hymn, “Come, Come Ye Saints.”

Brother Winters then related the following incident:

One night, as we were making camp, we noticed one of our brethren had not arrived, and a volunteer party was immediately organized to return and see if anything had happened to him. Just as we were about to start, we saw the missing brother coming in the distance. When he arrived, he said he had been quite sick; so some of us unyoked his oxen and attended to his part of the camp duties. After supper, he sat down before the campfire on a large rock, and sang in a very faint but plaintive and sweet voice, the hymn, “Come, Come Ye Saints.” It was a rule of the camp that whenever anybody started this hymn all in the camp should join, but for some reason this evening nobody joined him; he sang the hymn alone. When he had finished, I doubt if there was a single dry eye in the camp. The next morning we noticed that he was not yoking up his cattle. We went to his wagon and found that he had died during the night. We dug a shallow grave, and after we had covered his body with the earth we rolled the large stone to the head of

²⁶Pyper, “Story of Our Hymns,” p. 429.

²⁷Franklin D. Richards, *Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 9th ed. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1851; London: William Cook, 1851), p. 58. See also Pyper, *Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns*, p. 24.

²⁸If any readers have access to any primary sources of pioneers who made comment about how they were inspired in their trek across the plains by “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” the writer would very much appreciate receiving these accounts.

the grave to mark it, the stone on which he had been sitting the night before when he sang:

“And should we die before our journey’s through
Happy day! All is well!
We then are free from toil and sorrow too;
With the just we shall dwell.
But if our lives are spared again
To see the Saints their rest obtain,
O how we’ll make this chorus swell—
All is well! All is well!”²⁹

President Grant concludes by noting that there were tears in his father-in-law’s eyes when Brother Winters finished relating the incident.

A most unusual account pertaining to this song is reported to have come to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir from an old Indian chief who claimed he heard about the incident from his father:

Many, many moons ago my people were on the warpath. We hated the palefaces. We held council and decided to kill everyone. A band of palefaces were going west. They had almost reached the Rocky Mountains. I was the chief of 1,000 young braves. That night silently we waited on a mountain pass for these people, which were led by Brigham Young. There were braves with bows and arrows behind every rock and tree, waiting to pounce down upon the palefaces. The pioneers camped for the night and prepared dinner. The big bonfire was burning brightly, and the palefaces danced around the fire. Everyone then sat down and began singing, “Come, Come, Ye Saints.” I gave the signal, but our fingers were like stone—not one arrow was shot. We mounted our horses and rode back to camp. We knew the Great Spirit was watching over the palefaces. This is your song; it was your forefathers’ song and is my song every night before I go to bed. It brings the Great Spirit near to me and makes me and my people happy.³⁰

A more recent account of the popularity and effect of this song comes from the Mormon Tabernacle Choir’s European tour in 1955. At their first stop in Glasgow, Scotland, the choir sang “Come, Come, Ye Saints.” “Midway in the program, after ‘Come, Come, Ye Saints’ the applause became so tumultuous, even to stamping, that it was necessary to repeat this hymn before proceeding with the concert.”³¹

A current choir member, Dr. Calvin R. Brown, who as a young man went with the choir on that European tour, relates the following:

²⁹Grant, “Favorite Hymns,” pp. 781–83.

³⁰J. Spencer Cornwall, *A Century of Singing*, pp. 305–306.

³¹Millicent D. Cornwall, “A History of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, 1847–1957,” MS, in possession of Millicent D. Cornwall, p. 338, as quoted in a letter to the writer from Dr. Jerrold D. Ottley, director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, 31 December 1980.

“I first joined the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in 1944 at age 17. A year later I found myself in Bremen, Germany, a 2nd Lt. in the U.S. infantry. One Sunday morning during Christmas, I was alone by the great Dom in downtown Bremen, viewing with horror the total destruction of that beautiful city. Suddenly I heard the unmistakable strains of ‘Come, Come, Ye Saints’ in German drifting across the bombed out ruins. With great nostalgia and anticipation, I followed the sounds up some creaky stairs to a Sporthalle behind the great cathedral. When I opened the door, the singing stopped as all faces turned to me, noticing my uniform. Having experienced the most severe persecution all through the war, they were obviously frightened by my appearance. I tried to calm them and then began speaking in what they described as ‘German without accent.’ It must have been the gift of tongues. They considered me some kind of messenger delivering them from the extended period of darkness that they had suffered under Hitler. We then sang ‘Come, Come, Ye Saints’ together. I never hear it sung without remembering those tearful faces that day. The song changed my life.”³²

More than a century and a third has passed since William Clayton identified himself as the composer of this “new song.” However, its popularity has spread far beyond the camp fires of those Mormon pioneers and even beyond the singing by present-day Mormons in their various worship meetings. The Tabernacle Choir is widely recognized for its rendition of the great hymn of the plains, receiving requests that it be included in every broadcast. People of different faiths in many nations now thrill to its sound as do the Mormons.³³ The song has been translated into many languages and is sung by Mormons and non-Mormons around the world. It is published, by permission, in two public school music series as one of the ten best American hymns, comparing favorably with two of the great hymns of the world—France’s “La Marseillaise” and Martin Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”³⁴ It is one of the few hymns to have a special display, in its honor, in a non-Mormon museum at Corydon, Iowa, most likely only a few miles from the spot where the hymn was composed. The hymn has even been publicly recognized by a president of the United States. In a speech given in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on 27 November 1978, President Jimmy Carter said:

I thought about the early Mormons coming across this country, singing a famous hymn . . . “Come, Come Ye Saints.” Only a deep faith could let the words of that song—“All is well”—ring out. In times

³²Jerrold D. Ottley to the author, 31 December 1980.

³³Gerald A. Petersen, *More Than Music* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1979), p. 29.

³⁴J. Spencer Cornwall, “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” center spread.

when you and your forefathers were persecuted and driven one from another, [when you] crossed this land looking for freedom and a chance to worship in your own way, when perhaps you knew that you were about to die, when drought and thirst affected you, and still the song rang out, "All is well!"—this is indeed a demonstration of faith and a reaffirmation of hope.³⁵

Although William Clayton did not know it at the time, he immortalized his name when he composed the stirring words of his "new song" that spring day on Locust Creek. "Come, Come, Ye Saints" became a song of inspiration for the Mormon pioneers as they journeyed across the plains during the succeeding years; and it still stirs the hearts of Latter-day Saints, as well as those of other faiths, when it is rendered "around the world."

³⁵Petersen, *More Than Music*, p. 30.