

# "God Is Love"

*May Hymn of the Month*

*Just as picturesque scenes can bring peace and calmness to the soul, so does beautiful music*

## The Hymn



The month of May is associated with flowers and mothers in the USA. Is there a mother or anyone who doesn't enjoy the beauty of a flower? We know that the color and scent of a

flower attract pollinating insects that are necessary for the survival of the plant species. When we look at the petal arrangement and complexity of many flowers, however, it seems apparent that there is more than survival at work. The intelligent artistry of a benevolent creator is evident. The motive behind the creation of the beautiful things we enjoy on this earth is summarized in the title of our hymn, "God Is Love."

In the Bible, the Apostle Paul affirms that God is the father of our spirits. As human parents desire good things for their children, we can understand how much more God would have this desire for all of us, His children. In the hymn text the author, Thomas R. Taylor, brings our attention to evidence of God's love, and of His character, in the world around us.

The first verse speaks of things that we see, such as flowers, and it is interesting to note that the author uses the term "ten thousand" to convey a picture of an immense number of varieties. Scientists currently estimate the number of flowering plant species on earth at over 300,000. This is variety indeed. The text also describes the 'beams' or sunbeams, and 'show'rs' or rain showers that come to us through the "air" or our atmosphere. The glowing splendor, or resplendence, of the ocean and the expanse of heaven, or sky, are included in the description of things seen around and above us that show us "God is love."

The second verse points to evidence of God's love in sounds that we hear. Evidence in sounds of nature heard in the hills and 'vales,' or rolling valleys, in the woods and near small streams of water, or 'rills.' In the sounds of breezes, and sounds made by birds. Then the

## The Author



Thomas Rawson Taylor was born to Thomas and Mary Taylor in May of 1807 at Ossett, Yorkshire,

England. Ossett is a market town in the district of Wakefield about ten miles south of Leeds. He was the eldest of seven children in the family, and his memoirs record that even at the age of two, he was fond of poetry.

He was brought up in a devout Christian home and blessed with excellent parents. In 1808 his father moved the family to Bradford, which is about ten miles west of Leeds, where the elder Thomas took an appointment as a Congregational minister.

At the age of seven, young Thomas began his education in a public grammar school at Bradford. Four years later, he began study at an Academy in Manchester. He was noted to have a thirst for knowledge and showed a taste for literary composition. His conduct was noted by a friend as distinguished by propriety and amiability, and his character marked by sedateness and thought.

After three years at the academy, Thomas returned to Bradford. He had reached the age of fourteen and it was time to be concerned about his future occupation. At that time in England, many of the adolescent boys and some girls prepared for their future occupations by being apprenticed to a tradesman, or working similarly. Thomas studied at the grammar school until the following year, 1822, when he was placed with a merchant to work in their counting house.

## The Composer



Thomas Cott Griggs was born to Charles and Charlotte Willis Griggs in June of 1845 at Dover, Kent County, England. Dover is England's closest seaport city to continental Europe, and has a rich history complete with a medieval castle built to repel invasions.

Little is known of his early childhood or family life. When Thomas was about nine years old, his father died. His mother became a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) in 1854 and he became interested in the faith. He was baptized in May of 1856, joining the church at the age of about eleven. This was a time of gathering for church members and Thomas emigrated to America with his mother that year, arriving in Boston in July.

They remained in Boston for several years, attending a branch of the Church that had been organized there. One of the branch members, Elder Eardley, was a musician. It is likely that he lit a spark of musical interest, and Thomas began to study and practice music. Elder Eardley is said to have organized a brass band in which Thomas became an enthusiastic performer.

It is believed that the outbreak of the Civil War spurred a number of the church members in the area, including Thomas and his mother, to continue their emigration to Utah at that time. They traveled by boat and rail to Florence Nebraska, then were assigned to a wagon train led by Captain Joseph Horne. There were sixty-two wagons in the company and 183 people, including some extended family members and friends.

Thomas was sixteen at the time and kept a journal that has been digitized and is available online. The company started out on July 9th. He took his "brass instrument" with him, and would go apart from the group to practice. He mentions taking a side excursion on August 8th with some others and carving his name on a ledge at Chimney Rock. His grandma Foreman was run over by a wagon and died, and he was much affected that they had to bury her in haste without a coffin, a buffalo skull marking the grave. They met Native American tribes who traded with them and passed military groups headed for the war. There were other wagon trains on the trail as well. The company arrived in Salt Lake City on September 13th of 1861.

The family lived in Salt Lake City, and it wasn't long until Thomas was playing in John Eardley's band again. The Boston band leader had also emigrated. Thomas later played in the Croxall band. An employment opportunity with a mercantile house took him to Fairfield, near Camp Floyd, the U.S. Army base about 45 miles southwest of Salt Lake City. While there it is said that he went along with some of his young associates to a vocal training class that had been organized by the Church choir leader there, and soon became one of the most apt pupils. Upon the departure of the choir leader, Thomas was called to take his place.

author points to the gift of music which is found on earth beneath and in heaven above. This can be interpreted as being in nature or by human production, either of which in itself witnesses that 'God is love.'

John stated in the Bible, "He that loveth not knoweth not God: for God is love." This is the apparent source of the hymn title. The third verse carries this behavioral connection and speaks of the God-given human ability to feel emotion as evidence of His love. In the context of our hymn, the "heart" is a term which means 'our innermost feelings and character;' and a 'fountain' is a 'source' like a spring of water. The phrase 'fountain of the heart,' is a poetic way to say, 'the source of our deepest feelings.' To be able to feel human sympathies, hope and love deep within, to form relationships and experience bliss at home in family life, to be a part of an extended family, these are all gifts of God that show His love.

It is not known exactly when the hymn text was written, however, it was apparently before 1832. It has several variations that have been published in about sixty known hymnals. The original text was included in the memoirs of the author, published posthumously in 1836. See the digitized image of the publication and the original text reproduced below.

God Is Love

All I feel, and hear, and see,  
God of love, is full of thee!

Earth, with her ten thousand flowers-  
Air, with all its beams and showers-  
Ocean's infinite expanse-  
Heaven's resplendent countenance-  
All around, and all above,  
Hath this record - "God is love."

Sounds, among the vales and hills,  
In the woods and by the rills,  
Of the breeze and of the bird,  
By the gentle summer stirr'd;-  
All these songs, beneath, above-  
Have one burden - "God is love."

All the hopes and fears that start  
From the fountain of the heart;  
All the quiet bliss that lies  
In our human sympathies;-  
These are voices from above,  
Sweetly whispering - "God is love."

All I feel, and hear, and see,  
God of love, is full of thee!

Around this time, in addition to their work, Thomas and a few like-minded friends formed a literary and philosophical society at Bradford. They wrote essays for a weekly paper, and eventually presented public lectures. In these years Thomas deepened his appreciation for poetry and wrote many pieces.

He began to consider a future as a minister, but his father did not consider his character well enough formed for this, and kept him in business for a while longer. He was in agreement with this assessment, and at the age of seventeen, he left the merchant and was apprenticed to a printer and bookseller at Nottingham. Nottingham is about eighty miles south of Bradford.

Thomas lived with the printer's family, who he noted as being religious, and he was treated kindly. He attended the Sunday School at a local church and enjoyed the natural beauty of the area. He began to have a spiritual awakening which resulted in a deep Christian conversion, and he made a covenant, giving himself to the Lord, and becoming a member of the church. His desire to enter the ministry resumed with great sincerity and he began to prepare. In March of 1826 he was released from the apprenticeship and returned to Bradford.

He applied to an Independent (non-Church of England) College at Idle, known as Airedale College. This same month, his next younger brother, William, died of consumption (tuberculosis). The brothers had been close and he began his college endeavors with a tender heart. The next year their sister, Mary, passed away at the age of fifteen.

After a year and a half at Airedale College, Thomas began to preach at various congregations where there was a need. A particular Howard-street church at Sheffield was without a pastor and began to request him to come as frequently as he could. With some time remaining before completion of his training, he intended to do so but became unwell, coughing up blood.

After a few years Thomas returned to Salt Lake City and joined the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. He would participate for over thirty-five years there and sing under five directors. He became a substitute director, and was an assistant director to Ebenezer Beesley. He also served for many years as the choir director of the Salt Lake Fifteenth Ward of the LDS Church.

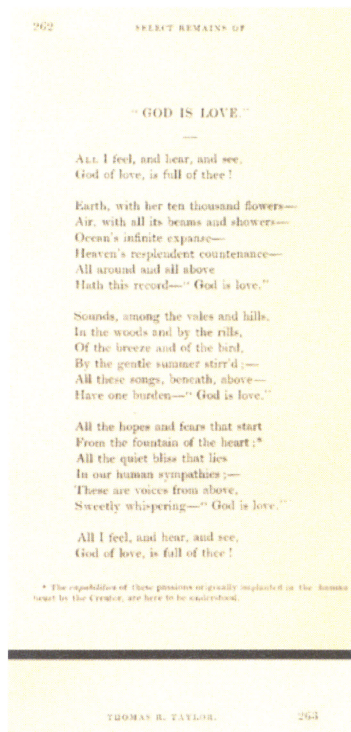
He served a mission for the Church to Great Britain, in the London area, and on his return was active in the Sunday School organization, both in his own ward and on the general board. In 1878 he was appointed a member of the publication committee of the Deseret Sunday School Union and in 1900 was appointed as business manager.

He studied music and composition under George Careless and a number of his pieces appeared in the Sunday School magazine of the time, 'The Juvenile Instructor.' He worked with Ebenezer Beesley on the compilation of the first 'Deseret Sunday School Song Book,' and served on the committee responsible for the publication of the Church hymn book, "The Latter-day Saints Psalmody." He also teamed with Ebenezer Beesley in the publication of the Tabernacle Choir song collection mentioned previously, in which our hymn, 'God Is Love' appeared.

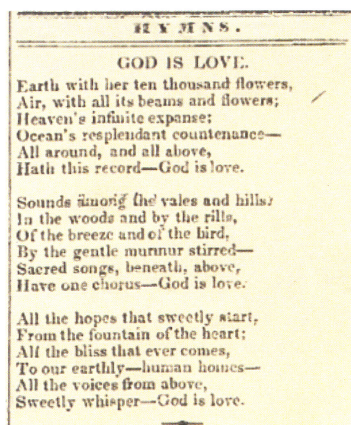
Thomas married Jeanette Ure and they were blessed with several children. He was described as a man of a genial, happy disposition, considerate and thoughtful, methodical and persistent. He was said to have used his musical and his executive abilities for the benefit and advancement of the youth, and was admirably suited to be a leader and teacher. He was noted as a tireless worker who did much to improve the music of the Church.

He passed away in August of 1903 at the age of 58, and was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. His connection to the Tabernacle Choir continues today as they sing the tune he wrote for "Gently Raise the Sacred Strain" in their weekly broadcast.





The hymn text with some alterations appeared in the September 1832 monthly newspaper "The Evening and The Morning Star," published in Independence, Missouri. (See the image below of this publication available on us.archive.org.) William W. Phelps was the editor and since no authorship for the hymn text was listed therein, it was assumed by many to be his work for quite some time. It is thought that he is the one responsible for the alterations to the original text by Thomas R. Taylor.



This altered version continued into the first hymnbook of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "A Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Church of The Latter-day Saints," edited by Emma Smith and published in 1835 at Kirtland, Ohio.

It is apparent in hindsight that he had contracted pulmonary tuberculosis (TB), the same disease that had taken his brother's life. The first antibiotic to effectively treat TB wouldn't be in use until 1944, and it is reported that 80% of cases proved fatal until that time. The disease caused those afflicted with it to slowly 'waste away,' and was commonly called 'consumption' as a result.

His state of health made it difficult for Thomas to preach, but he did as often as he could. In 1829 the Howard-street church in Sheffield offered him the position as their pastor upon completion of his studies. After much prayerful consideration he accepted and began in July of 1830.

The exertions of the post brought on more ill health and he soon had to take leave of absence. He returned after a time of recuperation and attempted to fulfill his duties, but by January of 1831 was required to again take leave and was no better by May when he regretfully gave up the ministry. His parishioners affectionately requested that he publish his sermons, which he did.

He took excursions to various places for his health and occasionally preached at his father's church. His mother passed away in 1832. In 1834 he accepted a post as the classical tutor at an Independent College where he labored in teaching Latin, Greek and mathematics.

At Christmastime that year he traveled to Nottingham and on the way preached one last time at Sheffield. Returning to the college his health continued to decline and the tuberculosis advanced until March of 1835, when he passed away at the age of 27, surrounded by his remaining family. His attitude remained positive and full of faith, and he was recorded as saying, "What a glorious place heaven will be! And what is more delightful still, heaven will not be a place of rest and enjoyment merely, but I shall be actively employed in serving God, holding some important station, and showing forth my gratitude to

It is not known which tune was used with the text prior to 1883 when the hymn appeared with the first two verses set to music by T. C. Griggs in "A Collection of Hymns and Anthems, Set to Music by Home Composers," compiled by Ebenezer Beesley for the Tabernacle Choir, and published in Salt Lake City, Utah. A few small changes were made to the first verse in this edition, likely by the editor.

The same hymn text with Thomas Griggs' tune was included in the 1889 edition of 'The Latter-day Saints Psalmody,' which was the first hymnbook of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) to include music. The tune name, TESTIMONY, appeared as the title in this hymnal, and the music in 3/4 time was written with three staves, the top staff for the tenor part, the middle staff for the soprano and alto parts, and the bottom staff for the bass part.

It continued into subsequent LDS Hymnals. In the 1948 edition of "Hymns, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," the hymn appeared with the first line as the title, 'Earth, With Her Ten Thousand Flowers,' and the text was attributed to William W. Phelps. The music was written in two staves, treble and bass. The current 1985 LDS Hymnal returned to the original title, "God Is Love," and corrected the author as Thomas R. Taylor, noting the alteration. The music was transposed into a lower key.

Whichever variation is used, the hymn has a timeless beauty as it points to unchanging evidence of God's love.

him." "The text which gives me the most sublime idea of heaven is -  
"They serve Him day and night in his temple."

Thomas R. Taylor's memoirs and selected letters and writings were compiled by a friend and published posthumously the next year. The volume has been digitized and is available at [us.archive.org](http://us.archive.org). Over seventy years after his death, six of his hymns were still in common use when John Julian included his biography in the 1907 "Dictionary of Hymnology." A notable accomplishment for such a young man, and we continue to be blessed by his short, but remarkable life.

## "God Is Love"

Text as found in the 1985 LDS Hymnal

Earth with her ten thousand flowers,  
Air, with all its beams and showers,  
Heaven's infinite expanse,  
Sea's resplendent countenance -  
All around and all above  
Bear this record: God is love.

Sounds among the vales and hills,  
In the woods and by the rills,  
Of the breeze and of the bird,  
By the gentle murmur stirred -  
Sacred songs, beneath, above,  
Have one chorus: God is love.

All the hopes that sweetly start  
From the fountain of the heart,  
All the bliss that ever comes  
To our earthly human homes,  
All the voices from above  
Sweetly whisper: God is love.



### Information in this article came from :

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