

# Lead, Kindly Light

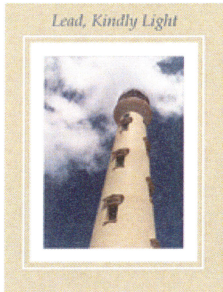
January 2013 - Hymn of the Month



[Lead, Kindly Light \(Piano Solo\)](#)

[from piano solo book, Testimony of Faith Vol 3 - LM3054](#)

## The Hymn



This beautiful hymn of supplication has resonated with truth-seeking Christians for over a hundred years. The text demonstrates the ability of good poetry to present metaphorical layers of meaning, which may be understood differently by the viewpoint of the

reader. For instance, the first lines effectively describe both a literal, physical situation of a traveler looking for help and direction in the night, and a symbolic, spiritual situation of a person looking for divine guidance in their journey through life. The usage of the term "light" can induce the image of a physical light such as a lighthouse, or the concept of a spiritual light such as personal revelation. The word "gloom" can refer to physical darkness, or spiritual/emotional despondency. The author's use of the phrase "far from home" can evoke thoughts of a physical distance from family or a spiritual distance from God.

The "kindly Light" in the hymn text is inherently symbolic of Jesus Christ, referred to in the Bible New Testament as the "light of the world," and "of tender mercy." The use of "Thou" and capitalization of "Light" reinforce the reference to the Lord. Common use of the pronoun "thou" in Standard English was obsolete by 1800 so the author's use here appears to show a marked intent of referring to and addressing God.

The word "keep" has multiple meanings; however, its use at the close of the first verse indicates a desire to have The Lord take control of the "feet" which take steps on the path, or the direction in which to go in life.

The second verse expresses repentance and a desire to change direction, turning away from worldliness and pride. The expression "'garish" (vivid, flashy or gaudy) day", appears to describe worldliness. The phrase "Choose and see my path," or choosing my own way and seeing the end from the beginning, is an apt depiction of pride which many in modern societies would not see as being wrong, but is the opposite of the humility required by a disciple of Christ.

Some of the terms used in the third verse, such as "moor" (an expanse of infertile, boggy wasteland), "fen" (low land partly covered with water), "crag" (a steep rugged rock or cliff), and "torrent" (a tumultuous rushing stream), evince the author's English background while depicting the figurative challenges he suggests may be encountered in the journey of life, which he affirms the power of the Lord will bless us to

## The Author



John Henry Newman was born at London, England in February of 1801 to John and Jemima Fourdrinier Newman, the eldest of six children. His father was a banker; his mother was of a Huguenot, or French protestant, family.

Young John attended Ealing School at age seven, and is said to have shown an early interest in

literature. He was baptized in the Church of England at age fifteen, and at the age of sixteen entered Trinity College at Oxford University. Oxford is the oldest university in the English-speaking world, located in the town of Oxford about sixty miles northwest of London. It is interesting to note that the University's motto, *Dominus Illuminatio Mea*, means "the Lord is my light."

John received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1820. It is said that he had originally intended to study for the bar, but gave that up in 1821 and decided to become a clergyman. He was elected a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford in 1822. He was ordained an Anglican (Church of England) clergyman in 1824, and served as curate of St. Clement's, Oxford. In 1825 he was asked to serve as vice-president of St. Mary's hall, and in 1828 as vicar of the Oxford University Church, St. Mary's.

John Newman was a distinguished religious writer, publishing over forty books in his lifetime, a number of which are still available. He also wrote several hymns in addition to *Lead, Kindly Light*, and was highly regarded as a preacher and teacher.

John Newman experienced a struggle with the doctrines of the Church of England, desiring more continuity from the ancient church, renewed emphasis on the sacraments and on the welfare of the working classes. Returning from his travels in Europe, after expressing his struggles in the text of *Lead, Kindly Light*, he joined with other fellows of Oriel College, Oxford, and tried to effect change in the church by means of tracts written between 1833 and 1841. He is sometimes referred to as the leader of this "Tractarian," or "Oxford Movement."

Some of his writings were misunderstood and brought much controversy and ill-will upon him. He resigned his position as vicar and his post at Oxford about 1843. Living at Littlemore, outside Oxford, he secluded himself in study and prayer, and spent time writing. He became convinced that the Catholic Church was closer to the faith of the early Apostles and Fathers and embraced Catholicism, being received into the Catholic Church at Littlemore in 1845.

## The Composer



John Bacchus Dykes was born to William and Elizabeth Dykes at Kingston-upon-Hull, England in March of 1823. Earlier generations spelled the surname as Dikes. Hull is a port city located 200 miles north of London, on the Humber Estuary of the North Sea. His father was a ship builder and later a banker. One of fourteen

children, John showed remarkable musical ability as a child and it is said that around age ten he began playing organ at the church his grandfather established, St. John's church in Hull, where his grandfather, Thomas, was the vicar.

It is said that when John was about eighteen years of age the Dykes family moved to Wakefield, about fifty miles west of Hull, where he attended school. He then traveled south to the University of Cambridge, where he entered St. Catharine's College (or Hall).

It is believed that he was assisted in taking a place at Cambridge by award of the first Dikes Scholarship, created in 1840 by subscriptions raised by the people of Hull in honor of his Grandfather.

The University of Cambridge dates from 1226 and was begun by migrating Oxford scholars; St. Catharine's College was founded in 1473 and today has a strong musical tradition. John Dykes is said to have been a founding member and first president of the Cambridge University Musical Society and graduated in 1847 with a Bachelor of Arts degree.

John became an Anglican clergyman that same year, ordained a deacon, and moved to Yorkshire to serve as curate at the small town of Malton, about 17 miles northeast of York. In 1848 he was ordained a priest, and the next year saw him moving another sixty miles north to Durham, where he served in various positions at Durham Cathedral from 1849 to 1862 including music director. It is likely that he was also associated with music training at the Chorister School, where the Cathedral choir boys were educated. Durham Cathedral was begun in 1093, largely completed forty years later, and is noted today for retaining almost all of its original Norman craftsmanship.

In 1850, at the age of 27, it is believed that he married Susannah, or Susan, Kingston, and they eventually had six children. In 1851 he received a Master's degree from Cambridge. In 1861 he received an honorary doctorate of music degree from the University of Durham. It is said that in addition to the organ, he also played the piano, the violin and the horn.



pass over. Given the author's religious affiliation, the lines describing the beloved "angel faces" that had been "lost awhile" may have been intended to refer to guardian angels, to belief in whom the prodigal returns, although many readers prefer the interpretation of reunion with loved ones after death.

In our modern urban cities, with street and security lights keeping any darkness at bay, cell phones putting access to help in our hands, and global positioning technology guiding many to their destinations over smooth roads, it may be more difficult for some to personally relate to the setting and symbolism of the hymn text unless they have done some traveling in primitive areas.

At the time *Lead, Kindly Light* was written, 1833, normal life was what we might call primitive. Andrew Jackson was the President of the United States, electric lighting was not yet used in homes and the telephone's predecessor, the telegraph, had yet to send its first commercial communication. Travelers, particularly ocean travelers, relied on the light and position of the sun, moon and stars to find their way.

The author, John Henry Newman, was in just such a situation as he sailed northwest across the Mediterranean Sea from Palermo, Sicily to Marseille, France in June of 1833. In a state of questioning his own beliefs, he had been traveling in Europe, had been ill and this was the first leg of an anxious return to England. He and his fellow passengers on the orange boat, oranges being a product of the area, made no progress for a week as the wind died in the Straits of Bonifacio, between the islands of Corsica and Sardinia. It is believed by some that a fog closed in, making their situation in the narrow straits precarious. During this time of frustration, distress and introspection, he wrote the text of *Lead, Kindly Light*.

It is said that the poem was published with various titles, "The Pillar of the Cloud," "Light in Darkness," and "Faith," first appearing about 1836. It is believed that the music came much later, and was written specifically for the text by the Reverend John B. Dykes, who gave the tune the Latin name of LUX BENIGNA, translated directly as "light kind."

In contrast to the circumstances of the writing of the text, the music reportedly came to the composer as he walked through one of the busiest streets in London, The Strand, a southern main artery from the City to the West End. The combination of the text and tune definitely make the whole even greater than the sum of the parts, and has led to its enduring popularity. It is said that the composer was very skilled in part-writing and the harmony for *Lead, Kindly Light* is therefore a bit more intricate than the average hymn.

The music of *Lead, Kindly Light* in the current 1985 edition of *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* is in a simpler, lower key than earlier editions of the hymnal; also, the arrangement for women's voices found in earlier editions was discontinued in 1985.

It is interesting to note that both the author and composer of *Lead, Kindly Light* were English clergymen named John who lived during the same time period, and experienced similar societal religious upheaval, as our American prophet/clergyman, Joseph Smith, Jr.

John Newman traveled to Rome and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1847, then returned to England with a mission from the Pope to found Oratories of St. Philip Neri in Birmingham and London. The first English Oratory was founded in 1848 at Birmingham and was given the name Maryvale. This small community of priests was dedicated to prayer, the liturgy, preaching, teaching and intellectual life. John Newman lived here the rest of his life, working toward his vision of an educated laity. Maryvale Institute today is located on the same site and carries on his vision, providing Catholic Theology learning to anyone. He also founded a Catholic University at Dublin in 1851 and a Catholic School at Birmingham in 1859.

Although he wrote much in his ministry, he is said to have believed that it is not argument, but fidelity to conscience that awakens and draws the soul to God. In 1879, at the age of 78, he was made a Cardinal-Deacon by Pope Leo XIII. His remarkable life came to a close in August of 1890 at Birmingham, but he has not been forgotten. He was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI at Birmingham in September of 2010 and made a Saint.

#### *Lead, Kindly Light – Text*

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom;  
Lead thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home;  
Lead thou me on!  
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene – one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou  
Shouldst lead me on.  
I loved to choose and see my path; but now,  
Lead thou me on!  
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years.

So long thy power hath blessed me, sure it still  
Will lead me on  
Over moor and fen, over crag and torrent, till  
The night is gone.  
And with the morn those angel faces smile,  
Which I have loved long since, and lost a while!

As a result of the Tractarian movement, new singable hymns were being written for the Anglican Church and John Dykes was one of the main composers of music for the texts. About 1862 it is said that some of his hymn tunes were published by Baker in a volume called *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, and this led to his being in great demand by hymnal editors, including an American editor, J. Ireland Tucker, who was influential in spreading his music in America. John Dykes supplied tunes without regard for the denomination of the requestor.

Reverend Dykes is said to have published religious articles and sermons, but is best known for composing over three hundred hymn tunes, including LUX BENIGNA for *Lead, Kindly Light*, and ST. AGNES for *Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee*. A number of his hymns were children's hymns. He is believed by some to be the most representative and successful composer of Victorian hymn tunes. He is also known in maritime circles as the composer of the hymn tune MELITA for the famous Navy hymn *Eternal Father Strong to Save*, written in 1860 by William Whiting.

In 1862, John Dykes became Vicar of St. Oswald's Church in the center of Durham, where he served the remainder of his career. It is believed that he was influenced by the Tractarian or Oxford movement and tried to introduce some changes in his church, but met with resistance from the bishop, who withheld assistance as a result, and with whom he had thereafter a strained relationship. Reverend Dykes appealed to the Queen's Bench, one of the divisions of England's High Court, but in 1874 it is said that he lost the case and he then retired, moving south of London to Ticehurst, Sussex.

Not long afterward in January of 1876, at the age of 53, the life of Reverend John B. Dykes came to an early close.

Many believe that the strain of running his parish for so long without help undermined his health. His remains were returned to be buried at St. Oswald's church in Durham. His popularity is confirmed by the report that upon his death, admirers raised a 10,000 pound fund to help his family.

The continuing popularity of the hymns containing his music is a lasting benefit to Christians everywhere.

**Information in this article came from:**

*Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, (Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1985, #97)

*Holy Bible, King James Version*, John 8:12, p. 1340; James 5:11 p. 1543. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1979)

George D. Pyper, *Stories of Latter-Day Saint Hymns, Their Authors and Composers*, pp. 166-169, (Deseret News Press, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1939)

Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns*, pp. 126, 371, 417. (Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1988)

J. Spencer Cornwall, *Stories of our Mormon Hymns*, p. 119. (Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1963)

*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, (G & C Merriam Company, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1975)  
<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/l/e/a/leadkind.htm>

<http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/Cardinal-Newman/About-Newman>

[https://uni-of-oxford.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a\\_id/129/~/where-is-oxford-university%3F](https://uni-of-oxford.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/129/~/where-is-oxford-university%3F)

<http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~cpercycourses/6362Yaswen2.htm>

<http://www.potus.com/ajackson.html>

<http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/bllight2.htm>

<http://inventors.about.com/od/tstartinventions/a/telegraph.htm>

<http://websites.lib.ucr.edu/agnic/webber/Vol1/Chapter1.htm>

<http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/TheStrand/strand.htm>

<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/249.html>

<http://www2.hull.ac.uk/theuniversity/hullcampus.aspx>

<http://www.cam.ac.uk/univ/history/records.html>

<http://www.durhamcathedral.co.uk/history>

<http://www.oswalds.org.uk/Activities.html>

[http://boreanbibleheritage.org/extraordinary/dykes\\_john.php](http://boreanbibleheritage.org/extraordinary/dykes_john.php)

<http://conjugilant.blogspot.com/2011/03/john-bacchus-dykes.html>

<http://www.hull.ac.uk/mhsc/FarHorizons/Documents/JohnBacchusDykes.pdf>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10794a.htm>

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/rcj-rolls-building/queens-bench>

<http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&tab=wl>