

February Hymn of the Month

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



[Happy Orchestration of "Scatter Sunshine" by Larry Beebe](#)



["Scatter Sunshine" Ring Tone](#)

The Hymn



The common February theme of love is carried out in several ways by the message of this hymn. On the

surface, the most apparent directive on love given by the author is to show love and caring for others by smiling and being happy while doing kindly deeds. This may seem overly simple and Pollyannish to some, however, the hymn text has much scientifically proven truth as well as deeper symbolism and meaning.

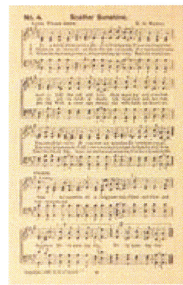
Mental health studies have shown that being around a person who is upbeat increases the chances of being happy. Who wouldn't want those they love to be happy?

Sunshine is synonymous with light and can mean literal visible light or figurative enlightenment or knowledge. In the first case, the effects of light on human moods have been shown by modern medical research to be a biochemical reality. Increasing the brightness of someone's day can actually cheer them up, particularly in the wintertime.

In the second case, a person's circumstances and feelings can be greatly affected by their knowledge. Showing them by word or example a different way to think about things, or sharing knowledge of the redemptive teachings of the Savior can lift their spirits and lessen their sorrow.

The author's use of the word 'courage' twice in the text, as well as 'faith,' recognizes the challenges of life and suggests that the person doing the caring, singing and smiling need not be free of their own problems in order to do so. This reflects the Bible New Testament directive given by the Lord, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." The admonition of King David applies also:

The Author



Atlanta "Lanta" Augusta Wilson Smith, author, was born to William J. and Sedelia Follett Wilson in July of 1856 at Castine, Maine. She apparently preferred the shortened version of Atlanta. Castine is a small town south of

Bangor on the Penobscot River near the Bay.

Lanta's father, William, was a Methodist minister, and it is said that from early childhood she sang and played the organ in church and Sunday school wherever her father was located. In 1866, when Lanta was about ten years old, her father packed his family in a covered wagon and traveled to Nebraska and the Dakotas to minister there, returning to New England after a few years.

When Lanta was about seventeen it is said that she attended the Bucksport Seminary, Maine, about seventeen miles north of Castine. The Bucksport Seminary was a Methodist preparatory school that operated from 1851 to 1933.

Here she received some musical instruction and also began to write stories for the church papers.

When music and hymns were introduced into publications by David C. Cook, Lanta began to write hymns, some of which were used by him. She was assisted by composers such as T. Martin Towne, Asa Hull, and E. O. Excell.

"Scatter Sunshine" is perhaps her best known hymn and became such a favorite it is said that Mr. Excell wrote to her with a plea to write another like it. The photo above is believed to be of the first publication.

The Composer



Edwin Othello Excell, composer, was born in December of 1851 to Joshua J. and Emily Excell at Uniontown, Ohio. Edwin was the oldest of several children. His father was a minister and an author. Between 1860 and 1870 the family

moved to Pennsylvania. Edwin is believed to have been educated in the public schools.

Edwin grew to be a tall, robust man with a remarkable singing voice, able to solo as a baritone or a tenor. In 1871 he married his sweetheart, Jane, and worked for several years as a plasterer and bricklayer as well as a singing instructor and a church choirmaster. It is said that involvement with leading songs at revivals and worship services of the Methodist Episcopal churches turned his focus to sacred music.

He studied music formally between 1877 and 1883 at the Normal Musical Institutes of George F. Root. In 1881 John J. Hood of Philadelphia published E.O. Excell's first collection of hymns and gospel songs, "Sacred Echoes." In 1883 Edwin moved to Chicago, the location of Root's operations, and focused on his lifelong career in music publishing.

Edwin continued to be involved in church music and assisted Benjamin Jacobs and John Vincent with the music of their Sunday school work. This was a significant influence in that much of his future music was published for Sunday school and youth programs.

Edwin continued as a choir leader and vocalist for revivals and evangelistic meetings and was said to be a master at directing great audiences in singing. It

"Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing."

In the second verse, songs are one of the methods suggested for removing care and sorrow. In the third verse the author suggests that a happy song will dispel gloom. It doesn't take a scientific study to recognize how music can affect our mood; most people have experienced it for themselves. It is interesting; however, that scientific studies have shown that listening to happy music can help people perceive the world in more positive ways. In the photo above, there is only one skylight. Mirrors on the walls below reflect and in a sense "scatter" the light to a wider view.

Of the several definitions of the word "scatter" the meaning likely intended by the hymn author is that of "disperse." A good visualization would be that of a pre-industrial farmer sowing fields by hand, casting the seed in all directions.

Likewise, the influence of a positive, happy person emanates from them in all directions to those in their circle of influence.

"Scatter Sunshine" is a hymn that, unlike many others, does not bear the first line as its title. The first words "In a world where sorrow..." do not adequately convey the positive message of the work.

It was likely written about 1892, as that is the copyright date listed on it in the songbooks of that time. It is said that the music was composed specifically for the text. The copyright was by the composer, E. O. Excell. It was first published by E. O. Excell in his "Triumphant Songs" collections.

The music was written in the gospel song style of the time, the verses in four part harmony with a refrain. Many of the songbooks in which it appeared in the early years were for Sunday Schools, Camp Meetings and Revivals. The rhythms give the music a sprightly energy, and the repeated chorus with its variations in text and rhythms between the voices adds even more interest.

Possibly thanks to the original copyright, the song we sing today has not changed much from the early versions. Some variations are found in the words used for the chorus. The hymn was included in the 1948 edition of *Hymns, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (LDS Hymnal) with the first line as the title "In a World Where Sorrow." In the 1985 edition of the LDS Hymnal, the original title "Scatter Sunshine" was restored, and the music in 6/8 time was transposed to a lower, simpler key.

In 1880, at the age of about twenty-four, Lanta Wilson married Reverend C. Hartley Smith. They traveled to the Dakotas where they preached and ministered for about twelve years. Reverend Smith was a musician as well as his wife and they sang together the beloved hymns of church in their ministry.

The Smiths returned to New England where Rev. Smith continued preaching. Lanta continued to write and it is said that she wrote more than five hundred poems, articles and hymns. Over one hundred and twenty of her hymns are known to have been published. It is reported that Lanta continued to write into her eightieth year. She passed away at Taunton, Massachusetts in October of 1939 at the age of eighty-three.

was remarked that he was large of body and happy in disposition, never known to lose his temper or his smile in his endeavor to make the people sing.

Edwin was known by his initials, E. O. and over his forty-year publishing career, it is estimated that he authored, composed or arranged over two thousand songs, developed approximately fifty song books and contributed to over thirty-five more. He is best remembered for his 1909 arrangement of John Newton's "Amazing Grace," his hymn tune for Johnson Oatman's "Count Your Blessings," and the tune for the children's favorite, "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam."

E.O. Excell is reported to have served as a member of the International Sunday School Association for thirty-six years in addition to his music activities.

Falling ill while assisting evangelist Gipsy Smith with a revival in Louisville, Kentucky, E. O. Excell returned to Chicago where he passed away in June of 1921, at the age of sixty-nine, after a lengthy hospital stay. His music continues to brighten the days of the next century.

*"Scatter Sunshine" Text as published in the 1985
LDS Hymnal*

In a world where sorrow
Ever will be known,
Where are found the needy
And the sad and lone,
How much joy and comfort
You can all bestow,
If you scatter sunshine
Everywhere you go.

Scatter sunshine all along your way.
Cheer and bless and brighten
Every passing day.

Slightest actions often
Meet the sorest needs,
For the world wants daily
Little kindly deeds.
Oh, what care and sorrow
You may help remove,
With your songs and courage,
Sympathy and love.

Scatter sunshine all along your way.
Cheer and bless and brighten
Every passing day.

When the days are gloomy,
Sing some happy song;
Meet the world's repining
With a courage strong.
Go with faith undaunted
Thru the ills of life;
Scatter smiles and sunshine
O'er its toil and strife

Scatter sunshine all along your way.
Cheer and bless and brighten
Every passing day.



Information in this article came from:

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