

# SINGING SCIENCE

## What Victorian Hymns Reveal about the Natural World

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*Doubts are abroad: make Thou these doubts to cease;  
Fears are within: set Thou these fears at rest!  
Strife is among us: melt that strife to peace!  
Change marches onward: may all change be blest!*

These poignant lines epitomize concerns that emerged during the Victorian period due to intense social, political, and economic changes taking place in Britain. Yet the source—a hymn—is not one typically studied by historians. Until recently, historians studied Victorian values and ideas almost exclusively through literature and poetry. These sources created an elite version of history characterized by accounts of “great men.” The history of science followed a similar trajectory. It focused on scientific theories, great ideas, and scientific geniuses reinforced by elite and academic sources produced by a select group of men such as Charles Darwin and Adam Sedgwick. The recent historiographical shift toward science in the marketplace led by James Secord and Aileen Fyfe, however, reoriented historians’ traditional perspective and encouraged a deeper investigation into religious tracts and sermons as reflections of popular engagement with the natural world.<sup>2</sup>

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1 *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1904), Hymn #454.

2 It is important to note that despite these sources being included in more



Despite these changes, hymns remain sidelined as valuable historical source material, often viewed as “a poor stepsister of belles-lettres.”<sup>3</sup> However, Victorian hymns outnumbered poems, suggesting that hymns might reveal as much as poems or other sources about how the common Victorian understood the world.<sup>4</sup> This paper inserts hymns into the historiography and investigates what they tell historians of science about Victorian conceptions of the natural world and natural knowledge.

Victorian hymns came from many different denominations and authors, but they reveal the relevance of nature and natural imagery as Victorians responded to rapid industrialization and British imperialism. Hymns written for children provide particularly useful insights. When it comes to what hymns reveal about reactions to industrialization, sometimes they offer a different perspective than other historical sources. More often, however, they reveal deeper and more nuanced insights into the perspectives of the natural world that both the British Protestant church and its members experienced throughout the nineteenth century. In particular, hymns reveal a society that idealized nature and a church that began by depicting nature negatively but ultimately accepted its positive portrayal—in a manner that kept it safely distinguished from the Darwinian view, that is. This point is reinforced by children’s hymns that reveal the idealization of nature and its growing acceptance throughout society. The presence of natural imagery in children’s hymns highlights how the natural world was no longer a negative or scary thing unacceptable for children by the end of the century. Instead, it became largely accepted in children’s hymns. This supports and offers deeper insights into the previous historiographical findings about nature in children’s literature. The study of imperial hymns also reveals how Victorians manipulated natural imagery to both justify and glorify their imperial

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mainstream source material, sermons and tracts are largely studied from a publishing rather than content perspective; J. A. Secord, “How Scientific Conversation Became Shop Talk,” in A. Fyfe and B. Lightman, eds., *Science in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

3 Susan S. Tamke, *Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord: Hymns as a Reflection of Victorian Social Attitudes* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978), 1.

4 To get an idea of the number of hymns and hymnals circulating during Victorian Britain: *Hymns Ancient and Modern* sold over 4.5 million copies, Alexander’s *Hymns for Little Children* (1848) went into more than 100 editions and between 1800 and 1820 nearly 50 different hymnbooks were used in the Church of England alone. Tamke, *Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord*, 2.

agenda, which supports the evidence that previous historians have gleaned from travel writings. These imperial hymns illustrate a changing vision of imperialism and the natural world that occurred toward the end of the nineteenth century, which emphasized the similarities rather than the differences between Britain and Britons and foreign lands and peoples.

This article highlights how British Protestant hymn writers and hymn singers shared, symbiotically, the changing conceptions of the natural world through their writing and singing. I argue that although hymn writers wrote for a variety of religious and personal reasons, the growing prevalence of natural imagery in their hymns indicates an iconographic shift in the Victorian conception of the natural world. As British Protestant congregations sang the hymns more frequently, the hymn singers began to view nature more positively and incorporate the hymn writer's view into their religious activities and beliefs.

### **Victorian Hymnology and Its Limitations**

The historiography of Victorian hymnology is brief, but important. Past Victorian hymnology focused on specific denominations (epitomized by David Creamer's work on Methodist hymns), or served as generalized studies (such as Albert Bailey's *The Gospel in Hymns*).<sup>5</sup> These approaches created narrow perspectives because they only considered hymns that made it into denominational hymnals. This excluded hymns written with and sung by more "radical" themes and authors. Additionally, the more generalized studies suffer by only offering limited mention of nineteenth-century hymns. Later Victorian hymnology investigated hymns merely as a form of escapism.<sup>6</sup> More recent scholarship by Ian Bradley and Susan Tamke built on this idea and highlighted the larger social importance of hymns by looking at hymns thematically. These works place

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5 David Creamer, *Methodist Hymnology: Comprehending Notices of the Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley* (New York: Joseph Longking, 1848). For more generalized scholarship on hymnology see Albert Edward Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns: Backgrounds and Interpretations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950); C. S. Phillips, *Hymnology Past and Present* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1937) or W. K. Lothar Clarke, *A Hundred Years of Hymns Ancient and Modern* (London: William Clowes & Sons., Ltd, 1960).

6 Gordon Rattray Taylor, *The Angel-Makers: A Study in the Psychological Origins of Historical Change, 1750-1850* (London: Heinemann, 1958); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).

hymns within a larger Victorian context by emphasizing the ideas and concerns of the period.<sup>7</sup> Although the recent historiography of hymnology legitimized hymns as source material, the scholarship does not address how Victorian hymns reflect changing conceptions of the natural world, despite the intense scholarly interest about the tension between science and religion that originated in this period. This paper builds on the previous historiography of hymnology, but offers a new perspective for the history of science that focuses specifically on what Victorian hymns written and sung by British Protestants reveal about how the church understood and presented the natural world throughout the nineteenth century.

### What Hymns Reveal about Industrialization

Victorian hymns provide insight into how people dealt with nineteenth-century industrialization. Though historians often present industrialization as straightforward, hymns reveal that the responses to it were complicated. Natural imagery in hymns reflects how different Victorian cultural, intellectual, and religious movements viewed industrialism. In general, the literal shift of machinery and people reinforced the Victorian conception that the natural world consisted of both an economic force to be harnessed and also an idyllic sanctuary being lost. Yet few hymns that present nature depict progress and control. Only one Victorian hymn highlights industrialization. That hymn compares a railroad with a believer's journey toward salvation.<sup>8</sup> The focus of the majority of hymns reveals that Victorians preferred an idyllic or demonstrative natural world that had little connection with their gritty industrial reality.

Though the predominance of rural imagery in hymns may simply reflect scriptural themes, the plethora of these images highlights larger cultural responses to industrialization. Many Victorians responded to their urban reality by idealizing the countryside. Historians traditionally look to the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth and Davy for a point of reference on this theme.<sup>9</sup> However, Romanticism was not just a literary movement, but was also

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7 Ian Bradley, *Abide with Me: The World of Victorian Hymns* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1997); Tamke, *Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1978).

8 William Booth, *Salvation Army Music* (London: Salvation Army, 1890), Hymn #100.

9 Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Redwood, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1989).

a social ideology that impacted larger Victorian conceptions of the natural world, including hymns. Its ideological rejection of mechanical metaphors and its replacement of them with natural ones is reflected in hymns that unite the aesthetic and the scientific.<sup>10</sup> Victorian hymns often accentuate the aesthetic beauty of Jesus' earthly life and draw comparisons between the natural beauty of Paradise and a dark industrial reality.<sup>11</sup> In nineteenth-century hymns, nature prompts an emotional response, which ultimately led Christians toward a greater understanding of God.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Victorian hymns, like romantic poetry, present a clearer and more emotive description of nature than their eighteenth-century counterparts, which emphasized more theological and technical imagery.

Hymns show that the church and its members did not reject the natural world. Although traditional historians contend that the church either believed in demonstrative natural theology (meaning that nature proved the existence of God) or faltered in convictions following Darwin, hymnology reveals a different narrative. Recent scholarship in the history of science presents a more nuanced perspective about religion and natural knowledge which is supported by hymnology. Hymns similar to the *Bridgewater Treatises*, which were an encyclopedia of the natural world that presented a largely demonstrative theology in line with William Paley's ideas, provide a vital resource for this new historiographical shift. These hymns show the continued acceptability of nature by Victorian Christians long after Darwin's publication. These hymns reveal how the church and its members maximized natural imagery within a "safe science" context of Christian belief that shows a growing acceptance of the natural world.<sup>13</sup>

Although Victorian hymns presented the natural world as a positive alternative to industrialization, some Christians challenged

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10 David Knight, "Romanticism and the Sciences" in *Romanticism and the Sciences*, eds. Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

11 Susan Drain, *The Anglican Church in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Queenston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1989), 425, 427, 433.

12 Some previous hymnology explores the connection between hymns and the Romantic Movement. See J. R. Watson, ed. *An Annotated Anthology of Hymns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 235-287.

13 Jonathan R. Topham, "Science and Popular Education in the 1830s: the Role of the Bridgewater Treatises" *British Journal for the History of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 25, 397-430.

and changed this presentation throughout the century. Different denominations accepted nature and natural imagery differently, a variety reflected in hymns. At the beginning of the century, for example, Evangelicals rejected earthly life in order to elevate the heavenly and thus viewed natural beauty as temptation from the devil.<sup>14</sup> This theological rejection of the natural world is reflected in Victorian Evangelicals' hymn choices. For instance, the 1836 *Congregational Hymn Book* includes few hymns that positively described the natural world.<sup>15</sup> The hymns that do include natural imagery emphasize the world's "short-lived beauties [which] die away" and lament that "the lovely flowers are gone."<sup>16</sup> This denominational tension with the natural world peaked during the 1855 controversy surrounding the publication of *Hymns for Heart and Voice: The Rivulet* by Thomas Toke Lynch. At that time, many Evangelicals criticized Lynch's presentation of nature. They contended that he must be a deist or freethinker because the hymnal presented positive portrayals of the natural world.<sup>17</sup> This controversy reflects larger Christian fears about the role of nature in a Christian context, especially the fear that positive portrayals of nature dissolved Christians into deists.

Additionally, Victorian Christians worried about whether natural imagery distracted from deeper theological issues. Hymns reveal a middle ground between Paley's natural theology, which saw nature as a way to prove God's existence, and a theology of nature, with its belief that nature brought people closer to God. By the end of the nineteenth century, Victorian Christians (even Evangelicals) viewed natural imagery positively. The 1884 *Congregational Hymns*, for example, included an entire section entitled "Nature" made up of twenty-two hymns.<sup>18</sup>

This increase in nature-related hymns challenges traditional historiography about how nineteenth century developments in natural knowledge created antagonism between religion and science. One might expect that as the century progressed and the divide between

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14 Tamke, *Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord*, 44.

15 Tamke, *Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord*, 44.

16 John Allen, *Penny Hymnbook* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1860), Hymn #101; Booth, *Salvation Army Music*, Hymn #15.

17 Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), 454-5; H. A. L. Jefferson, *Hymns in Christian Worship* (London: Rockliff Publishing Corporation, 1950), 117.

18 Tamke, *Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord*, 47.

religion and science grew, Victorian Christians would write and accept fewer hymns with natural imagery. However, research shows the opposite trend. Hymns with natural imagery became more accepted as the century progressed because of developments in Christian theology that have previously been overlooked by scholars. Thus, hymns offer a different historical interpretation that helps historians more deeply understand Victorian society and its response to industrialization.<sup>19</sup>

### Insights from Children's Hymns

Adults primarily sang the hymns discussed above, but the Victorian period also saw the emergence of children's hymns that dealt with the natural world. These hymns offer historians insights into how the church presented nature to Victorian children. The child became increasingly important as Victorian writers interpreted philosopher John Locke's conception of *tabula rasa*, through which society played a vital role in how children became upright citizens.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Victorian religious societies increasingly produced literature specifically for children. As the century progressed, religious groups worried that the proselytizing ventures of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, including the secular publications of natural knowledge seen in the *Penny Magazine*, might lead Victorian children away from a religious understanding of nature.<sup>21</sup> In response, religious societies published new tracts like *History of Beasts* and *History of Birds* that presented natural knowledge in a context of Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Hymns offered another form of influence that religious societies maximized. For example, the 1875 revised edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* included eight new children's hymns with a decidedly different viewpoint, which worked better for children than the more adult-oriented 1860 edition.<sup>23</sup>

Children's hymns also reveal shifts from more negative

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19 Some recent scholarship has investigated the role of church professionalization in the debate between science and religion. See F. M. Turner, "The Victorian Conflict between Science and Religion: a Professional Dimension" *Isis* 69 (1978): 356-76.

20 Lynne Vallone, "A Humble Spirit under Correction: Tracts, Hymns, and the Ideology of Evangelical Fiction for Children, 1780-1820," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 15 (1991), 72-95; 74.

21 J. S. Bratton, *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* (London: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1981), 39.

22 Bratton, *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction*, 39.

23 Drain, *The Anglican Church in Nineteenth Century Britain*, 461.

portrayals of the natural world to more positive representations later in the nineteenth century. Early Victorian children's hymns present nature as fickle and ephemeral, similar to the natural imagery found in early Evangelical hymns. These hymns emphasize hell-fire imagery, comparing struggles in the natural world with battles against sinfulness. One hymn asserts that depraved children "anger and rage like lions."<sup>24</sup> Additionally, children's hymns reinforce morality through the all-seeing eye of God. This theme of an all-powerful and vengeful God is found within a hymn in *The Fairfield Family* and later in the century in the 1879 Methodist Sunday School hymnal.<sup>25</sup> Many Victorian children later associated early Victorian children's hymns with fear and negative portrayals of the natural world. For instance, Janet Courtney remembered her childhood in Lincolnshire through a hymn that compared the autumn winds to death and the Devil.<sup>26</sup> This negative portrayal of the natural world resulted from the origin of these hymns. Evangelicals produced most early children's literature and hymns. By 1840, the Religious Tract Society had a catalogue of literature and song specifically for children.<sup>27</sup> Although the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge also viewed children as vital moral instruments to teach, their development of children's literature occurred more slowly. Therefore the Evangelical monopoly on children's literature and hymns influenced the presentation of the natural world. Since Evangelicals viewed the natural world negatively at the beginning of the century, this message characterized early children's hymns as well.

Similar to the shifts seen in the Evangelical acceptance of a more positive portrayal of nature toward the latter half of the nineteenth century, later Victorian children's hymns present a more idealized version of the natural world. Animals are no longer reminders of sin, but act as reminders of God's goodness. He is not a God of wrath, but one who "made the pretty birds to fly" and "the cow to give milk."<sup>28</sup> Additionally, animals symbolically represent the

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24 Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement, 1780-1917* (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 149.

25 Tamke, *Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord*, 82; *The Methodist Sunday-School Hymn-Book* (1879), Hymns #266, #370.

26 Janet Courtney, *Freethinkers of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1967), 4.

27 Bratton, *The Impact of Victorian Children's Literature*, 41.

28 *Hymns and Rhymes for Children: By the Daughter of a Clergyman* (London: Ward,

relationship between Man and God, with one children's hymn going so far as to equate God's loyalty to that of a good farm dog.<sup>29</sup> These images helped religious societies teach children deeper theological ideas through familiar natural imagery. This imagery is not gender- or class-specific, but speaks to the universality of Victorian ideas of both religion and the natural world. The use of these hymns placed natural imagery at the forefront of didactic teaching about religion. This suggests that Christian denominations did not feel threatened by the natural world, but instead simply wanted to offer their own interpretation of natural knowledge within a Christian context- perhaps, in the words of historian Jonathan Topham, as "safe science."<sup>30</sup>

The presentation of nature in Victorian children's hymns parallels Victorian children's literature. For instance, *Hymns and Rhymes* presents a moral poem entitled the "Busy Bee" that compares moral children with bees who fulfill their natural God-given role in the world.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Charles Kingsley's children's book *Madam How and Lady Why* details how young boys can understand God more through observing the idyllic nature surrounding them.<sup>32</sup> Thus, children's literature and children's hymns highlight a shared iconography of nature in the Victorian period. Although at the beginning of the century, imagery of nature for children received a darker portrayal that reminded children of their fallen state in the world, natural imagery became more idealized and positive as the century progressed. While later Victorian hymns and children's literature maintained their didactic function, they presented this function in quite a different way by the end of the nineteenth century, maximizing natural imagery for good and intertwining nature and God into a "safe science."

## Imperialism

Not only do Victorian hymns offer insight into responses to industrialization as well as the growing acceptance and propagation of natural imagery for children, but they also illustrate how the church and its members viewed imperialism. Victorians wrote hymns for both domestic and foreign mission work. In this paper, I examine

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Lock, and Tyler, 1871), 17.

29 *Hymns and Rhymes for Children*, 28.

30 Topham, "Science and Popular Education in the 1830s."

31 *Hymns and Rhymes for Children*, 22.

32 Charles Kingsley, *Madam How and Lady Why* (1869).

mostly imperial missionary hymns because they more closely detail the natural world. These hymns are especially insightful when compared with Victorian travel narratives. Together, these sources show how Victorians understood and propagated ideas about the basis for imperialism, including notions of British superiority over native people.<sup>33</sup> Hymns specifically reflect British imperial desires that existed throughout the century. This is epitomized in the 1870 hymn *The day thou gavest Lord is ended*, sung at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee service in 1897.<sup>34</sup> In this hymn, the British Empire becomes synonymous with the Kingdom of God. Further hymns characterize Britain as "favored of the skies" and as the country that "owns the divine hand."<sup>35</sup> These hymns detail the Victorian belief in British superiority that underlined the imperial and missionary efforts of the nineteenth century. The Christian message became the "secret of England's greatness."<sup>36</sup> Looking at hymns strengthens the historiographical tradition that shows how Victorian Britons viewed themselves as superior and perceived their dominant role over nature and native people.

Victorians grappled with how to view new people and new lands as the British Empire grew and became more accessible to the British public through travel narratives, newspapers, and even zoos.<sup>37</sup> Many travel narratives from the period, such as *Stories of the Gorilla Country*, present native peoples as uncultured and superstitious.<sup>38</sup> Victorian missionary hymns present a similar interpretation, with native peoples frequently described as "the heathen," "bigot," or "rude barbarian."<sup>39</sup> While Victorian travel narratives glorified the imperial

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33 M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge: London, 1992).

34 Erik Routley, *Hymns and Human Life* (London: John Murray, 1952), 94-5.

35 Edward Bickersteth, *Christian Psalmody: A Collection of Above 700 Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs* (London: L. B. Seeley and Sons, 1833), Hymn # 434.

36 Leslie Howsam, *Cheap Bible: Nineteenth Century Publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 4.

37 H. Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: the English and Other Creatures in Victorian England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), Chapters 5 and 6.

38 Paul Du Chaillu, *Stories of the Gorilla Country* (1871).

39 Reginald Heber, *From Greenland's icy mountains* (1819) in *The Church Missionary Hymn Book* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899); Henry Allon, *Children's Worship: A Book of Sacred Songs for Home and School* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1887), Hymn #527; Committee of the Presbyterian Church of England, ed., *Church Praise* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1885), Hymn #189.

hunter with his animal trophies, Victorian missionary hymns often equated their converts to trophies, discussing how the propagation of the Gospel maximized the “the trophies it has won.”<sup>40</sup> Here, trophies refers to the native converts won through British missionary and imperial efforts. Hymns reflect the same British attitude of superiority towards the natural world that justified large game hunts also justified the British imperial missionary efforts.

Victorian hymns, like Victorian travel narratives, divorced the beauty of nature in foreign lands from the native people, another interesting way hymns offered a justification for British imperial and missionary efforts. Travel narratives like J. D. Hooker’s *Himalayan Journals* contrast the natural beauty and economic opportunities of India with its people, who supposedly do not appreciate this beauty and its economic potential.<sup>41</sup> Hooker concludes that the native people need British leadership to maximize their natural resources. By praising India’s natural beauty and contrasting it with its native people, his narrative draws out Indians’ apparent savageness which, for Hooker, justifies British imperialism.<sup>42</sup> Victorian hymns such as Reginald Heber’s missionary hymn “From Greenland’s icy mountains” present similar justifications through contrast. Heber, for example, compares “India’s coral strand” and “Africa’s sunny fountains” with “the heathen in his blindness” who lives among these riches.<sup>43</sup> Other hymns simply highlight the many “wide realms [which] in darkness lie,” contrasting a bountiful land with its unsaved inhabitants.<sup>44</sup> These Victorian hymns, like the period’s travel narratives, heighten the distinction between native peoples’ ignorance and superstition and God’s natural beauty around them. Missionary hymns justified missionary efforts just as travel narratives justified imperial efforts. As source material hymns prove useful because they reveal a shared nineteenth-century language and iconography about the natural world

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40 *Church Missionary Hymn Book Hymn*, Hymn #239.

41 J. D. Hooker, *Himalayan Journals: Notes of a Naturalist*, Vol. 1, (John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1854).

42 A similar description between savageness and animals was seen at Victorian zoos, which often added natural settings to heighten the contrast between beast and nature. See Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*.

43 Heber, *From Greenland’s icy mountains*, (1823).

44 *Missionary Hymns: Composed and Selected for the Public Services at the Annual Meetings of the London Missionary Society* (London: London Missionary Society, 1830), Hymn #14.

that justified imperialism and missionary efforts as well as reinforced British superiority over the natural world.

Although hymns do offer insight into how Victorians understood and portrayed nature within an imperial context, they do not always present a straightforward imperial interpretation of the natural world. Hymns and their natural imagery also reflect the changes and challenges to nineteenth-century British imperialism. While many hymns detail British superiority, other hymns emphasize the equality and brotherhood between domestic and foreign believers in Christ, stating that all “are one in Christ their head.”<sup>45</sup> These hymns, that highlighted the Christian qualities of native people rather than their superstitious or savage natures, appeared later in the nineteenth century. Taken together, these hymns highlight the new outlooks which Christian denominations took toward missionary work at the turn of the century and illustrate how the natural world went from offering a justification for missionary and imperial ventures to providing attacks that changed the Victorian church’s perception of nature and society. Thus, John Oxenham’s 1908 hymn “In Christ there is no east or west,” with its imagery of Christian brotherhood between all races, stands in sharp contrast to John Ellerton’s aforementioned 1897 hymn for Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Hymns make historians consider the human motives and interactions under which texts evolve. D. F. McKenzie calls this the “sociology of texts.”<sup>47</sup> An investigation into Victorian hymns highlights the continued bond between nature and religion despite the idea of a perpetual “war” between the two begun by J. W. Draper in his *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* and continued by Richard Dawkins.<sup>48</sup> These hymns support historians such as Jonathan Topham and John Brooke, who present an evolving rather than an antagonistic relationship between nature and religion. Hymns also show the need in the history of science to consider changes in religion

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45 *Hymns for Use at United Prayer Meetings and Other Denominational Services* (London: Alliance House, 1886), Hymn #88.

46 John Oxenham, *In Christ there is no East or West* (1908), quoted by Calvin W. Laufer, *Hymn Lore* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1932), 158-61.

47 Howsam, *Cheap Bible*, xv.

48 John Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor, *Reconstructing Nature: The Engagement of Science and Religion* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 151, 16.

as influences on the professionalization of science and dynamic views of the natural world. This is seen quite clearly through the impact that Evangelicalism had on how hymns presented the natural world.

Hymns do not always challenge traditional historiography, but they do illuminate how similar the Victorian iconography and language was between missionary hymns and travel narratives. They also highlight the deep role played by the church both as an institution and as a body of individual members in Victorian conceptions of the natural world beyond just tracts or sermons. In the final analysis, hymns provide a valuable historical perspective because they present the natural world in a nuanced manner. Although doubts existed, hymns show that faith persisted and utilized natural imagery within certain dynamic, not static, contexts throughout the nineteenth century.

Moreover, hymns place historians of science in the church pew rather than in the publishing house or lecture hall. Although recent scholarship investigates more popular interactions with the natural world, few scholars look into how worshippers literally experienced imagery and language of the natural world within their place of worship. There is something powerful about understanding the repeated singing of hymns that Victorians would have experienced regularly throughout their lives. Hymns offer an inclusive space, perhaps like no other, where we can see how women and children as well as men across Victorian society visualized and thought about their natural and spiritual worlds together.

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