

= Hymns for the Amusement of Children =

Hymns for the Amusement of Children (1771) was the final work completed by English poet Christopher Smart . It was completed while Smart was imprisoned for outstanding debt at the King 's Bench Prison , and the work is his final exploration of religion . Although Smart spent a large portion of his life in and out of debt , he was unable to survive his time in the prison and died soon after completing the Hymns .

Smart 's Hymns are one of the first works of hymns dedicated to children , and they are intended to teach Christian virtues . Unlike some of the other works produced by Smart after his release from a mental asylum , such as A Song to David or Hymns and Spiritual Songs , this work was a success and went into many immediate editions . Part of the success of this work lies in the simplicity and accessibility of the text . However , Smart died before he ever saw the proceeds of the work and never learned of the book 's success .

= = Background = =

Smart was released from asylum in 1763 and published two religious works , A Song to David and Hymn and Spiritual Songs , soon after . These were quickly attacked by critics that declared Smart was still " mad " and subsequently failed to become popular . Smart continued to work on religious works as he struggled to publish and support himself . However , he quickly fell into debt and , on 20 April 1770 , he was arrested and sent to Debtors ' prison .

On January 11 , 1771 , he was recommended to the King 's Bench Prison . Although he was in prison , Charles Burney purchased the " Rules " (allowing him some freedom) in order to help make Smart 's final weeks peaceful although pathetic . In his final letter , written to Rev. Mr. Jackson , Smart begged for three shillings in order to purchase food . Soon after , Smart died , May 20 , 1771 , from either liver failure or pneumonia , after completing his final work , Hymns , for the Amusement of Children .

It is unknown how many poems published in the Hymns were written before Smart was imprisoned or during his final days , but at least one , titled " Against Despair " was produced during this time . A different version of the poem was published after his death in the Gentleman 's Magazine . This version included a note claiming , " Extempore by the late C. Smart , in the King 's @-@ Bench , " which verifies that he was writing hymns throughout this time , or , at least , editing them to create a better version .

Although five editions of the Hymns were published in the 18th century , only one edition was published before Smart died . This edition was published by his brother @-@ in @-@ law , Thomas Carnan , and was announced in the Public Advertiser 27 December 1770 . However , this edition did not list Smart as the author . It is possible that there was a sixth edition of the Hymns , but that has since " disappeared " ; there is also a possible pirated edition produced by Thomas Walker . Although the work made it as far as Boston , Massachusetts , as shown by an advertisement for selling the work in 1795 , no Boston editions have been found , but such editions could exist in addition to the Philadelphia , Pennsylvania edition .

Smart 's first children 's hymn was " A Morning Hymn , for all the little good boys and girls " in the Lilliputian Magazine in 1751 . During this time , there were only two models for him to base his children 's hymns on : the works of Isaac Watts and of Charles Wesley . Watts 's work attempted to amuse children while Wesley 's attempted to simplify morality for them . It is possible that Smart 's Hymns were not modelled on Watts 's or Wesley 's actual hymns or songs , but instead after a note in Watts 's work the Divine Songs which says :

A Slight Specimen of Moral Songs , such as I wish some happy and condescending genius would undertake for the use of children , and perform much better ... The sense and subjects might be borrow 'd plentifully from the Proverbs of Solomon , from all the common appearances of nature , from all the occurrences in the civil life , both in city and country : (which would also afford matter for other Divine Songs .) Here the language and measures should be easy and flowing with cheerfulness , and without the solemnities of religion , or the sacred names of God and holy things ;

that children might find delight and profit together .

The work was dedicated " to his Royal Highness Prince Frederick , Bishop of Osnabrug , these hymns , composed for his amusement , are , with all due Submission and Respect , humbly inscribed to him , as the best of Bishops , by his Royal Highness 's Most Obedient and Devoted Servant , Christopher Smart . " Although the prince , the second son of King George III , was only seven at the time , Smart was given special permission to dedicate the work to the boy through the intervention with the royal family by either Richard Dalton or the King 's Chaplain , William Mason .

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In essence , the Hymns for the Amusement of Children is intended to teach children the specific virtues that make up the subject matter of the work . While trying to accomplish this goal , Smart emphasizes the joy of creation and Christ 's sacrifice that allowed for future salvation . However , he didn 't just try to spread joy , but structured his poems to treat valuable lessons about morality ; his subjects begin with the three Theological Virtues (Faith , Hope , and Charity) , then the four Cardinal Virtues (Prudence , Justice , Temperance , and Fortitude) and adds Mercy . The next six hymns deal with Christian duties and are followed by ten hymns on the Gospels . The final works introduce the miscellaneous Christian virtues that were necessary to complete Christopher 's original self @-@ proclaimed " plan to make good girls and boys . "

All but three of the hymns were provided with a corresponding woodblock illustration . The original illustrations either represented the scene of the hymn or a symbolic representation of the hymn . However , later editions of the work sometimes included illustrations that did not match the corresponding hymn , which was the fault of " a general deterioration of standards in book production " . With such possibilities , it is hard to justify an exact relationship between any particular hymn and illustration .

There are thirty @-@ nine hymns included in Hymns for the Amusement of Children :

= = = Mirth = = =

Besides the hymns that are " expected " in a book of hymns , Arthur Sherbo points out that the collection contains hymns " on learning and on ' good @-@ nature to animals ' . " In particular , he emphasizes Hymn XXV " Mirth " as " showing anew the love for flowers that is a recurring characteristic of his poetry " as it reads :

If you are merry sing away ,
And touch the organs sweet ;
This is the Lord 's triumphant day ,
Ye children in the gall 'ries gay ,
Shout from each goodly seat .
It shall be May to @-@ morrow 's morn ,
A field then let us run ,
And deck us in the blooming thorn ,
Soon as the cock begins to warn ,
And long before the sun .
I give the praise to Christ alone ,
My pinks already shew ;
And my streak 'd roses fully blown ,
The sweetness of the Lord make known ,
And to his glory grow .

To Sherbo , this poem is " a good example of the artless quality " of the whole collection of Hymns .

= = = Long @-@ Suffering of God = = =

According to Moira Dearnley , Hymn XXIX " Long @-@ Suffering of God " is " one of the more

pathetic poems in Hymns for the Amusement of Children . " As a poem , it " restates Smart 's certainty that the long @-@ suffering God will eventually bestow his grace upon the barren human soul " as it reads :

Thus man goes on from year to year ,
And bears no fruit at all ;
But gracious God , still unsevere ,
Bids show 'rs of blessing fall .
The beams of mercy , dew's of grace ,
Our Saviour still supplies-
Ha ! ha ! the soul regains her place ,
And sweetens all the skies .

This final poem fittingly ends in " manic exultation " and shows " that for Smart , presentiments of the grace and mercy of God were inseparable from madness . "

= = = The Conclusion of the Matter = = =

Smart 's final poem of the work , XXXIX " The Conclusion of the Matter " , demonstrates to Neil Curry that the " joy and optimism of [Smart] are unwavering . " Smart " does not look back , he looks forward and the sequence ends on a note of triumph " as it reads :

Fear God - obey his just decrees ,
And do it hand , and heart , and knees ;
For after all our utmost care
There 's nought like penitence and prayer .
Then weigh the balance in your mind ,
Look forward , not one glance behind ;
Let no foul fiend retard your pace ,
Hosanna ! Thou hast won the race .

However , as Curry claims , " in this world Smart himself had won nothing . " Instead , Curry believes what Christopher Hunter stated about his uncle : " I trust he is now at peace ; it was not his portion here . "

= = Critical response = =

Although he wrote his second set of hymns , Hymns for the Amusement of Children , for a younger audience , Smart cares more about emphasizing the need for children to be moral instead of " innocent " . These works have been seen as possibly too complicated for " amusement " because they employ ambiguities and complicated theological concepts . In particular , Mark Booth questions " why , in this carefully polished writing are the lines sometimes relatively hard to read for their paraphrasable sense ? " Arthur Sherbo disagreed with this sentiment strongly and claims the Hymns " are more than mere hack work , tossed off with speed and indifference . They were written when Smart was in prison and despairing of rescue . Into these poems , some of them of a bare simplicity and naiveté that have few equals in literature of merit anywhere ... " However , he does admit some of the argument when he claims that " Generosity " , along with a handful other hymns , was " not so simple and surely proved too much for the children for whom they were bought . "

Not all critics agree that the work is too complex for children , and some , like Marcus Walsh and Karina Williamson , view that the works would have fit the appropriate level for children in the 18th century , especially with the short length of each hymn and a small illustration of the scene proceeding each one . This is not to say that the works are " simple " , because many words are complex , but , as Donald Davie explains , there is a " naiveté " in the work that allow them to be understood . In particular , Moira Dearnley claims that the hymns contain a " high @-@ spirited delight in the day @-@ to @-@ day life of children , the joy that characterizes the best the Hymns for the Amusement of Children . "