

History of Hymns: "My Hope Is Built"

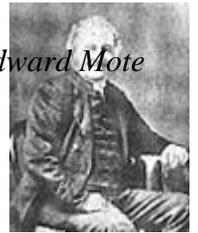
by C. Michael Hawn

"My Hope Is Built"

Edward Mote

The United Methodist Hymnal, No. 368

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand.*



Edward Mote

Edward Mote (1797-1874) falls into the rare category of hymn writers who grew up without religious training and whose parents were pub owners. He was apprenticed at a young age by his parents to a cabinetmaker, but found faith when he heard the preaching of John Hyatt at the Tottenham Court Road Chapel in London at age 15.

Living in Southwark near London, he established a successful cabinet-making enterprise and became a Baptist minister in 1852, at 55 years of age. He ministered for 21 years at Strict Baptist Church in Horsham, Sussex.

Singing hymns was of great interest to him. The master cabinetmaker became a prolific hymn writer, composing more than 100 hymns. He published his hymns with selections by others in 1836 in *Hymns of Praise, A New Selection of Gospel Hymns*. Hymnologists note that this is the first time the now common term "gospel hymn" appears.

American Methodist hymnologist and hymnal editor Robert Guy McCutchan notes that the hymn was probably written in 1834 and originally began, "Nor earth, nor hell, my soul can move." The original title was "Jesus, my All in All." Mr. McCutchan cites the origin of this hymn narrated by the composer as it appeared in a London periodical, *The Gospel Magazine*:

"One morning it came into my mind as I went to labour, to write an hymn on the 'Gracious Experience of a Christian.' As I went up to Holborn I had the chorus,

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

"In the day I had four verses complete, and wrote them off.... On the Sabbath following... by the fireside [I] composed the last two verses... Brother Rees of Crown Street, Soho, brought out an edition of hymns (1836) and this hymn was in it."

Baptist hymnologist William Reynolds summarizes the rest of the story: “The next Sunday [Mote] visited the home of some fellow church members where the wife was very ill. The husband informed Mote that it was their custom on the Lord’s Day to sing a hymn, read the Bible, and pray together. Mote produced the new hymn from his pocket, and they sang [“The Solid Rock”] together for the first time.”

UM Hymnal editor Carlton Young notes in his *Companion* that the hymn is of uneven quality. Indeed, the version in our hymnals today is the result of careful editing of the original six stanzas into four, choosing the most coherent lines from the original.

One can quickly see how the best lines of Mote’s two original stanzas were combined to make a much more articulate whole in the stanza cited at the beginning of this article.

Dr. Young comments on the revised product: “[This hymn’s] compelling topic—the parable about the security of building a house on rock, as opposed to sand (Matthew 7:24-27)—and subsequent redaction and setting to a simple, repetitious, foot-stomping tune have merged to form a hymn of faith that over the generations has proved useful and comforting to many in their daily spiritual journey.”

The “foot-stomping” tune was composed by American gospel song composer, William Bradbury (1816-1868), a fellow Baptist, for Mote’s text in 1863 and appeared during the American Civil War in Bradbury’s *Devotional Hymn and Tune Book* (1864).

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<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-my-hope-is-built>

