

LET ALL THE WORLD IN EVERY CORNER SING

When you were studying “I Sing the Almighty Power of God” written by Isaac Watts you learned that the Christian Church in those earlier years did not believe in singing hymns that had been written by talented persons of that era. All the church authorities strongly felt that only the poetical arrangements of the Book of Psalms called *paraphrases* were worthy to be sung by Christians. Many persons, however, did write poetry that was meant to be used for their own personal devotions.

One of those early poets was a clergyman named George Herbert. George had not planned as he was growing up on becoming a preacher. He wanted to go into politics and be a government official. As a young man, until George was about 32 years old, he was a favorite in King James I Court. After the king died George Herbert decided to “take holy orders,” as going into the ministry was known in those days, and he was ordained by the Established Church of England and became rector of a church in Bremerton, England. He only served there for three years, however, for he contracted tuberculosis and died when he was 39 years old.

However, those three brief years brought an immense amount of poetry and writing from this versatile, humble, and dedicated man. He had the wonderful ability to take simple, sincere ideas and produce poetry having “homely imagery and quaint humor” to quote one of the persons who has written about his life and work.

“Homely imagery” means that George Herbert was able to take ordinary, everyday objects and develop beautiful thoughts about them. “Quaint humor” means that he was able to write those thoughts so that they brought a bit of gaiety or a chuckle of laughter when one reads them.

George Herbert’s sacred poetry finally was discovered to be excellent material for hymns, but it took a great many years for church leaders to realize it. George’s hymn which we are studying “Let All the World in Every Corner Sing” was first called by an odd name – *Antiphon*. Your choir director can explain to you more about singing that is called *antiphonal*. George Herbert meant for this bit of poetry to be sung just that way with everyone joining on the first two and the last two lines while a solo voice or a choir group sings the middle four lines.

The musical form of this hymn might be thought of as a sandwich! A sandwich has two slices of bread with a layer of meat or cheese or other filling between them. Think of the first two lines as one slice of bread – “Let all the world in every corner sing my God and King” then we have a filling in the first stanza that says: “The heavens are not too high, His praise may thither fly; The earth is not too low, His praises there may grow.” (The second stanza will be another kind of filling, of course!) Then we can put the other slice of bread on the filling “Let all the world, etc.” and complete the song.

Dean McCutcheon, who wrote the excellent tune for this lovely text, was the editor of the Methodist Church hymnal that was published about 1935. That was when the Methodist denomination was finally re-united following many years of having been split into three factions because of our Civil War. The tune is called “All the World” and seems to fit the words very wonderfully because it has the same kind of simplicity as George Herbert’s poem.