

Music Blurb for 6-10-18

The text of today's hymn, "In Christ there is no east or west," was written by John Oxenham for a production of a pageant he mounted for the London Missionary Society in 1908. John Oxenham was the pen name for William Arthur Dunkerly. As well as being a rather prolific writer, he served as a Congregational minister in west London from the 1880s until he moved in 1922 to Worthing, Sussex, where he became the town's mayor. In 1913 Oxenham included this text in his collection of poetry called *Bees in Amber: A Little Book of Thoughtful Verse*. The publishers were willing to invest in only 200 copies for an initial printing. That ended up being 0.1% of their eventual total sales. The book can still be found for sale on Amazon.com. It first appeared in the Episcopal hymnal in the 1940 edition. In the intervening years between then and the 1982 edition, the text underwent many revisions by many other denominations for use in their own hymnals. There have been so many revisions, as well as additions of verses by other writers, that there is no standard version of the text among mainline Protestant hymnals.

The tune was an adaptation of an African-American Spiritual, "I Know the Angels Done Changed My Name." The tune had been popularized by the Fisk University Jubilee Singers. The college was founded after the Civil War for African Americans. By 1870 they were facing bankruptcy. The music director formed the Jubilee Singers in 1871 and to raise money they began to tour, ending up all over the US and Europe. As well as saving the college, those tours introduced the world to the rich repertory of African American spirituals. The text and tune were adapted as a hymn by Harry Burleigh in 1939. Burleigh, also an African American, had a brilliant international career as a soloist and made many solo and choral arrangements of spirituals. He even helped Dvorak find authentic tunes for his New World Symphony. In 1939 he was the paid baritone at St. George's Episcopal Church in Manhattan and named his tune MCKEE, after the rector. According to our hymnal's *Companion*, the addition of this in the 1940 hymnal was "one of the first works from African-American culture to enter a hymnal of a major Protestant denomination."