What rhymes with 'day'…?
A 150-year-old misprint in O thou, the central orb

by Ben Byram-Wigfield

In 1873, the Reverend Professor Sir Frederick Arthur Gore Ouseley published his edition of collected church music by Orlando Gibbons. This included the verse anthem *O all true faithful hearts,* which Gibbons wrote in 1619 as "a thanksgiving for the King's happy recovery from a great dangerous sickness". The original text was as follows:

O all true faithful hearts, with one accord
United in one head, sing to the Lord,
For he our David from the snares of death
Hath freed; prolong his days, enlarge his breath.

Rejoice in him, give thanks, his great name bless
For a remembrance of his holiness.

His life is worth ten thousand, therefore give
Each soul ten thousand thanks that he doth live
To lead his people forth to pastures green,
To praise his God whose love to us is seen. *Rejoice*…

Now for the righteous is sprung up a light,
And gladness with each true-hearted wight.
Joy we in him with thanks, that he may bring
More joy unto ourselves, health to our King. *Rejoice*…

Opportunities to perform this work 'meaningfully' would be slim, requiring as they do a male monarch to fall ill and then get better. Consequently, Ouseley commissioned Revd. Henry R. Bramley (1833 - 1917) to supply a more liturgical useful text for the work, in the hope that it would be performed more often, as the calibre of its music warrants.

O Thou, the central orb of righteous love,
Pure beam of the most High, eternal light
Of this our wintry world; Thy radiance bright
Awakes new joy in faith: hope soars above.

Come, quickly come, and let Thy glory shine;
Gilding our darksome heaven with rays divine.

Thy saints with holy lustre round Thee move,
As stars about Thy throne, set in the height
Of God's ordaining counsel, as Thy sight
Gives measured grace to each, Thy power to prove.

Let Thy bright beams disperse the gloom of sin:
Our nature all shall feel eternal **day**
In fellowship with Thee, transforming **day**
To souls, erewhile unclean, now pure within. Amen.

Many people have pointed out the rather poor choice of rhyming '*day*' with … '*day*', which is the poetical equivalent of a consecutive fifth in music.



Fig.1: Ouseley's 1873 edition

Charles Wood also used the text for his grandiose anthem of 1915, and 'day' is used twice there, too. Some have proposed that '*clay*' was intended: presumably with the **c** and **l** letters in a cursive hand looking like a **d**. Indeed, in *English Church Music*, Volume 1 (OUP, 2010) the editor, Robert King, wrote:

> "Returning to Wood's manuscript enables the correction of a long-standing error made by the original typesetter, who misread Wood's handwritten 'clay' at b. 60 as 'day', and which early proofreaders failed to notice makes little linguistic or rhymed sense."

However, Wood's autograph (in the Library of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge) clearly displays 'day' –most obviously in the Bass– and this does not explain where Wood sourced 'clay', when Ouseley's edition of 1873 also writes 'day'. Furthermore, 'clay' makes less sense than 'day'. (Clay is not transformed into souls: it is usually considered a vessel for them.)

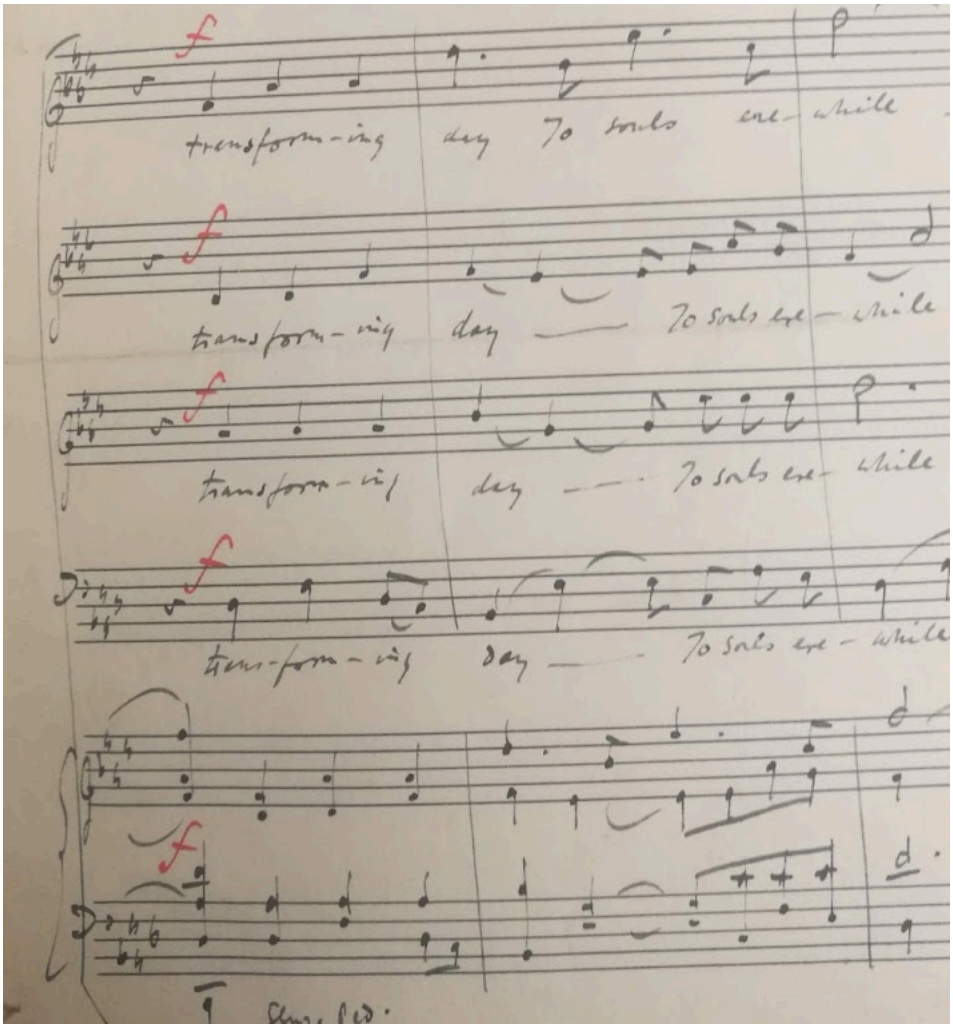


Fig. 2: Charles Wood's autograph of O thou the central orb

Ouseley's publication states that the text was adapted by Bramley. The original poem on which it was based was a reflection on the Advent prose, *O Oriens*, by Richard M Benson, published in *Lyra Mystica*, a collection of religious poetry, in 1865.

O Thou, the central Orb of righteous Love,
Rising in fulness of Eternal Light
On this our wintry world! Thy Radiance bright
Wakes the glad shout of Faith! Hope dwells above;
Thy Saints with holy lustre round Thee move,
Stars of a new Creation, in the height
Of God's ordaining Counsel, as Thy Sight
Gives measured Grace to each, Thy Power to prove.
Come! Quickly come! and let Thy Beams disperse
The lingering taint of primal sin's defiling,
With kindling touch, transforming, reconciling.
Come! Quickly come! dispel fallen manhood's curse,
Till all our nature feels the eternal ray
In Fellowship Divine of Spotless Day.

Much is familiar here, though Bramley's is perhaps the better poem. Notably, Benson's last two lines rhyme 'day' and 'ray', though we have 'eternal ray', in contrast to Bramley's 'eternal day'. But Bramley's alterations reinforce and reiterate a coherent imagery: beam, light, radiance, bright, shine, lustre — what else could it be, but 'transforming ray'…?

"To souls that were unclean, the transforming ray now makes them pure within."

Of course, this remains as conjectural as 'clay', if more plausible. But hard evidence can be found in a book of *Anthems sung at the Cathedral Church of Durham*, dated 1871. (Such books are frequently provided for congregational use.) Here, Bramley's text is set out, under the heading 'Gibbons', with the phrase 'transforming ray'.

523 ADVENT. ALTO SOLO.

O Thou, the central orb of righteous love,
Pure beam of the Most High, eternal Light
Of this our wintry world ; thy radiance bright
Awakes new joy in faith : hope soars above.

CHORUS.

Come, quickly come, and let thy glory shine ;
Gilding our darksome heaven with rays divine.

DUET, TREBLE AND ALTO.

Thy saints with holy lustre round thee move,
As stars about thy throne, set in the height
Of God's ordaining counsel, as thy sight
Gives measured grace to each, thy power to prove.

CHORUS.

Come, quickly come (*as before*).

DUET, TWO TREBLES.

Let thy bright beams disperse the gloom of sin :
Our nature all shall feel eternal day

VERSE, SIX VOICES.

In fellowship with thee, transforming ray
To souls, erewhile unclean, now pure within.

CHORUS.

Come, quickly come (*as before*).
Amen.

Gibbons.

Fig. 3: Anthems Sung in the Cathedral Church of Durham, 1871

More interesting is that this book was produced two years before Ouseley's collected volume of Gibbons' church music. How had Durham, far away from Ouseley's Herefordshire seat, obtained a copy of this work?

We can only presume either that the anthem had been published separately before the edition of collected works (though the British Library's earliest single copy is 1905); or that manuscript copies had been shared up and down the cathedral institutions of the land. Either way, this gives us a window of between 1865 and 1870 for the marrying of Bramley's text to Gibbons' music.

A quick read through Ouseley's edition shows several other mistakes in the underlay, such as 'dispese', instead of 'disperse'. The punctuation does not match that of the Durham book, either, and is frequently incorrect.

Most importantly, this shows that the introduction of the tiniest error can have profound, long-term implications. Charles Wood must have copied the text from Ouseley's edition, complete with the erroneous 'day', for his composition of 1915. Generations of choristers and lay clerks have become accustomed to 'transforming day', in both works for almost a century.

A similar long-lived mistake has perpetuated in British editions of *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, with regard to the comma in *"Where meek souls will receive him still, the silent stars go by."*
But that's another story…

Ben Byram-Wigfield
August 2023