

Min Jesus, lad mit hjerte få (revised 2017)

John Irons

One of the best-loved hymns in the Danish Hymn Book (*Den danske salmebog*) is ‘Min Jesus, lad mit hjerte få’ (No. 217), also because it has been sublimely set to music by Carl Nielsen. His tune was originally composed in 1914, but first published in 1919 and not indicated as the sole melody suggested for the text until 2003.¹

I intend to start in 1764, since as yet I have no evidence of earlier versions in any other language. For in that year Bjørn Christian Lund, strongly influenced by the Pietist movement and, in particular, the Moravian Brotherhood, published his collection of hymns *Jesu Bruuds Glæde i hendes Immanuel og brudgom*, which included a hymn of 31 verses ‘Naar jeg gethsemane her faaer’². Above the hymn is the cryptic *Mel. Die thränen Des Immanuel* &. As far as I can discover, no German model of the hymn exists of which Lund’s poem is a translation. But the comment could mean ‘Use the same melody as that used for the hymn *Die thränen des Immanuel*,’ for such a hymn exists. It is number 452 (*Mel. 14*) in *Gesangbuch, zum Gebrauch der evangelischen Brüdergemeinen*, a book of hymns published first in 1778, but listed in *Geistliche Gedichte des Grafen von Zinzendorf* (p. 312) as written by him around 1753. This hymn is included here as an epilogue, with a translation. What at any rate is clear is that Lund’s hymn has the same mind-set, or perhaps one should say it comes from the same *Gedankengut*.

Lund’s hymn focuses entirely on the Mount of Olives (Gethsemane) as the place where Jesus took upon him the sins of the world and, in particular, those of each and every individual, thereby ensuing redemption for every sinner that repents. There is no depiction of Golgotha or the Resurrection. It is a narrative of Christ’s suffering on behalf of the narrator. Christ’s torment, during which he shed ‘tears of blood’, mean that the narrator, whenever he glimpses Gethsamene here in earthly life, feels transported to a paradise:

When here Gethsemane my eyes
May glimpse, likewise its fruit,
I wander in a paradise
And smell life’s tender shoot.

In that fair garden I now see
A sign of import rare,
God’s Lamb that bears my sins for me,
A sight beyond compare.

After a detailed description of Christ’s sufferings, the narrator leads up to the last four verses with this prayer:

The only thing I’d have you give
Though undeserved to me
Is in that garden I might live
With you eternally.

That your now pitiable frame

¹ For the history of both text and music, see: <http://www.kb.dk/da/nb/samling/ma/fokus/mdrsang/cnjesus.html>

² For the entire text and an English translation of it, see: <http://johnirons.blogspot.dk/2015/12/lunds-entire-hymn-in-english.html>

Would new and lovely be,
And in my spirit I the same
Would fully get to see.

That every evening I could hear
Within my heart set free
Your screams of death, of tears and fear
Come from gethsemane.

That every night I'd lie apart
Upon your bloody arm,
That from your bloody sweat my heart
Was blessed, open, warm.

That soul and mind and fantasy
In every place and time
Did only float in, constantly,
Your bloody love sublime.

That every dawn I woke anew
With my heart's gaze alway
On flowers bathed in your blood-sweat's dew
That in the garden lay.

My soul on roses would proceed,
Be glad and whole as well,
On daily bread and manna feed
With you, Immanuel!

The 'blood, sweat and tears' metaphors are all in place. Now come the final four stanzas:

O Jesu lad mit hierte faae
En saadan smag paa dig,
At nat og dag du blive maa
Min siæl umistelig.

Da bliver naadens tiid og stund
Mig sød og angenem,
Til du mig kysser med din mund,
Og tager til dig hiem.

Mit hierte paa det sted du laae
I haven hviid og rød,
Hos dig sit sidste slag skal slaae,
Og hvile i dit skiød.

Jeg kommer som en synder frem
I din retfærdighed,
Da i det nye Jerusalem,
For din den blodig sved.³

³ Oh Jesu mine, may my heart learn/for you to hunger so /that night and day my soul will yearn/you never to forgo!//Then mercy's time and hour shall be/Most sweet and pleasant too,/Until one day your kiss takes me/From this

Seen in their original context, these four verses are the logical culmination of the whole hymn. Seen out of context, stanza 3, in particular, seems strangely incongruous.

The four last stanzas were printed, without any indication of the author in 1778 in *En liden Samling af adskillige Vers og Sange til Opmuntring og Opbyggelse sammen-skreven* (7. forbedrede oplag 1778)⁴. This passed unnoticed until 1915, when P. Severinsen, when chancing to read the hymnal from 1764, realised that the by then well-known and well-loved hymn 'Min Jesus, lad mit hjerte få' was not at all a hymn written by N.F.S. Grundtvig, as was often believed at the time.⁵

Before Grundtvig came into the picture, the hymn had already reappeared in *Harpen, en Salmebog*, ed. Nils Johannes Holm (Christiania, 1829) as No. 208, but with a marked change of emphasis.⁶ The template has been reused, but the whole basic idea of the original poem has been scrapped, in order to make way for a different theology and a rounded poem.

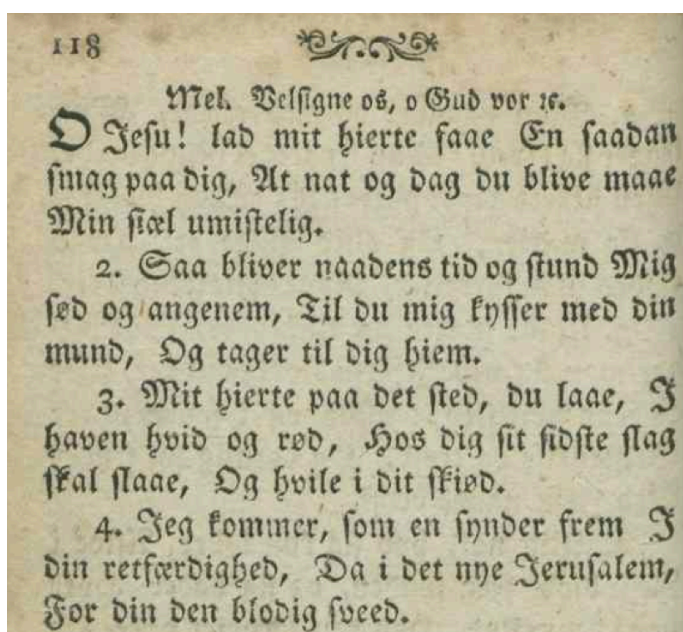
There is no evidence that Grundtvig knew of any earlier versions, indeed, when his version is first published in 1846, as No. 18 (Old hymn) in *Psalmer til den stille Uge og Paasken*, eds. J.F. and R. Th. Fenger, it is specifically stated in the notes that this is 'based on an oral tradition). The version of this 'Easter Week' hymn is fairly similar to the present-day one⁷:

Min Jesu, lad mit Hjerte faae
En saadan Smag paa dig,
At Nat og Dag du være maa
Min Sjæl umistelig!

Da bliver Naadens Tid og Stund
Mig sød og angenem,
Thi du mig kysser med din Mund
Og tager til dig hjem!

Mit Hjerte i den Grav, du laae,
Som opstod hvid og rød,
Lad, naar det aftar, Hvile faae
Og smile ad sin Død!

Før saa mig arme Synder hjem,
Med din Retfærdighed,
Til dit det ny Jerusalem,
Til al din Herlighed!



The first printed version of the last four verses in 1778

life home to you.//Upon that place my heart you laid/In white-red garden blessed,/With you its final beat shall fade/And at your bosom rest.//And as a sinner I draw nigh,/To righteousness I'm led,/To your Jerusalem on high,/Saved by your bloody sweat.

⁴ p. 118. The melody is listed as *Velsigne os, o Gud vor etc.*

⁵ For more information, see Malling, *Dansk Salme Historie*, Vol. III, pp. 366-367.

⁶ O Jesu, lad mit Hjerte faa/En saadan Smag paa dig,/At Nat og Dag du blive maae/min Sjæl umistelig!//Saa skal jeg med Taalmodighed/Min Vei her vandre frem,/Til du mig tager bort i Fred/Og henter til dig hjem.//Lad mig i Troen paa din Død/da ud af Verden gaae;/Du, Frelser! i min sidste Nød,/For Sjælens Øie staae.//Naar i Guds nye Jerusalem/Oprinder Glædens Aar,/Jeg kommer som en synder frem,/Helbredt ved dine Saar.

⁷ Changes marked in italics.

Grundtvig has ‘tweaked’ a couple of things in the first two stanzas, marking them in the pencil text he used, probably written by C.J. Brandt. But when it comes to the last two, he decides he must make drastic changes.⁸ Apart from line 10, which it is difficult to make sense of, since the original ‘garden’ no longer is a theme of the hymn, the hymn is immediately recognisable as the one in the Danish Hymn Book. ‘Jesu’ still has to become ‘Jesus’, and ‘Thi’ will eventually revert to ‘Til’, but lines 6 and 8 change to ‘Mig sød og lystelig’ and ‘Og tager hjem til dig’ (which would have rhymed at the time) in Rørdam’s *Anden Tillæg til Evangelisk-christelig Psalmebog*, printed in 1871, alterations which, according to Malling, are probably Grundtvig’s. Despite this, these alterations are not present in *Kirke-Aaret i Salme-Sang ved Nik. Fred. Sev. Grundtvig* (1873), No. 22, although they are to be found in *Tillæg til Salmebog for Kirke- og Hus-Andagt*, published in same year, 1873. This supplement also has the important shift in line 10 to ‘Til Paaskemorgen rød’. Grundtvig’s earlier version continues to be used for quite some considerable time.

There would, then appear to be a fairly fluid situation during this period, since Landstad in his *Kirkesalmebog* (1870) also published his own version as No. 442, in a section for Whit Monday.⁹

Malling concludes by citing Aastrup’s version in *Salmer* (1941), which is a fine example of how to kill a hymn stone dead.¹⁰ Grundtvig’s version is consistent with a tradition, though clearly, in terms of language and metaphor, not his own work. Aastrup’s version I feel as a travesty. P Severinsen suggests a combination of Lund vv. 1, 5, 13, 14, 18, 28, 29, 31,¹¹ which means Lund’s poem acquires a new status as a shorter poem in its own right.

In conclusion, here is the 2003 version, and a possible translation of it:

Min Jesus, lad mit hjerte få
en sådan smag på dig,
at nat og dag du være må
min sjæl umistelig!

Oh Jesu mine, may my heart learn
for you to hunger so
that night and day my soul will yearn
you never to forgo!

Da bliver nådens tid og stund
mig sød og lystelig,
til du mig kysser med din mund
og tager hjem til dig.

Then mercy’s time and hour shall be
most sweet and joyous too,
until one day your kiss takes me
from this life home to you.

Mit hjerte i den grav, du lå
til påskemorgen rød,
lad, når det aftner, hvile få
og smile ad sin død!

In that same grave where you did bide
till Easter morn’s first breath,
may my heart rest at eventide
and smile at its own death!

Før så mig arme synder hjem
med din retfærdighed
til dit det ny Jerusalem,
til al din herlighed!

Then take me home, poor sinner I,
in righteousness and love
to your Jerusalem on high,
to glory up above!

⁸ See *Grundtvigs Sang Værk*, Vol. IV, p. 147, where the following is noted for hymn 152. The new last two verses written out in full by Grundtvig, with the old ones placed in brackets.

⁹ Min Jesu, lad mit Hjerte faa/En saadan Smag paa dig,/At Dag og Nat du være maa/min Sjæl umistelig!//Da skrider Naadens Tid og Stund/Saa sød og salig frem,/Thi du mig kysser med din Mund,/Og tager til dig hjem.//Mit Hjerte i den Grav, du laa/Knust af min Synde-Nød,/Lad naar det kvelder, hvile faa,/Og smile af sin Død!//Før saa mig arme Synder hjem/Med din Retfærdighed/Til dit det ny Jerusalem,/Til al din Herlighed!

¹⁰ Malling, op. cit., p. 367. My thanks to Liselotte Larsen from Grundtvig-Biblioteket for this information, ibid. note 11.

¹¹ See *Dansk Kirketidende* 1916, pp. 275-282

452. Mel. 14.

Die Thränen des Immanuel sind der Gemeine Text, jemehr zur Heimath unsrer Seel der Seelen Heimweh wächst.

2. Und siehet man noch überdem des Heilands Leben an, daß Gott und Menschen angenehm und in Gott war gethan:

3. Was wars doch anders, (Herz, du weißt!) als ein täglicher Tod, und Kraft und Trost des heiligen Geists, mit abwechselnder Noth?

4. Nun geht keins durch dis Jammerthal und sät die Thränenfaat, das nicht an dem Original Trost und Exempel hat.

5. Es ist nichts unter alle dem, was Leib und Seel macht matt, so fürchterlich unangenehm, als daß man Sünde hat.

6. Wenns Geistes Zucht das Gliedergift, der Seele Schlangenart, so jeder Mensch bey sich antrifft, dem Herzen offenbart;

7. Wie roth wird da das Wangelein! was Thränen

rolln herab! und kam kein Friedensengelein und mahlte Jesum ab,

8. Und zeigte klärlich aus dem Buch, wo's Herz so gern dran gläubt, daß er die Sünd und ihren Fluch gebüßt hat und vertreibt:

9. So weinte sich ein weiches Herz ums Sündenelend todt; allein, der Glaub ans Lammes Schmerz hilft ihm aus aller Noth.

10. Wenn aber eins es so weit hat, daß ihm Immanuel zum Freund wird und getreuen Rath; dann lebt erst Leib und Seel.

11. O welch ein immerwährend Fest: wenn er uns seine nennt, uns seinen Frieden fühlen läßt, und sich zu uns bekennt!

12. Da weint das Sünderherz nach ihm, dem holden Sünderfreund, so wie aus Liebe und Estim er ehemals selbst geweint. *)

*) Joh. 11, 35. 36.

13. Uns ist so, daß um Christi Seel das Aug uns immer rinnt, bis er uns mit der Wundenhöhl erscheineth, ohne Sünd. *)

*) Ebr. 9, 28.

452.

The tears of our Immanuel
are aye our church's prose,
the more toward our soul's true home
the souls' nostalgia grows.

And if one in addition keeps
the Saviour's life in view,
which God and mankind greatly pleased
and from God did accrue:

What else then was it (heart, thou know'st)
than daily death no less,
and Holy Spirit's solace and
its strength mixed with distress?

Now nought can ever reach the vale
of woe and sows tears' seed
which solace and example lacks
from the Original by deed.

And there is not one thing which on
the body and the soul
as dreadfully and nastily
as sin does take its toll.

If venom of the spirit's weal,
the soul's own snakelike lair,
each man when finding in himself
should to his heart lay bare;

How red would then his cheeks become!
What tears would fast descend!
if no peace-bringing angel came
and showed Christ as his friend,

And in the Book then clearly showed
what each soul would believe,
that Christ from sin and its foul curse
for us has gained reprieve:

A gentle heart would weep to death
at all sin's misery;
unless belief in God's Lamb's pain
from sin's plight set him free.

If though a man e'er should deserve
to have Immanuel
as friend and guide, his body and
his soul would both live well.

Oh, what a never-ending feast:
if he called us his own,
and let us sense within his peace
and us did all condone!

Then would the sinful heart for him
shed tears, its sinless friend,
just as he from esteem and love
his tears did once expend.

For Christ's soul it now does seem to us
We'll always shed a tear,
until he with his gaping side,
shall sinless reappear.