

Hymn Stories - Rev'd John S. B. Monsell

*Fight the good fight with all thy might;
Christ is thy Strength and Christ thy Right;
Lay hold on life, and it shall be
Thy joy and crown eternally.*

John Samuel Bewly Monsell, born in Ireland in 1811, was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, graduating in 1832. His first post was as curate of Templemore, Derry (1834-1836), and, after holding a number of ecclesiastical positions, including vicar of Egham, Surrey, he became rector of St Nicholas's Church, Guildford, in 1870, and Chaplain to Queen Victoria (1870-1875).



He was a prolific poet and hymn writer, publishing eleven volumes of poetry and approximately three hundred hymns. His books included *Hymns and Miscellaneous Poems* (1837) and *Litany Hymns* (1870), but he is best remembered for the hymn *Fight the good fight with all thy might* which first appeared in 1863. Only this and three of his other hymns are still sung today.

Despite the first line, this hymn is not a Christian battle-song in the style of *Onward Christian Soldiers* or *Soldiers of Christ arise*. Rather, it is a call to faithfulness. Each of the verses is based on a verse from the Epistles. The first echoes 1 Timothy 6:12, "*Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.*" The second, with its athletic connotation, follows Hebrews 12:1, "*Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*"

*Run the straight race through God's good grace,
Lift up thine eyes and seek His face;
Life with its way before us lies,
Christ is the Path and Christ the Prize.*

The third verse is from 1 Peter 5:7, "*Cast all anxiety on him, for he cares for you*"; and the fourth from Colossians 3:11, "*Christ is all, and is in all.*"

Monsell believed that hymns should be enthusiastically sung and full of joy. He wrote: "*We are too distant and reserved in our praises.*" In 1875, whilst supervising the rebuilding of St. Nicholas Church, Guildford, he slipped and fell from the roof, and died shortly afterwards from his injuries.

Eddie Newall