# Hymn Stories – Dorothy Frances Gurney

*O perfect Love, all human thought transcending,*
*lowly we kneel in prayer before thy throne,*
*that theirs may be the love which knows no ending,*
*whom thou in sacred vow dost join in one.*

*O perfect Life, be thou their full assurance*
*of tender charity and steadfast faith,*
*of patient hope and quiet, brave endurance,*
*with childlike trust that fears no pain or death.*

*Grant them the joy which brightens earthly sorrow;*
*grant them the peace which calms all earthly strife;*
*grant them the vision of the glorious morrow*
*that will reveal eternal love and life.*

Dorothy Frances Gurney was an English poet and hymn writer. Born in London in 1858, Dorothy and her Anglican clergyman husband, Gerald Gurney, converted to Catholicism in 1919.

Although best known for her poem *God's Garden* which is the source of the verse often seen on garden plaques, bird baths and sundials*: One is nearer God's heart in a garden/Than anywhere else on earth*, she also wrote the hymn *Oh Perfect Love, all Human Thought Transcending* for her sister's wedding in 1883. It soon became popular, especially in London, where it was used at many fashionable weddings, including those of royalty.

Spiritual insight into the meaning of hymns isn't always easy. However, in his book *The Gospel in Hymns,* Albert Bailey points out that in this hymn, *'the Lord Jesus Christ is given two titles that are of special significance in marriage - 'perfect love' and 'perfect life'*. He concludes that these titles speak of two great ideals which are important in every marriage; motive and performance. If these ideals are honoured and obeyed they will yield joy and peace in any marriage.

Dorothy Gurney

Perhaps it's also worth noting that Mrs Gurney certainly brought out the truth that human love cannot begin to compare with God's love; which *'transcends all human thought'*.

She died in 1932 and the London Times printed the following tribute*: 'Thousands of people at thousands of weddings must have sung, or heard sung, O Perfect Love, without ever knowing that Mrs Gurney was the writer.'*

*Eddie Newall*