

## **O Worship The King**

### **By Robert Grant**

ONE OF the great Christian hymns, sung with gusto in every Christian tradition, is O Worship the King. Written by Robert Grant (1779-1838) It's a glorious shout of praise to God, strengthened even more when it's sung to the majestic 'Hanover' by William Croft (so named in honour of the Hanoverian kings who followed the House of Stuart on the British throne).

But it's more than just a series of slogans. It's a thoughtful and very skilful reflection on God as the Creator and Sustainer of life. It moves from considering the grand scale of the physical creation to acknowledging God's care for each one of his children.

The King is 'all-glorious above', 'pavilioned in splendour, the ancient of days' – the imagery is drawn from Daniel 7. The hymn comes closer than any other to expressing the awe-inspiring majesty of God. But it also speaks of God's 'bountiful care,' which 'breathes in the air' and 'shines in the light'. God, for Grant, is not distant and unknowable; he is intimately involved with human beings, and blesses all of us throughout our lives. We are 'Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,' but 'In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail.'

But it's the majesty of God which is the theme of this hymn, and it draws its imagery from the majesty of nature.

Robert Grant was a successful lawyer and administrator who was born in Bengal (his father was a director of the East India Company). He moved back to Scotland with his family when he was only six, and in time became a dedicated and reforming Member of Parliament (he was responsible for the emancipation of Britain's Jews). He was a sponsor of evangelical causes throughout his life.

He returned to India as Governor of Bombay in 1834, dying only four years later.

It may be that in writing the second verse, which contains the thrilling lines 'His chariots of wrath/ The deep thunder clouds form/ And dark is his path/ On the wings of the storm' he was thinking not of Britain's milder climate, but of the onrush of the Indian monsoon, when nature's power is seen in its full strength – and is still subject to the will of God, who can calm the storm with a word.

Interestingly, the hymn is not entirely original. It was based on one by William Kethe (?-1594) who was one of the translators of the Geneva Bible and wrote All people that on earth do dwell.

One of Kethe's verses read, 'His chamber beams lie, in the clouds full sure,/ Which as his chariot, are made him to bear/ And there with much swiftness his course doth endure:/ Upon the wings riding, of winds in the air.'

### **Mark Woods**