

## In Jesus

James Procter (dates unknown)

Robert Harkness, 1880-1961

1. I've tried in vain a thou-sand ways My fears to quell, my hopes to  
 2. My soul is night, my heart is steel—I can-not see, I can-not  
 3. He died, He lives, He reigns, He pleads; There's love in all His words and  
 4. Tho' some should sneer, and some should blame, I'll go with all my guilt and

raise; But what I need, the Bi-ble says, Is ev-er, on-ly  
 feel; For light, for life I must ap-peal In sim-ple faith to  
 deeds; There's all a guilt-y sin-ner needs For-ev-er-more in Je-sus.  
 shame; I'll go to Him be-cause His name, A-bove all names, is

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## In Jesus

*Author*—James Procter, dates unknown*Composer*—Robert Harkness, 1880-1961

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

Psalm 14:1

Though some should sneer, and some should blame,  
 I'll go with all my guilt and shame;  
 I'll go to Him because His name  
 Above all names is Jesus.

These are the words of a man who had been an avowed atheist for most of his life but who later became a believer in Jesus Christ and a follower of the Christian faith. The composer of the music, Robert Harkness, shares this account:



## 101 More Hymn Stories

“In November, 1903, while I was privileged to be associated with the late R. A. Torrey in his world-wide campaigns, we had meetings in the city of Manchester, England. At the close of an afternoon session, toward the end of November, a lady approached me, as I was leaving the platform, and timidly handed me an envelope.

‘Mr. Harkness, would you read the verses in this envelope? Maybe you can set them to music.’

‘I opened the envelope and immediately began to read these interesting words:

I’ve tried in vain a thousand ways my fears to quell,  
My hopes to raise.  
But what I need, the Bible says, is ever, only Jesus.

‘My dear lady, that’s a very unusual text. Where did you get it?’ The lady began to relate the following story:

‘The verses were written by my brother, James Procter. He was raised in an old-fashioned Christian home, where we had family prayers. He lived as a boy in a good spiritual environment, attending Sunday school and church regularly. But in his early teens, he began to read the writings of the Free Thinkers and other infidels. He read the error of these writers to such an extent that his own faith in God became shaken. Finally, he renounced all interest in the Christian faith and the Bible. He later joined the Free Thinkers’ Society in Manchester, soon becoming its president.

‘During these early years of infidelity and searching for life’s meaning, James Procter penned the first two stanzas of this hymn. In the second verse, he especially described his own attitudes as an unbeliever with these words:

My soul is night, my heart is steel—  
I cannot see, I cannot feel;  
For light, for life I must appeal  
In simple faith to Jesus.

‘Later, while serving as president of the Free Thinkers’ Society in Manchester, England, James Procter experienced a serious illness. Fearing that the end of his life was at hand, he one day requested his sister to send for a minister of the gospel. A faithful man of God came to his bedside and led Procter to a saving faith in Christ. The illness took a turn for the better and his sister described this experience during his convalescence:

‘One day as I sat at my brother’s bedside, he said, “Sister, go over to that old bureau and look through some papers in the top right drawer. You will find a sheet on which are two verses of a poem. I want to finish that text right now.”’



## 101 More Hymn Stories

“Only Believe and Live,” and “When I See My Savior Hanging on Calvary.”

Mr. Harkness continued to be active in Christian service until his death at the age of eighty-one on May 8, 1961, in London, England. He gave extensive personal performances throughout this country in a program called “The Music of the Cross.” His inspiring piano solos will long be remembered by many.

Through the years, men in their vain deceits have tried to discredit both our Savior, the Living Word, as well as the Scriptures, the written Word of God. But human reasoning alone will never truly satisfy the yearning of any life, since man is a special creation — endowed with a spirit that is meant to relate to the corresponding faculty of God. One can never be a truly complete person, until this spiritual union is accomplished. Like the author of this hymn text, when one is faced with the crises of life and the prospect of an endless eternity, that spirit within the human breast cries out for far more comfort and assurance than mere human reasoning alone can afford. For now and for eternity, “What I need, the Bible says, is ever, only Jesus.”

\* \* \*

146 “Atheism is the death of hope, the suicide of the soul.”

Anonymous

“Atheism is rather in the lip than in the heart of man.”

Sir Francis Bacon: *Essays: Of Atheism*

### THE ANVIL— GOD’S WORD

“Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith’s door,  
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;  
Then looking in, I saw upon the floor  
Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.

“‘How many anvils have you had,’ said I,  
‘To wear and batter all these hammers so?’  
‘Just one,’ said he, and then, with twinkling eye,  
‘The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.’

“And so, thought I, the anvil of God’s Word,  
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;  
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,  
The anvil is unharmed — the hammers gone.”

Unknown



'I went over to the bureau and soon located the paper and began to read, "I've tried in vain. . . ."

'Yes, yes, that's it. Now let me dictate the last two verses to you.'

'With great excitement, my brother repeated these words slowly, while I wrote them down with much care:

He died, He lives, He reigns, He pleads;  
There's love in all His words and deeds—  
There's all a guilty sinner needs  
Forever more in Jesus.

'Tho some should sneer and some should blame,  
I'll go with all my guilt and shame  
I'll go to Him because His name  
Above all names is Jesus.

'That closing verse was especially meaningful to my brother as it represented his personal testimony to his many long-time friends, the other members of the Free Thinkers' Society. You can well imagine my delight on that November day of 1903, when the noted gospel musician, Robert Harkness, expressed a real interest in my brother's text.'

'I thanked this dear lady for her kindness in giving me these words, written by her brother, and for sharing with me this unusual experience. I promised her that I would do my best to set them to some appropriate music. Our campaign meetings ended in Manchester at the end of November. Just before Christmas of 1903, I traveled by train from Edinburgh to London to spend the Christmas season with relatives. It was a dull, foggy day. Visibility seemed to be nil, as I casually looked through some papers in my pocket as the train rambled its way to London. To my surprise, there was the paper with the four verses of 'In Jesus.' As I read the words anew, the musical suggestion came quickly and the music was written, just as it has been used to the present time.'

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Robert Harkness was born in Bendigo, Australia, on March 2, 1880. He traveled extensively with the Torrey-Alexander gospel team and also with J. Wilbur Chapman in evangelistic meetings. Harkness was recognized as one of the finest gospel pianists of his day. He also wrote instructional books on the techniques of evangelistic hymn-playing that have been very influential, including a one-volume correspondence course published by the Lillenas Publishing Company. Robert Harkness personally composed or arranged more than 2,000 gospel songs. Several of these are still familiar favorites with many Christians: "Our Great Savior" (No. 73), "Why Should He Love Me So?", "Hiding in the Shadow of the Rock," "No Longer Lonely," "Sometime, All Sorrow Will Be O'er," "Thine, Lord,"



# Ada R. Habershon (1861-1918)



“Ada was the youngest daughter of Dr. Samuel Osborne Habershon. She was brought up in a Christian home by believing, praying parents, and her whole life was devoted to God’s service. In 1901, she began writing poetry while ill and wrote *Apart with Him*. She met Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey when they visited London in 1884, and visited America at their invitation to deliver lectures on the Old Testament, which were later published. During the 1905 Torrey-Alexander Mission, Charles Alexander asked her to write some Gospel songs; within a year, she supplied him with 200.”

Taken from Hymntime.com.

- Are You Ready for the Coming? by Ada Haberson
- He Will Hold Me Fast
- He Will Hold Me Fast by Ada Habershon
- I Need to be Filled by Ada Haberson
- I’m Pleading for You by Ada Haberson
- Is He Yours? by Ada Haberson
- Meet Me in the Homeland by Ada Habershon
- No Other Story by Ada Haberson
- Soon will our Savior from Heaven appear by Ada Habershon
- Waiting by Ada Habershon
- What will it be when we see Him? by Ada Habershon
- Will the Circle be Unbroken? by Ada Habershon



# Ada Ruth Habershon

[Cite this article](#)

HABERSHON, Ada Ruth. b. Marylebone, London, 8 January 1861; d. London, 1 February 1918. She came from a religious family: she was the daughter of a physician, Dr Samuel Habershon, and his wife Grace. She was educated at a boarding school at Dover. She was steeped in evangelical culture: she was a friend of Charles Haddon Spurgeon\*, and an enthusiastic supporter of the 1884 London Mission of Dwight L. Moody\* and Ira D. Sankey\*. Her autobiography and memoir, *A Gatherer of Fresh Spoil*, compiled by her sister, E.M. Habershon, emphasises her debt to Moody and Spurgeon (p. 19). She worked at 'Gray's Yard Ragged Church and Schools' from 1883 until 1899, working with the poor and with tramps. In...



# Ada R. Habershon



**Ada Ruth Habershon** (1861-1918) was an [English Christian hymnist](#), best known for her 1907 [gospel song](#) "[Will the Circle Be Unbroken?](#)" for which the tune was composed by [Charles H. Gabriel](#).

## Biography

Ada R. Habershon was born in [Marylebone, England](#), on 8 January 1861. Her father, Dr. Samuel Osborne Habershon, was a noted [physician](#); her mother was Grace Habershon. She was raised in [Chelsea, London](#), in a Christian home. In her twenties, she was a member of the circle surrounding [Charles Spurgeon](#). She met [Dwight L. Moody](#) and [Ira D. Sankey](#) in 1884 during their preaching tour of England. At their urging, she visited the [United States](#), delivering a series of lectures on the [Old Testament](#) that were later published.

Habershon's first foray into hymn writing came in 1899, when she wrote several hymns in the [German language](#). She wrote her first [English language](#) hymns in 1901, while ill. In 1905, [Charles M. Alexander](#) and [R. A. Torrey](#) toured the United Kingdom, and Alexander asked Habershon to write hymns for use during this evangelistic tour. Habershon ultimately sent Alexander over 200 hymns.

## Works

- *Types in the Old Testament*, 1898
- *Vorbilder: Christus im alten Testament*, 1899
- *The Study of the Types* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1898)
- *The Study of the Parables* (London: Nisbet, 1904)
- *The Bible and the British Museum* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1904)
- *The Priests and Levites, a Type of the Church; a Bible Study*, 1908
- *A Sevenfold Method of Studying the Epistles to the Seven Churches*, 1914
- *Hidden Pictures: Or, How the New Testament is Concealed in the Old Testament* (London: Flemming H. Revell Company, 1916)
- *The Day of Atonement in Its Prophetic Aspect*, 1916
- *A Gatherer of Fresh Spoil; an Autobiography and Memoir*, 1918

Ada R. Habershon



Ada R. Habershon

See something missing?

Edit Now



He Will Hold Me Fast

## When I fear my faith will fail

### I. Background

This hymn of devotion has its roots in three continents. The story begins with American evangelist R.A. Torrey (1856–1928) and his music director [Charles Alexander](#) (1867–1920), who were touring Australia in 1902 when they met a young pianist, [Robert Harkness](#) (1880–1961).

Dr. Torrey and Mr. Alexander came to my home town of Bendigo in June. Prior to their coming a committee of the Mission came to me, and asked if I would not help in the meetings by playing the piano a part of the time. I was not interested in evangelistic meetings; indeed, I was rather opposed to them, but the thought struck me, that perhaps my good father and mother would be pleased if I took part in these meetings, and I consented. I hadn't been in the first meeting ten minutes before I found it was going to be decidedly warm, much warmer than I had expected.

Mr. Alexander announced Hymn No. 7, and I was soon playing a two-line hymn, with an old Southern melody. I was not deeply interested, and played it in an offhand way. In playing through the “Glory Song,” when I came to the chorus, I closed the book; I had memorized it quickly and improvised an accompaniment to the chorus to try to displease Mr. Alexander; but, instead of displeasing him, he turned around and looked at me and said, “Keep it up. Keep it up. That is what we want.” So I kept on. The next time we had the chorus I played a full octave accompaniment, thinking he would surely be upset, but he was not there to be upset. At the close of the meeting Dr. Torrey asked me if I was a Christian. I straightened up and said, “No, I am here to play the piano.” Dr. Torrey left me and went away, to pray for me—I think.[1]

After that experience, Alexander challenged Harkness to accept Christ. Harkness, moved by Alexander’s genuine concern for his spiritual welfare, accepted. In addition, Alexander was so impressed by Harkness’ abilities that he employed the young man in his traveling music team, forming a partnership that lasted several years.

After their work in Australia, the team traveled to Tasmania, New Zealand, and India before shifting their efforts to the British Isles. In 1905, while in London, toward the end of their campaign, the team came into contact with songstress [Ada Habershon](#) (1861–1918), yielding their first collaborative composition:

A few days before the movement in the Strand ended, a new gospel song was added to Mr. Alexander’s collection of revival hymns, which achieved instant popularity. It was entitled, “Oh, what a change!” and was written by a lady already widely known for her sacred verse, Miss Ada R. Habershon. She was a worker in the campaign, and heard Dr. Torrey speak one afternoon upon “The Second Coming of Christ.” She was much impressed by the Doctor’s words, and on returning home wrote the beautiful lines of the hymn. . . . Soon afterwards, Miss Habershon handed the lines to Mr. Harkness with the request that he would set them to music. During Dr. Torrey’s sermon one night, as the pianist scanned the lines, he had an inspiration, and, pulling from his pocket a piece of paper jotted down the melody. The hymn was quickly printed as originally written—without any alteration whatever—and delighted everyone who was privileged to hear it. During the last days of the campaign on the Strand it was sung on an average at least once in each meeting.[2]

In early 1906, the team was in Toronto, Canada. By one account, Harkness had met a young convert there, who “expressed the fear that he would not be able to hold out,”[3] so he wrote to Habershon in England to request more texts to address this sentiment. Harkness later described how Habershon’s reply came after the team had moved their work to Philadelphia:



Alexander & Harkness in New Zealand, 1902, in *Twice Around the World with Alexander* (1907).



It was 1906, during the Mission in Philadelphia. I remember Dr. Torrey was preaching to about 4000 people in the Armory. During a sermon I took out some slips of paper with some words which Miss Habershon had sent over in response to a request for some verses about keeping the power of Christ. I read over the lines of “He will hold me fast”; the melody came to me, and I worked it out there and then, writing the music for the verses and the chorus.[4]

The following summer, 1907, the song was introduced at the Moody Bible Conference in Northfield, Massachusetts. One reporter described how this song “captivated everybody . . . and was sung and whistled all over the grounds.”[5]

In the spring of 1908, Charles Alexander returned to Philadelphia with evangelist J. Wilbur Chapman (1859–1918) and later relayed this testimony in relation to the impact of the song:

During our mission in Philadelphia last spring, Dr. Charles W. Gordon called me across the waiting room of the hotel where we were staying and introduced me to a fine looking young man, and told me this story. . . . His face was shining as he told us how he had been in our meeting a few days before and had been converted. When I questioned him I found that he had been in darkness, and felt he was too weak to live a Christian life. He was in the meeting when I was leading the people in the song “He will hold me fast,” and he said that was the very message he needed. The thought that Christ could hold him fast, and that he need not depend upon his own will power, or his own strength, was the means of his decision for Christ.[6]

Only a few weeks after the Philadelphia crusade, Chapman and Alexander (and probably Harkness) were leading a crusade in Kansas City. A reporter described how “He will hold me fast” was a highlight of the experience:

The climax of the service of song came when Mr. Alexander united choir and audience—6,000 strong—in singing Mr. Harkness’ new hymn, “He will hold me fast.” The people were electrified by the vast volume of melody, such as was probably never before heard in the building, and by the thought of Christ holding us fast amid all of life’s temptations and trials.[7]

## II. Publication

“He will hold me fast” first circulated on leaflets and/or in small booklets prepared for revival meetings, including a broadsheet published in Toronto in 1907 ([WorldCat](#)). Its first appearance in a hymnal or songbook was in the *Northfield Hymnal with Alexander’s Supplement* (Chicago: Biglow & Main, 1907 | Fig. 1). It also appeared in George T.B. Davis’ *Twice Around the World with Alexander, Prince of Gospel Singers* (NY: Christian Herald, 1907). The original version has four stanzas and a refrain. Musically, it has the unusual feature of placing the melody in the bass line. In an interview in 1909, Harkness described his rationale for doing this:

I adopted the plan of putting the melody in the left hand and writing a little accompaniment for the right, having got the idea from hearing a cello in an orchestra. This had been used in secular song, but was quite a new thing in gospel songs—and I had been most desirous of getting away from the old accompaniment of three or four chords. Some of the leading gospel writers said that these would never be sung, because they were opposed to the rules of gospel hymns, but the public apparently cared nothing for the rules, as they quickly became very popular, and since then numbers of writers have adopted the principle.[8]

## III. Retuned

In spite of the initial success of the song, it fell out of use after the mid twentieth century. In recent years, it has enjoyed a resurgence through a new tune setting by Matt Merker of Capitol Hill Baptist Church (Washington, D.C.). According to Merker, a member of his congregation had given him a copy of the original gospel song, but he initially set it aside.

I forgot about the song for a while, but later pulled it out again when I was walking through a difficult personal season of doubt and uncertainty. I was wrestling with the hard questions of the faith and struggling to place my trust in the enduring power of God’s preserving grace. John Piper’s sermon from T4G 2012 on Jude vv. 20-25 was a lifeline for me, and Jude 24 became an anchor for my soul in that trying time: “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy . . .” . . . I pulled out “He Will Hold Me Fast” again and the words ministered to me deeply. I wanted to see the resurrection and return of Christ featured in the lyrics, since our hope is guaranteed by the reality that Christ has risen and is coming again. I first shared the song with my wife and then with our pastor, and he suggested we should try singing it as a congregation. We introduced the song to CHBC early in 2013 and the church quickly owned the song and began singing it with joy (and really loud voices!).[9]



Mission site at The Strand, London, England, 1905, in *Twice Around the World with Alexander* (1907).

**He Will Hold Me Fast.**  
“Thy right hand shall hold me.”—PSALM cxxxix, 10.  
ADA R. HABERSHON. ROBERT HARKNESS.

1. When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast;  
2. I could nev-er keep my hold, He must hold me fast;  
3. I am pre-cious in His sight, He will hold me fast;  
4. He'll not let my soul be lost, Christ will hold me fast;

When the tempt-er would pre-vail, He can hold me fast.....  
For my love is oft-en cold, He must hold me fast.....  
Those He saves are His de-light, He will hold me fast.....  
Bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast. ....

REFRAIN. *a tempo.*  
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;  
hold me fast, hold me fast;

*rall.*  
For my Sav-our loves me so, He will hold me fast.



Merker’s version combines Habershon’s original four stanzas into two, with some minor alterations, and it adds an additional stanza featuring the resurrection and return of Christ. It was first published electronically through Capitol Hill’s website (Fig. 2) and has since been covered by other artists, including Keith & Kristyn Getty.

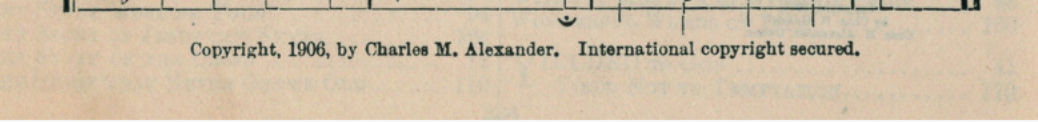


Fig. 1. *Northfield Hymnal with Alexander’s Supplement* (Chicago: Biglow & Main, 1907).



Fig. 2. “He will hold me fast,” Matt Merker, Capitol Hill Baptist Church (Washington, D.C., 2013), excerpt. ©2013 Matt Merker Music.

by CHRIS FENNER  
for Hymnology Archive  
3 January 2018

Footnotes:

1. George T.B. Davis, *Twice Around the World with Alexander, Prince of Gospel Singers* (NY: Christian Herald, 1907), pp. 47–48.
2. George T.B. Davis, *Torrey and Alexander: The Story of a World-Wide Revival* (London: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905), pp. 219–220: [Google Books](#)
3. Cyber Hymnal, “He will hold me fast,” <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/h/w/i/hwilhold.htm>
4. “The spiritual awakening in Australasia,” *The Westminster*, vol. 34, no. 38 (18 Sept. 1909), p. 11.
5. “He will hold me fast,” *The Presbyterian Banner*, vol. 94, no. 43 (2 April 1908), p. 1405.
6. Charles M. Alexander, “Gospel song in the service of Christ,” *Record of Christian Work*, vol. 27, no. 11 (November 1908), p. 859.
7. George T.B. Davis, “A great meeting at Kansas City,” *The Presbyterian Banner*, vol. 95, no. 1 (11 June 1908), p. 23.
8. “The spiritual awakening in Australasia,” *The Westminster*, vol. 34, no. 38 (18 Sept. 1909), p. 11.
9. “He will hold me fast,” Getty Music, <https://www.gettymusic.com/he-will-hold-me-fast/>

Additional Resources:

Wax cylinder, performed by Harry Anthony and James F. Harrison (1909), University of California Santa Barbara, Cylinder Audio Archive:  
<http://www.library.ucsb.edu/OBJID/Cylinder3594>

C. Edward Spann & Michael W. Williams Sr., *Presidential Praise: Our Presidents and Their Hymns* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2008), pp. 258–260.