

Stanfordian Thoughts
A periodical series of reflections on recorded and unrecorded works by Stanford
by Christopher Howell

13. Songs of Faith

You do not have to be very old to remember a time when your only hope of hearing music by Stanford was in the Anglican Church. Even today, your best chance of encountering his music live, rather than on disc or radio, remains the Anglican Church. Generations of choristers and churchgoers have rejoiced in music that expresses a faith that is radiant, almost childlike without being smug, fluent but not facile, and is an unending pleasure to sing. It would be disheartening, to say the least, if we had to tell these people that Stanford did it all by supreme technique, that his own faith was rocky, non-existent or strongly tempted in other directions.

Even if I thought this was true, I could not prove it. Stanford was irascibly vociferous on such matters as musical education, musical style and Irish home rule, but absolutely reticent as to his personal life, personal philosophy and religious beliefs. We do not even know if he attended church regularly after relinquishing his position at Trinity College, Cambridge, at the end of 1892. An oft-quoted episode might give us pause for thought about this. Following the Leeds Philharmonic Society's tribute to their former conductor on 13th November 1923¹, Sir Edward Bairstow recalled: "Next morning Stanford came to service at York Minster. We offered to sing him any of his services. He chose the one in C, for he said he had never heard it!"² The Service in C had been published in 1909 and had rapidly become a regular part of the Anglican repertoire. It is difficult to see how anyone could have frequented "quires and places where they sing" with any assiduity from 1909 to 1923 without hearing it.

A recent article by Robert James Stove notes that "Stanford will sooner or later baffle anyone who seriously researches his life and work ... A particularly regrettable gap in our understanding of Stanford concerns his religious attitudes". Stove further comments that Stanford showed "unexpected interest in musical aspects of the Roman rite" together with "an equally unexpected periodic taste for setting the theologically heterodox verses of Walt Whitman and Algernon Charles Swinburne". Though Stove can only conclude that "the likelihood is that we will never know", we must remain grateful to him for reminding us of the problem³.

I no more have the answer than anyone else, but a forthcoming second recording of the cycle *Songs of Faith*, op.97⁴ gives me the opportunity to examine the evidence offered by this cycle and other works from the same period.

The forthcoming disc is a follow-up to a recital which raised similar questions by juxtaposing 5 *Sonnets from The Triumph of Love*, op.82, with *Die Wallfahrt nach Kevlaar*, op.72. The first of these draws on texts by Stanford's friend from his childhood days, and his cousin, Edmond Holmes. Holmes was a firm believer in reincarnation. Stanford reordered the sonnets in such a way that the casual

¹ Jeremy Dibble: *Charles Villiers Stanford, Man and Musician*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p.452

² Harry Plunket Greene: *Charles Villiers Stanford*, Edward Arnold & Co., 1935, p.221

³ Robert James Stove: "You would pluck out the heart of my mystery": *Discoveries and Paradoxes in Stanford-Related Research*, *British Music, the Journal of the British Music Society*, Vol. 43, 2021, pp.1-6.

⁴ The first recording, by Roderick Williams (baritone) and Andrew West (piano) was issued on SOMM CD 0627 in 2021. A second recording, by Elisabetta Paglia (mezzo-soprano) accompanied by the undersigned, will shortly be issued on Da Vinci Editions.

listener might suppose lines such as “I think that we are children long ago” to be a hyperbolic expression of infatuated love, rather than a belief that the lovers had really met in a previous life and that their love would remain triumphant in a future one. You could even argue that Stanford might have understood the verses this way, but in view of his longstanding relationship with Holmes, it is not really plausible that he was unaware of the underlying philosophy behind the sonnets. This does not prove he shared it, but he was seemingly open-minded and tolerant towards holders of strange, even esoteric, beliefs. Likewise, he was open-minded and tolerant towards Heine’s curious ballad which, to a strictly Protestant mind, may seem to encapsulate all that is most bigoted and self-delusional in Marian Catholicism.

One tends to suppose that Stanford, fluent as he was, would have started composing a song cycle with the first song and then proceeded in order. Survival rate for Stanford’s song manuscripts is extremely low, but we do have those of *Songs of Faith*, and they show that gestation was, by Stanford’s standards, slow and far from linear. Listed below are some dates which suggest an interesting story⁵:

4th May 1905: Symphony 6, first movement
 14th May 1905: Symphony 6, second movement
 19th June 1905 “Laus Deo”: Symphony 6, fourth movement
 16th July 1905: Serenade op.95
 18th January 1906: conducted first performance of Sixth Symphony (LSO, Queen’s Hall)
 15th March 1906: *Stabat Mater* op.96
 27th May 1906: *God and the Universe*, piano version, eventually op.97 no.2
 30th May 1906: death of William Yeates Hurlstone
 1st June 1906: attended funeral of Hurlstone
 1st June 1906: orchestration of song *I think that we were children long ago* op.82 no.4
 2nd June 1906: orchestration of song *O Flames of Passion* op.82 no.5
 4th June 1906: orchestration of song *When in the solemn stillness of the night* op.82 no.3
 18th June 1906: *Tears*, eventually op.97 no. 5
 28th June 1906: *To the Soul*, eventually op.97 no.4
 Late July: went on holiday to Inverness-shire
 September 1906: *Joy, Shipmate, Joy*, eventually op.97 no.6
 30th September 1906: *Faith*, eventually op.97 no.3
 10th October 1906: String Quartet no. 4 op.99, first movement
 16th October 1906: String Quartet no. 4 op.99, second movement
 20th October 1906: String Quartet no. 4 op.99, third movement
 30th October 1906: String Quartet no. 4 op.99, fourth movement
 19th December 1906: *Strong Son of God*, op.97 no.1
 10th February 1907: *Wellington Ode* op.100

I begin with the Sixth Symphony for two reasons.

Firstly, it is one of two major works written in memory of a painter/sculptor. The earlier of the two was the *Requiem*, op.63, completed on 1st September 1896 and dedicated to the memory of

⁵ For the dates of the compositions, I am indebted to Frederick Hudson: *A New Catalogue of the Works of Charles Villiers Stanford 1852-1924, Compiled from the Original Sources*, typescript 1994. Held in the Stanford Collection of Newcastle University and accessible here: https://www.ncl.ac.uk/webtemplate/libraryassets/external/special-collections-guide/handlists/stanford_charles_villiers_archive.pdf. Retrieved 13.4.2022.

Frederick, Lord Leighton (1830-1896). Leighton surrounded himself with a secrecy that might almost have been a model for Stanford's own, yet his questioning of standard Victorian religious beliefs was well known, and induced his mother to write in 1852: "I beseech you, do not suffer your disbelief in the dogmas of the Protestant Church to weaken the belief I hope you entertain of the existence of a Supreme Being"⁶. The Sixth Symphony was dedicated to the memory of George Frederic Watts (1817-1904). Watts's painting *Faith* was described in 1901 as "A Symbolic figure, novel in conception and modern in sentiment breathing the toleration of a Faith which no longer trusts the power of the sword, and has learnt to recognize the good in the creeds of others"⁷. Two artists, therefore, who stood aside from Victorian religious tenets. As with so much of Stanford's private life, we do not really know the extent of his friendship with them, still less what they discussed together, if anything. Association with them and grief at their death does not mean a sharing of their beliefs, but it looks as if Stanford was not horrified by them either.

The other interesting feature of the Sixth Symphony is that the manuscript bears the Haydnesque inscription "Laus Deo" at the end. The Hudson catalogue shows that Stanford appended this pious phrase to only a few works. So far as we know, he attached it to none of his other symphonies⁸. It would be over-ingenious to attribute its presence to a burst of religious zeal in that moment, or to suppose that its absence elsewhere registers a moment of doubt. Still, the point is a curious one.

After the relative relaxation of the Serenade, op.95, one of Stanford's sunniest works though with a touch of mystery in the slow movement, the composer embarked on the *Stabat Mater*, the fourth of his five large-scale choral-orchestral works based on Roman Catholic Latin texts – the others were the Mass in G, op.46 (1892), the Requiem, op.63 (1896), the Te Deum, op.66 (1897) and the Mass Via Victrix, op.173 (1919). In many ways, the *Stabat Mater* is the most fundamentally Roman Catholic of these texts. If you translate the Roman Mass into English and move the Gloria to the end, the result is the Anglican Communion Service⁹, so a Protestant composer could argue that the use of Latin rendered the music universal, rather than tied to a specific creed. The *Stabat Mater*, on the other hand, is a poem that reflects the Catholic tendency, of which most Protestant churches are wary, to venerate, almost deify, the Virgin Mary.

In some respects, moreover, Stanford's setting could be found the most Catholic of any – in its pictorialism. If you go into even the smallest of Italian Catholic churches, you will find them full of pictures, from the altarpieces to the central nave and the side chapels. All illustrating, obviously, with varying degrees of realism, stories from the Bible or from the lives of the Saints. Some Protestant churches have been more rigorous than others in expunging these from their walls, but even High Anglicanism has never fully renounced the Puritanism that had these whitewashed over in the 17th century. Stanford had already experimented with a degree of pictorialism in his G major Service, op.81 (c.1900), where a "real Mary", in the form of a treble soloist, and a "real" Simeon, in the form of a baritone, sing the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis. He begins his *Stabat Mater* with a chordal motive that depicts the Cross and returns throughout the piece, followed by a dramatic depiction of the earthquake that rent the temple and then the first vision of the Paradise theme that will eventually conclude the work in an epilogue of ravishing beauty. Above all, the soprano clearly enacts the role of Mary, the other solo voices and the chorus offering commentary in the manner of a Greek chorus. In this it is quite different from the setting by Dvořák, a fervent Catholic, who sought

⁶ Letter quoted on the site of the Leighton House Museum, <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/leightonarabhall/biography.html>, retrieved 28.6.2022.

⁷ E.T. Cook: *A Popular Handbook of the National Gallery*, Macmillan, 1901, pp.502-503.

⁸ The MS of no.5 is missing.

⁹⁹ The Mass in G was, in fact, published in this form as a Communion Service in G, though it never caught on.

a more generalized – or universalized – expression of Mary’s grief. The Stanford work could almost be staged as an opera¹⁰.

But, if this pictorial approach might seem to lead towards Catholicism, it could equally lead towards Pre-Raphaelitism. The Pre-Raphaelites, for the most part unorthodox Christians, had shocked the Victorians with their extremely realistic approach to religious scenes. A famous example is Millais’s *Christ in the House of his Parents* (1849-1950), where the child Jesus is depicted in a real carpenter’s shop with warts-and-all real people as his parents and family. This painting¹¹ elicited a famous attack from Charles Dickens¹². In the light of subsequent developments in religious painting, Millais’s work seems to 21st century eyes a charming, even sentimental representation of an episode in Jesus’ early life, so it is important for us not to lose sight of how revolutionary it actually was. Stanford’s portrayal, in his G major Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis, of a “real” Mary sitting at her spinning wheel and of a “real” Simeon taking leave of his life, could be considered a Pre-Raphaelite conception, as could the pictorial elements of the *Stabat Mater*. The painters Stanford is known to have frequented particularly, however, Watts and Leighton, stood rather apart from the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

More than two months passed before the next dated composition, the voice and piano version of *God and the Universe*,¹³ which was eventually to become the second of the *Songs of Faith*. This was completed on 27th May 1906. On 30th May came the shocking news of the death, at the age of 30, of a former pupil, William Yeates Hurlstone, for whom he had the highest regard¹⁴. Stanford attended Hurlstone’s funeral on 1st July. Was he aware, on 27th June, that Hurlstone was mortally ill? Probably this is another of the things we shall never know. Certainly, he chose a text – reproduced at the foot of this article – in which Tennyson sought reassurance about the permanence of man’s “tiny spark of being” in the midst of the “deeps and heights” of the universe. This poem was from Tennyson’s last collection, *The Death of Oenone and other poems* (1892), in which the ageing bard spoke of “this embattled wall of unbelief / My prison, not my fortress”¹⁵. The answer that comes in *God and the Universe* is a mystic one, a voice, perhaps of God, which tells him not to fear “the hidden purpose of that Power which alone is great”. Stanford’s setting has impressive intensity, both in the questing first section and the rising tension of the second. He gives much emphasis to the words “His shadow”, ending in darkness and mystery more than reassurance.

For the moment, this setting remained isolated. We do not know if a cycle of *Songs of Faith* was already forming in Stanford’s mind, though the chronology of events suggests it had not yet begun to do so. His next task was the orchestration of the last three songs from the cycle *5 Sonnets from the Triumph of Love*. The orchestration of songs written some years before could be a purely mechanical exercise, but it seems more likely they caused the composer once more to mull over the belief in reincarnation expressed by the poet, Edmond Holmes. Nor do we know why he made these

¹⁰ Something of the kind seems to have been attempted: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xa3XixGoenc>. These YouTube postings give no idea of where and when this took place, and leave the home listener rather perplexed over what may have been a deeply moving occasion for those witnessing it.

¹¹ In Tate Britain.

¹² Mary, for example, was “so hideous in her ugliness that ... she would stand out from the rest of the company as a Monster, in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest gin-shop in England” Charles Dickens *Old Lamps for New Ones*, Household Words 12 (15 June 1850), pp.12-14, full text viewable at http://www.engl.duq.edu/servus/PR_Critic/HW15jun50.html, retrieved 4.7.2015.

¹³ I have discussed, in article 11 in this series, my reasons for believing that the SATB version of this piece was actually the original one.

¹⁴ The Wikipedia entry states that Stanford rated Hurlstone above all his other pupils, including Vaughan Williams and Holst, but quotes no source.

¹⁵ In *Doubt and Prayer*.

orchestrations. The last two were eventually performed at a Promenade Concert by Olga Mikhailov, conducted by her husband Sir Henry Wood, on 21st October 1909¹⁶. Had Wood already put out feelers in 1906?¹⁷ On the other hand, if Stanford felt an inner compulsion to orchestrate these songs, why only three of them?

Walt Whitman was in the air at that time. In article 12 of this series, I concluded that Stanford probably knew that his former pupil Vaughan Williams was working on a major Whitman-based work, had probably not yet seen the results but may just possibly have known which texts had been chosen – this last point being the most doubtful. In any case, Stanford's first Whitman setting since the *Elegiac Ode* of 1884 was *Tears*, completed on 18th June 1904. This eventually became the fifth of the *Songs of Faith*. Whitman's poem, reproduced below, basically says that we all shed tears, though we generally do so when none are looking. He offers no consolation for this universal grief, or any mention of God at all, so it is difficult to see how this could be called a "Song of Faith", except by setting it alongside another poem that implies the solution missing here. Stanford's setting, in its strange harmonies, menacing march rhythms and vehement outbursts, verges on the Mahlerian.

Ten days later, he completed *To the Soul*, which in due course became the fourth of the *Songs of Faith*. This was the text set by Vaughan Williams as *Toward the Unknown Region*. Here Whitman describes the soul's journey into the unknown. Whitman himself seems to embrace the prospect joyfully, though he does not know anything about this future state other than that we will "dwell beyond the bounds of Time and Space". Unlike *Tears*, Whitman expresses here a faith of a sort, but hardly one compatible with orthodox Christianity. Again, God is not mentioned. Stanford is groping, sinking, hesitant and almost becalmed in the first section. His climax speaks of stoic acceptance rather than passionate espousal, giving Whitman a slightly Tennysonian tweak.

From here, we jump to September. We do know that in late July, the Stanfords went on holiday to Inverness-shire¹⁸. Did Stanford the composer switch off when on holiday? The best answer seems to come from two letters quoted by Plunket Greene,¹⁹ albeit not regarding this particular holiday. In the first, dated "Achanalt²⁰, August 10, 1911", Stanford gives some details of his fishing expeditions with one Francis Harford, "a doctor in India and a first-class fly-caster". He then mentions that "In the intervals of the gales I am doing a new set of Mary Coleridge part-songs". A little later, on August 29th, 1911, he wrote: "As I have not fished much I have perpetrated 8 more (and I think better) Mary Coleridge part-songs and I finished today the complete Communion Service for the Coronation Gloria". One wonders what Jennie did while her husband was out fishing all day. We can only hope that Stanford's fishing friends provided between them a party of grass widows with whom she could take pleasant walks among the rain and midges – and breathtaking scenery – of Bonnie Scotland.

So the answer seems to be that he would take his manuscript paper on holiday with him and write shorter works as fishing²¹ allowed. Possible candidates for "recreational" composition during the summer of 1906 would be the string of 2-part songs, or at least some of them, published in 1906 and

¹⁶ The orchestral version of the third song seems never to have been performed.

¹⁷ Dibble, *Ibid.* p.386, states that they were "specially orchestrated for her to sing". If so, she took her time to learn them.

¹⁸ Cf. Paul Rodmell: *Charles Villiers Stanford*, Ashgate, 2002, p.249. Rodmell does not tell us when he returned. With the RCM in summer recess, it seems likely that he remained in Scotland for most of August.

¹⁹¹⁹ Greene: *Ibid.*, pp.240-241.

²⁰ A small freshwater Loch in Ross and Cromarty, Scotland.

²¹ "Stanford's only real outdoor recreation", Greene, *Ibid.*, p.238.

1907 by Curwen without opus number²², and the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis on Gregorian Tones, op.98. The part-songs find him in a more relaxed mood than in any other music written at about this time. Op. 98 must be among the least performed of all Stanford's service music. Edmund Fellowes had this to say:

*The "Evening Service on the 2nd and 3rd tones" is of an experimental character. The plainsong is sung in unison in alternate verses, answered by the voices in four-part harmony with a very free treatment of the plainsong melodies. The experiment is not entirely successful, for the fundamental differences between the two methods are in a sense irreconcilable under such a scheme as this. Nevertheless, Stanford's rare technical skill, coupled with his gift for thematic phrasing, has given a quality to this Service that makes it welcome in Cathedral lists as an occasional contrast to more conventional compositions.*²³

So, having toyed with a Catholic (or Pre-Raphaelite) pictorial concept of the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in the G major Service, Stanford now sought to reconcile the old, originally Catholic, plainchants with a more modern manner, for use in the Anglican Church.

We do not know exactly when op.98 was written, but it seems logical to infer that it came before the String Quartet op. 99, on which he embarked in October, and at a time when op.97 existed at least in his mind. The summer of 1906 seems as likely a date as any. The big news from the point of view of this article is that Stanford had, by around August 1906, decided to bring together the three ambitious songs written that year as part of a cycle. Whether or not the cycle had a name at that stage, it had an opus number.

We have to speculate a little over the date of the next of the *Songs of Faith*, the third Whitman song *Joy, Shipmate, Joy*, in due course op.97 no.6. The last page of the manuscript, which was presumably dated, is missing. In the published copies, September 1906 appears at the end of this, the last song, implicitly referring to the cycle as a whole, though in fact we know that the last song to be completed is dated 19th December. I make the assumption that *Joy, Shipmate, Joy* was dated September 1906 on the last page and the publisher took this as applying to the entire set of songs. Since *Faith*, eventually op.97 no. 3, is dated 30th September, I also assume that *Joy, Shipmate, Joy* was written earlier in the month.

In this poem, Whitman speaks of the soul's joyful embracing of death as it leaves its anchorage, like a ship setting sail into the unknown. The poem climaxes with a repetition of the first line, "Joy, shipmate, joy". Stanford, too, arrives at a big climax here, but then it is as if the soul, having greeted us for the last time, then turns and sails away. The music fades with the soul repeating "joy" as it vanishes into the distance. Stanford has tweaked the emphasis of the poem. In Whitman's words, we hear only the soul speaking. Stanford seems to interpret the scene from the point of view of those left behind, watching the soul go. And maybe wondering, as Whitman seemingly does not, where it is going. No answer to this question is offered. This song is radiantly assertive where the previous two seemed fearful, hesitant, but God is not mentioned. If this is a song of faith at all – Whitman seems convinced that an afterlife of some kind is out there waiting for us – it expresses Christian faith only for those who wish to see it that way.

²² *The Lark's Grave, A March Landscape, This is the Way* (1906), *Cradle Song, A Laughing Song, Robin Redbreast, The Echoing Green* (1907). See article 8 in this series for a discussion of these pieces.

²³ Edmund H. Fellowes: *English Cathedral Music from Edward VI to Edward VII*, Methuen, 1941, p.241.

I should like to make a plea here over the tempo for this song. It is marked *Allegro*, but with three minims (half-notes), not crotchets (quarter-notes) to the bar. This does not, to my mind, mean it goes at the same speed as it would if it had been written with three crotchets to the bar and the note values halved. It is the crotchets that are *Allegro*, not the minims. Performed this way it conveys a steady swell, surging rather than racing to the climax, and does not seem to be over almost before it has begun. In support of this view, I would point to the “Pro peccatis” section of the *Stabat Mater*,²⁴ likewise with three minims to the bar. This follows on from a section with four crotchets to the bar and, at the change of time, Stanford stipulates that crotchet equals crotchet. This would seem to show that, at least for him, three minims to a bar meant a fairly broad three-in-a-bar.

Stanford now had a set of three Whitman songs. He next gave the so far isolated Tennyson setting, *God and the Universe*, a companion. *Faith* was completed on 30th September. This is another poem from *The Death of Oenone*. Tennyson begins with a strong exhortation to “Doubt no longer that the Highest is the wisest and the best”, set in forthright manner by Stanford. The poet then seemingly shoots himself in the foot by listing all the things – “the shipwreck, ... the famine, or the pest” – which induce us to doubt this very point. The only hope Tennyson can offer is a mystic one – “Thro’ the gates that bar the distance comes a gleam of what is higher”. He therefore urges us to “Wait till Death has flung them open”. Stanford accompanies the mystic gleam with a touch of relatively modernist-leaning harmony, breaking in with high drama as the gates are flung open. However, he concludes by reiterating the opening lines, so his message is a little more comforting than Tennyson’s own.

Symmetry required a third Tennyson song to balance the three by Whitman. October was mostly taken up, however, by the composition of his fourth String Quartet, op.99, a restless work, in spite of its upfront ending, in which lyrical expansion is more glimpsed at than developed. It was not until 19th December that he finally completed op.97. The chosen poem was not from *The Death of Oenone*, and it is difficult to see what other poem in that collection could have filled the bill, except *Crossing the Bar*, which he had already set in 1890. Instead, he selected the famous opening lines of *In Memoriam*. Tennyson’s opening verse, for many Victorians, encapsulated the nature of the Christian faith.

*Strong Son of God [i.e. Jesus Christ], immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;*

His next verse, however, seems addressed directly to God, at times bitterly:

*Thine are these orbs of light and shade;
Thou madest Life in man and brute;
Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot
Is on the skull which thou has made.*

Stanford, having begun in broad, hymn-like manner, sets these last two lines in dramatic semi-recitative.

²⁴ P. 92 of the vocal score

Much could be written about what Tennyson's line, in the next verse, "He [i.e. man] thinks he was not made to die" is supposed to mean. The tone seems ironic, yet the whole point of the long poem is the poet's gradual acceptance that his dead friend, Arthur Hallam, has some sort of existence in an afterlife:

*I trust he lives in thee, and there
I find him worthier to be loved.*

Tennyson's argument, developed not in a linear manner but via spurts of faith, spurts of doubt, spurts of anguish and spurts of momentary consolation, finally reaches the conclusion he wanted to believe, but nobody has found it very convincing:

*Whereof the man, that with me trod
This planet, was a noble type
Appearing ere the times were ripe,
That friend of mine who lives in God,

That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.*

Tennyson himself had seemed to side, earlier on (in poem 96) with

*... one indeed I knew
In many a subtle question versed,
Who touch'd a jarring lyre at first,
But ever strove to make it true:

Perplex'd in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out,
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.*

T.S. Eliot probably summed it up for the 20th and 21st century when he said of *In Memoriam* that "Its faith is a poor thing, but its doubt is a very intense experience"²⁵. This may seem a rather obvious reaction now, but was it Stanford's? In the same essay, Eliot wrote:

Apparently Tennyson's contemporaries, once they had accepted In Memoriam, regarded it as a message of hope and reassurance to their rather fading Christian faith. It happens now and then that a poet by some strange accident expresses the mood of his generation, at the same time as he is expressing a mood of his own which is quite remote from that of his generation.

So perhaps Stanford, like many of his contemporaries, found "hope and reassurance" in Tennyson. In any case, his op. 97 was now complete. It was published, in two sets, in 1908. He called it *Songs of Faith* and I can only reiterate my title question: what faith? If he had called it *Songs of Death*, the title

²⁵ In *Selected Essays*, also reprinted in *Tennyson: In Memoriam. A selection of critical essays edited by John Dixon Hunt*, Macmillan 1970, pp. 129 et seq.

would have been at least as near the mark. Whatever, they are magnificent songs, among the finest he wrote. His search among Tennyson's death-inspired poetry did not stop here, since his next work, the *Wellington Ode*, op.100, was a big choral-orchestral setting of the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*. It has found few admirers, but this should be the subject for another article.

So, to return to my opening question, do we have to tell those Anglican churchgoers who have found support for their faith in Stanford's church music that he "did it all by supreme technique, that his own faith was rocky, non-existent or strongly tempted in other directions"? We do not know. I suspect that the simple, steady, almost childlike faith expressed in so much of his church music was an ideal to which he aspired, and which he sometimes achieved. He certainly expressed it powerfully in the slightly later *Bible Songs*, op.113 (c.1909). He lived, however, in times when doubts and alternative creeds proliferated, and walked among many of the men who personified them. Few who are not destined for sainthood, and even some who are, have avoided their rocky moments. We have followed Stanford about as closely as is possible, mainly through his music, over a period of a year or so. The message we get from the music is that 1906 may have been one of his rockier periods.

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SONGS OF FAITH

1. Strong Son of God

*Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;*

*Thine are these orbs of light and shade;
Thou madest Life in man and brute;
Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot
Is on the skull which thou hast made.*

*Thou wilt not leave us in the dust;
Thou madest man, he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die;
And thou hast made him: Thou art just.*

Tennyson

2. God and the Universe

*Will my tiny spark of being wholly vanish in your deeps and heights?
Must my day be dark by reason, O ye Heav'ns, of your boundless nights,
Rush of suns, and roll of systems, and your fiery clash of meteorites?*

*"Spirit, nearing yon dark portal at the limit of thy human state,
Fear not thou the hidden purpose of that Power which alone is great,
Nor the myriad world, His shadow, nor the silent Opener of the Gate."*

Tennyson

3. Faith

*Doubt no longer that the Highest is the wisest and the best,
Let not all that saddens Nature blight thy hope or break thy rest,
Quail not at the fiery mountain, at the shipwreck, or the rolling
Thunder, or the rending earthquake, or the famine, or the pest!*

*Neither mourn if human creeds be lower than the heart's desire!
Thro' the gates that bar the distance comes a gleam of what is higher.
Wait till Death has flung them open, when the man will make the Maker
Dark no more with human hatreds in the glare of deathless fire!*

Tennyson

4. To the Soul

*Darest thou now O soul,
Walk out with me toward the unknown region,
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?
No map there, no guide,
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes are in that land.
I know it not O soul,
Nor dost thou, all is a blank before us,
All waits undream'd of in that region, that inaccessible land.
Till when the ties loosen,
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds bound us.
Then we burst forth, we float,
In Time and Space O soul, prepared for them,
Equal, equipt at last, (O joy! O fruit of all!) them to fulfil O soul.*

Whitman

5. Tears

*Tears! tears! tears!
In the night, in solitude, tears;
On the white shore dripping, dripping, suck'd in by the sand;
Tears, not a star shining, all dark and desolate;
Moist tears from the eyes of a muffled head;
O who is that ghost? that form in the dark, with tears?
What shapeless lump is that, bent, crouch'd there on the sand?
Streaming tears, sobbing tears, throes, choked with wild cries;
O storm, embodied, rising, careering with swift steps along the beach!
O wild and dismal night storm, with wind! O howling²⁶ and desperate!
O shade so sedate and decorous²⁷ by day, with calm countenance and steady²⁸ pace,*

²⁶ Whitman actually wrote "belching". However, Whitman's poems went through a number of editions and versions, so the change may not be Stanford's.

²⁷ Stanford omits "and decorous".

²⁸ Whitman wrote "regulated". Again, the change may not be Stanford's.

*But away at night as you fly, none looking—
O then, the unloosen'd ocean,
Of tears! tears! tears!*

Whitman

6. Joy, Shipmate, Joy.

*Joy, shipmate, joy!
(Pleas'd to my soul at death I cry,)
Our life is closed, our life begins;
The long, long anchorage we leave,
The ship is clear at last, - she leaps!
She swiftly courses from the shore.
Joy, shipmate, joy.*

Whitman

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