

7th July 2026

Nature

"The whole of nature is life."

Albert Einstein, from *'Einstein and the Poet'* by William Hermans (1983)

In a recent church "Songs of Praise", we explored the language of Victorian and modern hymns, expressing the need for relevance in our praise. Not long afterwards, I discovered a Victorian hymn which had all the modern relevance of which we'd spoken.

Maltbie Davenport Babcock was born Syracuse, NY, in 1858, and died in Naples, Italy, in 1901. A Presbyterian minister, he served Brown Memorial Church in Baltimore, Maryland, and Brick Church, New York City. In Baltimore he was especially popular with students from Johns Hopkins University, but he ministered to people from all walks of life. His short career was memorable for the remarkable influence of his personality and his preaching, and the value of his hymns and devotional poems.

Babcock was a great walker and runner (long before jogging was popular) and though he had tragedy in his life, his love of nature, and his ability to see God's hand in the world's beauty were sustaining forces in his life. And his Victorian hymn? Apart from the odd word here and there, might this have been written for today?

This is my Father's world,
and to my listening ears
all nature sings; and round me rings
the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas –
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world:
the birds their carols raise,
the morning light, the lily white,
declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;
in the rustling grass I hear Him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let earth be glad!

Note: The hymn has a DCM metre, and works well to Bach's melody "Ich Halte Treulich Still"

A prayer for today

Can God speak to me in the carolling of the birds and the rustling of the grass?