

Douglas, J. D., Comfort, P. W., & Mitchell, D. (1997, c1992). *Who's Who in Christian History*.

MONTGOMERY, JAMES (1771–1854)

Scottish hymn writer

Relatively few great hymn writers have been laymen. Such, however, was Montgomery, a newspaper publisher and editor and a determined advocate of social reform. Indeed, he was twice imprisoned for his outspoken articles.

Montgomery was born in Scotland, the son of Moravian missionaries to the West Indies, both of whom died while he was still a boy. His early years were difficult ones, but eventually he found his place on the staff of a journal in Sheffield, England. In time he became the owner of the publication, which he renamed *The Iris*. Through it he championed many causes, such as the struggle to abolish child labor in the factories. Not surprisingly, his Moravian background gave him an ardent concern for foreign missionary endeavors.

He was closely associated with the efforts of evangelical Anglicans to win acceptance for hymn-singing in their churches, a practice still opposed by many of the bishops. Together with his friend and minister, Thomas Cotterill, who was also a hymn writer, he won the approval of the archbishop of York for the use of a hymnal they had compiled. Montgomery had a keen sense of literary style, as well as a fine lyrical gift. He was one of the finest hymn writers of his generation and one of the first to write critical articles on the subject of hymnody.

Of his own fine hymns, the best-known is probably “Angels from the Realms of Glory.” “Go to Dark Gethsemane” is a masterpiece in its poignant brevity. “O Spirit of the Living God,” among the greatest of missionary hymns, contains a couplet that epitomizes his sense of urgent mission: “Give tongues of fire and hearts of love, To preach the reconciling Word.”

See: James Montgomery. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*.

[James Montgomery](#)