

Sometimes a Light Surprises

SAB, *A Cappella* or with Accompaniment
Epiphany, General

Olney Hymns was published in 1779 as a joint venture by William Cowper, the author of this lyric, and John Newton, the former slave trader who repented and became an evangelical minister. Cowper contributed 67 texts to the collection, of which "Sometimes a Light Surprises" is one.

The hymn reflects Cowper's lifelong personal struggles with mental instability and spiritual insecurity. Verses 1–3 express his sense of spiritual cheer when God grants him an unpredictable "season of clear shining." The final verse goes further, echoing the prophet Habakkuk's radical faith (3:17–18) that even in seasons of barrenness the faithful soul, knowing that God remains ever the same, "cannot but rejoice."

I have matched Cowper's lyric with a buoyant melody by Michael Praetorius, *Ach Gott, vom Himmelreiche* (1609). By this three-voice harmonization I have hoped to bring the anthem within the reach of smaller choirs, and also to lighten the texture, avoiding thicker harmonizings of this melody dating from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Albert Blackwell
January 20, 2012

Sometimes a Light Surprises

William Cowper (1731-1800)

Melody, Michael Praetorius (1571-1621)

Arr. Albert Blackwell

1. Some - times a light sur - pris - es the
2. In ho - ly con - tem - pla - tion, we
3. It can bring with it noth - ing but
4. Though vine nor fig tree nei - ther their

3

Christ - ian while he sings; _____ it is the Lord who
sweet - ly then pur - sue _____ the theme of God's sal -
he will bear us through: _____ who gives the lil - lies
wont - ed fruit should bear, _____ though all the fields should

6

ris - es with heal - ing in his wings: _____ when
va - tion, and find it ev - er new; _____ set
cloth - ing will clothe his peo - ple too: _____ be -
with - er, nor flocks nor herds be there: _____ yet

9

com - forts are de - clin - ing, he grants the soul a -
 free from pres - ent sor - row, we cheer - ful - ly can
 neath the spread - ing hea - vens no crea - ture but is
 God the same a - bid - ing, his praise shall tune my

12

gain _____ a sea - son of clear shin - ing, to
 say, _____ e'en let th'un-known to - mor - row bring
 fed; _____ and he who feeds the rav - ens will
 voice; _____ for while in him con - fid - ing, I

15

cheer with give can - it it his not af - ter what chil - dren re -
 rain. may. bread. joice.