JOHN POLLOCK – THE ENDEAVOUR OF A LIFETIME

JOHN CROTHERS[1]

For most contemporary hymnologists, let alone worshippers, the name John Pollock is unlikely to ring any bells. Consulting Julian, or even looking up that attractive and apparently omniscient source, the Internet, will yield nothing at all about him. And there is not a single instance of a Pollock text or tune in any of the representative hymn books of the major denominations of the inter-war years – in other words, during his lifetime or shortly thereafter. Only in the *Scottish Mission Hymn Book*, compiled for the Church of Scotland's General Assembly and published by OUP in 1912, is one work to be found[2], and various editions of the restricted-circulation *Christian Endeavour Hymnal* contain no more than half-a-dozen.

Of what interest, then, is such a clearly obscure figure? The fact is that anyone living in Great Britain, Ireland or the USA at the turn of the 20th century and involved in Christian youth work or interested in the direction hymnology was taking, would almost certainly have heard of him: the name 'John Pollock' would have been as familiar as that of, say, Keith Getty, is in those places today. There is a certain similarity, for Pollock was not only known in these islands – in *his* case, he was an internationally acclaimed personality within the global Christian movement of which he became one of the chief public representatives.

At his funeral in 1935, the following tributes were paid:

'...[a man] worthy to stand among the greatest...' (*Belfast News Letter,* 8th January 1935)

'...a man of outstanding genius...' (*The Witness,* 11th January 1935)

and, of particular interest to us:

'He was [...] a poet and musician.' (Revd Carey Bonner, *op.cit.*)

'He achieved fame as a hymnwriter...' (*Missionary Herald* of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, February 1935)

'...his own hymns are among the choicest...' (*ibid.*)

Those are only a few of the numerous, and universally effusive, tributes paid by his contemporaries. A celebrated historian of his denomination added:

'[He was] a figure of world renown.'[3]

Even today, there are still one or two who do remember him. A fellow clergyman, who was later involved with the movement which John Pollock served, describes him as: '...a man whom my generation regarded with great honour'.[4]

Perhaps that is not surprising: in the course of a long life, he had conversed on world problems with the most celebrated statesmen and inventors, was no mean artist with a pencil, and, almost to the end, his post bag brought him letters from prominent people on the international stage. For his work at home and abroad he received many honours, among them an honorary Doctorate in Divinity from the Senate of Montreal Presbyterian College.

This apparently inexhaustible polymath – writer, composer, artist, and cyclist - who thought nothing of swimming four miles when visiting the coast of Maine, USA, and who in his sixty-eighth year cycled the length of Britain, from John O'Groats to Land's End, was described as having a strong personality and opinions, yet his 'tolerance for the differing opinions and policies of others' [5] was recognised as remarkable, especially in the context of a divided society in Northern Ireland, where he was a resident for most of his working life.

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[1] A revised version of the lecture given at the HSGBI Annual Conference in July 2009

[2] The text, 'Our lives to Christ we dedicate' (No.234), together with its tune, here named ENDEAVOUR

[3] John Barkley, *St Enoch's Congregation 1872-1972*, p.111

[4] Revd Dudley Cooney, private correspondence.

[5] Funeral address, reported in *The Christian Endeavour Times,* 17th January, 1935

Small wonder, perhaps, that the Moderator of the Irish Presbyterian Church, which he had served with distinction, referred to him in these terms: '...by whatever standard you measure [John] Pollock, he was worthy to stand among the greatest'. [6]

And yet, he has all but disappeared from our horizon. But this versatile and gifted man could be counted among those relatively rare people who write both texts and tunes, a type which is occasionally regarded with more than a little suspicion by hymnologists. There have been very few examples of those who have produced both 'to any worthwhile standard', as Martin Leckebusch has observed in a recent article in 'The Bulletin'.[7] In this article we shall see to what extent Pollock succeeded. We shall observe him becoming more accomplished at his craft as he found his life's work. And we shall consider why he has slipped into oblivion.

THE LIFE

We have few details of the life of John Pollock, except for those given to us by his many friends, details which are invariably piecemeal. It seems that the innate modesty of Pollock's own character meant that he almost never wrote or talked about himself. He did, however, write much about others, about God, the Church and theology; from these writings we can glimpse something of his preoccupations and character. For the biographical details that follow we are obliged to turn to newspaper reports, an article in *The Irish Presbyterian* magazine (January 1915) and the history of his Belfast church.

John Pollock was born in Glasgow on 27th October, 1852, the son of a grocer and tea merchant. He was baptised into the Free Church of Scotland, where his father was an elder of the kirk, and he was brought up in that church. He showed the beginning of a lifetime interest by becoming a Sunday School teacher at the age of 12.[8] As a young man he was first attracted to a career in business, believing that his experience helping to run the family grocery would stand him in good stead. Friends and colleagues later testified to his remarkable business acumen and capacity for organisation, which would prove invaluable in the work to which he later devoted himself.

He entered the Faculty of Arts in the University of Glasgow at 19 years of age, but left five years later, in 1876, without graduating. It would seem that a vocation, or call to a particular branch of the ministry of the church had evidently been forming in his mind; what we know is that while at university he transferred his allegiance from the Free Church to the United Presbyterian Church - formed following the coming together of some formerly separated brethren in 1847[9] – and eventually entered that church's Theological Hall, from which he graduated. For someone who, as we shall see, highly valued steadfastness and loyalty, this may appear out of character. It seems that Pollock did not consider it a betrayal in any sense, but rather a prescient move in advance of what was to come. For when his own minister met him and expressed regret that Mr Pollock should be lost to the 'Wee Frees', Pollock replied, with a characteristic touch of humour, 'Not lost: just gone before.' And indeed, some 20 years later, in 1900, the two churches became one![10] The astute Pollock was proved right.

He was licensed to preach by the United Presbyterian Presbytery of Glasgow, and ordained on 7th January 1880 in Freuchie Church, Fife. In 1885, he became the first minister of what would later be known as the John Ker Memorial Church in Edinburgh, founded as the result of a student mission in 1882, and three years later still a temporary iron church. Pollock, shortly after his arrival, managed to raise a good deal of the sum of £3000 needed to build a new hall for services by lecturing around the country on 'The Origins and Early History of the United Presbyterian Church'.[11] Already, his agile mind and business acumen were being put to good unified use! Photographs show a serious enough face, usually rimmed with scholarly spectacles, but perhaps with a twinkle in the eye, for he was well known as something of a humourist. He could, however, be a little brusque, something acquaintances put down to his Scottish background, although he is recalled as being invariably kindly to anyone in trouble, even to his own detriment.

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[6] *ibid.*

[7] No.258, p.20

[8] *Belfast Telegraph*, 4th January 1935

[9] Douglas Galbraith, personal correspondence

[10] *The Irish Presbyterian*, January 1915

[11] From *History of the Congregations of the UPC 1733-1900* and *The Kirks of Edinburgh 1560-198*, courtesy Douglas Galbraith

The key event of his early career took place after he was installed in Shamrock Street United Presbyterian Church back in his native Glasgow in 1891. (There, incidentally, a historian of the time comments that 'the membership rose to 720 and the stipend to £350'[12]: we seem to be intended to infer that Pollock's effective labours resulted in the former, and the gratitude of the congregation in the latter!)

Shortly after his arrival in Glasgow, his attention became ever more focused on the youth of his congregation. There was little to occupy the young Christians, and there was always the danger of the many pubs. This was the era when the Temperance Movement in Scotland, which had become influential in the third decade of the 19th century, had moved its stance from promoting moderation to demanding total abstinence. Scottish Presbyterians were largely exercised by the social evils that they perceived as a direct result of the drink trade, and John Pollock saw this as an area in which he and the church should be involved. At much the same time, he heard of an organisation for young people which had begun in the US a decade earlier and seemed to have the answer to so many of the concerns Pollock himself had for the young folk in his church. That movement was Christian Endeavour – known to its members as CE - and from its foundation in Portland, Maine, USA in 1881 it had grown dramatically, spreading throughout the US in just two years and then into the British Isles and well beyond. It came to other lands via the agents of Empire and missionaries, and by 1892 was already at work on five continents. It based itself on local churches; local groups were called 'societies', and the young people (up to the age of 30) were required to make a solemn promise, renewed every month, that they would be faithful Christians and participate fully in weekly meetings. With guidance, the young people actually ran the organisation themselves through a number of committees, thus preparing themselves for active Christian leadership.

For Pollock in 1891 this seemed just the thing. He later admitted to a colleague, Rev Knight Chaplin, that 'he had tried many plans to put life into the young people of his church, but those plans had failed. He had, however, found Christian Endeavour, when properly applied, to be eminently successful'.[13] He could not have known then, but this was to become the passion and the 'cause' of his life. It was also to inspire and be the vehicle for his talent for verse-writing and composition, of which we hear nothing before his involvement with the organisation.[14]

By May 1899, we find him on a great assembly or 'Convention' platform in Belfast, paying testimony to the value of 'CE as a factor in church life'.[15] By the end of his life, an ex-President of the British CE Union would describe him thus: 'He was the Father in God of Christian Endeavour all over the world'.[16] It was not long before the movement recognised the talent of the one who had adopted *it*. CE was organised into national Unions, with governing Councils, and eventually the European CE Union was set up. As it turned out John Pollock was to hold office in all of these, and to be European President for 19 consecutive years. In one year he was to be simultaneously President of the Irish, British and European Unions, a distinction that remains unique.[17] When the British CE Union was formed at Bristol in 1896, Pollock was already well enough known to be elected by popular ballot as one of the first 24 members of the Council. In this role he regularly attended the great gatherings of Christian Endeavour, known as Conventions. In 1899 the Ninth British National Convention came across the Irish Sea and was held in Belfast. Pollock was one of the speakers representing Scotland.

Evidently, something happened that attracted Pollock to Belfast and the Presbyterians of Belfast to Pollock, for in 1900 he received a formal call to minister at St Enoch's Church, not just the largest in Belfast, but believed to be the largest Presbyterian congregation in the whole of Ireland.[18] Pollock accepted, and was installed in February 1901. The Irish took him to their hearts. Although he never lost his Scottish accent, he became an honorary Irishman.

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[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Christian Endeavour Times*, 17th January 1935

[14] 'He […] composed its best hymns, both words and music' – *The Witness*, Friday, 11th January, 1935

[15] 1899 Belfast Convention handbook

[16] Revd Dr R K Hanna, *Christian Endeavour Times*, 17th January 1935

[17] *Missionary Herald* of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, February 1935.

[18] Revd Prof TW Chance, *An Appreciation*, in *CE Times,* 17th January 1935

He brought CE to his church: in 1905, Belfast and St Enoch's hosted the World's Christian Endeavour Convention. Pollock himself attended, as representative, the World Convention held in 1907 in Seattle, USA. He laboured in Belfast in his ministerial duties and for CE, nationally and internationally, until five years before his death, which took place in 1935 and which was widely reported in the national newspapers. He was buried in Belfast, after a funeral attended by the highest dignitaries of his own and other denominations. Contrary to what we might by now have expected, however, his grave is devoid of any reference to his outstanding work for the CE movement. There is no reference, either, to his contribution to the song of the Church.

The Texts and Tunes

There appears to be no trace of anything written by John Pollock before the 1890s. Out of nowhere, therefore, emerges an embryonic writer, whose first, tentative steps contain the germ of what he would later refine.

'Arm, Endeavourers!', for lack of evidence to the contrary, seems to be the earliest text that Pollock wrote. The four verses and their refrains are undated and devoid of music, but the word 'Motherwell' is written in the author's hand at the bottom left-hand side of the manuscript[19]: this would suggest that Pollock wrote it when still ministering in Scotland. The text clearly has its origin in his recent discovery of CE, and after he had pledged himself to the movement in the early to mid-1890s. The first two verses and their refrains are as follows:

Brothers and sisters in Christian Endeavour,
Bound by a union in Christ to be true –
Gird on your armour and march into battle,
'Gainst Satan's dark forces the conflict renew!
Forward then Endeavourers!
Onward let us go
Till our Christian band shall triumph
Over every foe!

Strong in the might of our heaven-born purpose,
Inspired by the love of our Captain divine,
Let us go forth in the strength of his greatness,
Scatt'ring the wild hordes of treason and crime!
Wave aloft the Gospel banner,
Onward, forward, let us go!
Till our Christian band shall triumph
Over every foe!

In rhyme and rhythm this lacks the easy assurance of his later work, being highly irregular in form. Only the last two lines of the refrain are similar in each of the four verses. Pollock attempts to rhyme only the second and last lines of each verse, and does so imperfectly in the second and third verses. Looking at the syllable count we find that, while verse 1 has 11.10.11.11, verse 2 gives us 11.11.11.10! With 11.12.11.11 in verse 3 and 10.9.11.11 in verse 4, it is clear why no workable tune has been found for this: it would be something of a challenge for any composer, not to mention congregation. Pollock himself seems not to have attempted one, so this text, although written in hymnodic form, never appeared in the movement's Hymnal. What stands out to the modern reader is the extent to which this text strikes a note of triumphalism: it does not actually teach Christian truth, as such, and it does not incorporate, as Charles Wesley did pre-eminently, a skilful variety of closely meshed Biblical quotations and imagery in almost every line. The author concentrates on only three main areas: the OT Covenant between God and his people (his chosen people); St. Paul's reference, in Ephesians chapter 6, to the Christian's armour and the wrestling against demonic powers; and the vision of the Book of Revelation. We shall see that this sets the tone for the future texts.

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[19] Archived, as are all the texts discussed, at the Headquarters of the Irish Christian Endeavour Union, Belfast.

Of course, to contemporary ears a title such as 'Arm, endeavourers' would be alarming, to say the least. The injunction to 'fight the good fight' is one whose biblical roots we understand, but which we no longer respond to so favourably in our hymnody in the English speaking Church. Neither are we are so comfortable any longer with the idea of empire building. In Pollock's day it was different: those *were* the days of Empire; they were also the days of the Women's Suffrage movement, the beginnings of the Salvation Army and, not least, the Temperance Movement, with its Band of Hope members (a movement with which Pollock was closely involved[20]) urging warfare against the demon of insobriety. There is in all likelihood a conscious borrowing from the organisational notions of this movement in his use of the word 'band' in each refrain. One source indeed claims that towards the end of his life Pollock produced 'the battle hymn of the [Temperance] movement'[21], although text and tune have since disappeared.

As we move to the first of three key 'Endeavourer' texts, we shall note how these preoccupations return time and again in Pollock's verse. John Pollock the writer/composer first came to the attention of the CE world when he contributed a text and tune to the First Scottish National Convention of 1895, held in St Andrew's Hall in his native Glasgow. The effect has been described in an article written for *The Irish Presbyterian* in 1915. The writer enthuses, 'I have rarely experienced a more thrilling moment of song'. The hymn being referred to was 'Scotland for Christ!' The text of this item is intentionally stirring, and the tune – Pollock's first widely-known composition – certainly serves to carry the words forward. As was to be the case with most of the composer's work, he named the tune after the first line of the text. SCOTLAND FOR CHRIST probably owed its popularity to two features: first, a second line reminiscent of a familiar Scottish air, and secondly, the refrain. The latter, typical of the Moodyand Sankey heritage in which this seems to stand, no doubt allowed the singers to feel they were truly united, as they launched with gusto into each 'chorus':

Rally, Endeavourers! Swell out the chorus,
Trusting in God, and renewing your tryst!
Bright gleams the banner that's marching before us,
Claiming the victory – 'Scotland for Christ'!

The first and last verses begin with the watchword 'for Christ', which was to become Pollock's trademark. Verse 2 gives a flavour of his vision:

Men of the Cov'nant! in glad attestation
Setting your seal to the bond of the Lord,
Follow your fathers in high consecration,
Filled with His Spirit, believing His word.

Significantly, the inclusive 'brothers and sisters in Christian Endeavour' later to be mentioned (in verse 4) seem to be for Pollock co-terminous with the exclusive 'Men of the Cov'nant' – and indeed with the 'Sons of the martyrs' who are directly addressed in verse 3. Pollock was clearly inviting both male and female delegates to see themselves as standing in a long and noble tradition. Being people of faith meant that they were required to remain loyal and true to the 'faith of their fathers'.

And that faith, then as now, was robustly protestant. For CE was uniquely a protestant organisation: it gathered its greatest following from non-Anglican churches. In particular it appealed to young people in Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Baptist circles, with its emphasis on conversion, personal salvation and a rather strict view of personal holiness, including a preoccupation with such things as Sabbath-keeping, smoking, entertainment and, of course, total abstinence. That is not to say that there were no societies, for example, in the Established Church in England, or the *Dis*established Church in Ireland (disestablished in 1871), but where societies existed in these, it was generally because the churchmanship of the clergy concerned was of the 'low' variety.[22]

And so Pollock, who was brought up in Covenanting country with a high view of the seventeenth-century Scottish Covenanters (those Christians who bound themselves to maintain the

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[20] He served, until shortly before his death, as President of the North Belfast Temperance Council
[21] Tribute, *Belfast Telegraph*, 4th January 1935
[22] *A History of the Christian Endeavour Movement in Ireland*, Revd Dudley L Cooney, 1977, p.84

Protestant Reformation in Scotland), himself took extremely seriously the whole idea of God's people solemnly binding themselves to serve Him. And it is clear that he carried that through into CE, where the individual Active Member pledged lifelong loyalty to the person and cause of Christ. As he declared at the 1894 British Convention, held in London (at the Metropolitan Tabernacle): 'I come frae bonnie Scotland, the land of Covenanters, beloved, I believe, for our forefathers' sake.'[23] Not surprising, then, that in verse 2 of this hymn we have 'setting your seal to the bond'. And most of his Convention texts feature the word 'tryst', another word for 'Covenant'. The complete text contains more than a whiff of nationalism: 'your patriot sires', 'sons of the martyrs', and even 'the old banner of blue', ostensibly the CE one, could also conjure up visions of the flag of Scotland - minus the saltire!

National feeling was contagious. One of the most prominent members of the Irish CE Union (Rev James D Lamont) had attended the second Scottish Convention in 1896. There he heard 'Scotland for Christ!' sung, and was greatly impressed. He asked Pollock, as he put it, to 'try his hand at an Irish song', so that the Irish Endeavour movement might benefit in the way he believed the Scots had. Pollock, however, 'dismissed the idea as absurd'.[24] As someone who had never set foot in Ireland at that time, Pollock, it seems, thought any such effort might sound inauthentic and artificial. Lamont was not ready to give in so easily, however, and in 1898 he persuaded the Irish Council to make a formal request for such a hymn for the Ninth British Convention, to be held in Belfast at Whitsuntide 1899. Pollock finally acquiesced, and the result, written two years before he came to minister in Belfast, was 'Ireland for Christ':

'Ireland for Christ!' the martial chorus
Echo near and far,
While the banner floating o'er us
Bids us forth to war!
Ancient land of saints and sages
Circled by the sea,
From the slavery of ages
Rise to liberty!
Peal it over hill and valley!
Tell it out thro' street and alley:
This the song to which we rally –
'Ireland for Christ!'

This text and tune – not surprisingly named IRELAND FOR CHRIST – proved to be an instant and resounding success[25] – a success that, perhaps surprisingly, has waned little in CE circles over the years on the island. That success owes much to the stirring nature of the tune, which is less four-square than its Scottish forbear, and contains a possibly unconscious musical reference to the well-known nationalistic rallying song 'Scotland the Brave'!

The CE founder, Revd Dr Francis Clark, in his biography of CE, infers that the ready acceptance found by both of Pollock's tunes sprang from the fact that they were 'characteristic of the music of the two countries'[26]. Although, as we have seen, brief references to national music may be detected in them, the key factor is surely that both tunes are singable 'en masse' by virtue of their limited register, repeated phrases, refrains and 'gathering' pauses on high notes. The enthusiasm of the rallying Endeavourers would have done the rest.

Strikingly, in 'Ireland for Christ' we are a long way from Pollock's first efforts. The rhyme scheme of the verses - AB AB and so on - is regular and satisfying for singers, and the AAAB of the refrain helps produce the climax of purposeful endeavour that is clearly intended. Incidentally, Pollock may not have intended the pun, but two CE figures well known in Ireland, the British Union Field

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[23] 1894 Convention Handbook, p.77

[24] Dudley Cooney, *op.cit.*, p.19

[25] Article in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 4th January 1935: 'When first heard in Belfast, [it] took […] Ireland by storm.'

[26] FE Clark, *Christian Endeavour in All Lands*, 1906, p.566

Secretary Miss Jennie Street and the Irish Union Council member Rev. James Alley, must have marvelled at the apparent reference to them worked into the chorus!

But it is the words which are still, frankly, astonishing. The militaristic language of an army with banners is one thing, and now to be expected of Pollock: what the Belfast Endeavourers, who may not have paid particular attention to the nationalistic tone of 'Scotland for Christ', can hardly have been expecting was the resounding nationalistic fervour expressed here – and *Irish Republican* nationalist at that! For verse one speaks clearly about going to war. Already we have echoes of a patriotic song like 'The Minstrel Boy' who 'to the war has gone' – a war against the oppressor, traditionally the English. But that is not all. 'The slavery of ages' comes next, and 'slavery' is what the 18th-century Irish nationalist romantic Thomas Moore had been singing about in his wistful condemnations of the great pity brought about in Ireland by the depredations of its unfeeling larger neighbour. The singers are enjoined to 'rise to liberty'...!

Bring forth the harp, so oft in sadness
Touched by bards of old.
Sweep its chords with psalms of gladness,
Hail your age of gold!
Fairest Isle of all the ocean,
All your tribute bring,
Pour it forth in full devotion
To your rightful king! *(v.2)*

The harp, devoid of the crown, was largely the symbol of Irish nationalism. To crown it all, as it were, Pollock borrows Dryden's 'Fairest isle (all isles excelling)' and applies the description to John Bull's *other* island!

Pollock's wide-ranging intellect was at work. There is surely an echo here of Chesterton's epic poem, 'The Ballad of the White Horse', an often quoted quatrain of which runs: 'For the great Gaels of Ireland / Are the men that God made mad: / For all their wars are merry / And all their songs are sad.' The singer is sad because he is a *slave*.

And there is more... The Irish diaspora, in the US in particular, had been the source of much trouble to the Crown from the mid-19th century, fomenting violence against British agencies. What then is to be made of verse 3 where the Irish are joining Ireland's 'children o'er the water in the vow they make'? Doubtless the Convention attendees from Britain took this as a positive reference to them...

Soon shall the Royal proclamation
End the long campaign,
Soon o'er our united nation
Christ shall come to reign [...] *(v.4)*

There can be little doubt that the first Endeavourers, who were protestant to a man or woman, would have swallowed hard at all of this. But of course, they were able to spiritualise the significance of the imagery. The 'brightest hope of our endeavour', after all, is 'Ireland won for Christ'. The conversion of those in spiritual slavery is what is aimed at. For here what is being talked about is King Jesus, is it not, and is the warfare not spiritual? No doubt that *is* what Pollock intended. Nevertheless, the imagery, in an Irish context of its day, was daring. Perhaps with unconscious irony, the Rev. Carey Bonner, Pollock's English Baptist collaborator in CE, predicted that: 'in Protestant circles, his memory will be enshrined in the strains [of this hymn].'[27] What many clearly did not realise was that John Pollock, despite being a Presbyterian, at the time held political views diametrically opposed to those held by the majority who were to sing his words. The only insight into this is given in one of the posthumous tributes to him which appeared in the Belfast Telegraph, then a Unionist leaning newspaper: '[Rev. Pollock] originally had a strong leaning to Home Rule, but he had not been many months on this side of the water until he confessed that his views on that matter had all been awry and wrong. He therefore laboured to the end on behalf of union with Great Britain and the autonomy of Ulster since its erection as a state in 1920.'[28] (For 'Ulster', read 'Northern Ireland'.) What this shows is that Pollock's imagery came from a pro-Irish nationalist view of the island. What it also tells us is that Pollock, whatever we may think of his change of direction, did not count political views as binding as he did a sacred Covenant with God. His Convention Song, however, had taken on a life of its own, and, once the text was settled, we have no record of his ever having attempted to rewrite it. To him, clearly, the symbolism pointed to a deep spiritual reality with which he was still wholeheartedly in agreement.

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[27] *The Christian Endeavour Times*, 17th January, 1935, p.400

Interestingly, prior to publication, he put his pen through a penultimate verse which he clearly thought inappropriate.[29] The original manuscript reveals Pollock's view of the past treatment meted out to Ireland and his belief in the progress of the Gospel, not by force of arms but by evangelism:

Not by the force of martial legions,
Not by shot and shell,
But by blessing rebel regions
With the tale we tell, -
Not by sudden flash of sabre,
Not with roll of drum,
But by earnest pray'r and labour
Shall His Kingdom come.
Peal it out (etc.)

There is a postscript to 'Ireland for Christ'. Barely two years later, as a letter in the Irish CE archives in Belfast shows, John Pollock received what must have been welcome confirmation that his own endeavour had borne fruit beyond his imagining. The letter is dated 14th February 1901 and is headed 'Wesleyan Mission, Kyaukre, Burma'. His text had been adapted for use in a mission school, as 'Burma for Christ!' The writer says: 'I think you will be interested in hearing of its success [...] The hymn is one of the best embodiments of missionary aims that I have met with', and adds: 'One of my teachers plays the cornet, which carries this martial air admirably.' The true nature of the music had clearly been recognised!

The influence of what had become Pollock's great cause was spreading. It was hardly surprising, then, that for the seventeenth National British CE Convention held on the Isle of Man in 1907, Pollock should produce the words of the Convention Song. Having had 'Scotland' and then 'Ireland' for Christ, what other title could there be but 'Manxland for Christ!'? and its concomitant tune of the same name? Of course, 'Manxland' seems a pure invention of Pollock's, in order for an already popular rhythm to be maintained and the lines to scan, but the local Endeavourers do not seem to have objected! This time Pollock produced his text with a national flavour by the expedient of rewriting 'Scotland for Christ!'. In fact, little was actually altered. The change he made for Manx consumption was to suppress verse 2 about the Scottish Covenanters. The original verse 3 *here* becomes verse 2, verse 4 becomes verse 3, and so on. But it is the last verse that firmly anchors this text in its time and for the specific occasion it was designed to celebrate. Pollock had a penchant for archaisms and here, to welcome delegates from the four corners of the British Isles, he resorts to using recognised poetic names for those lands, names which sound gratuitously archaic to modern ears. ('Cumbria', incidentally, is a version of 'Cambria', the latinised version of *Cymru*, and the equally classical name for Wales.)

Welcome from Albion, ye hosts of Endeavourers,
Hail Sons of Erin, fair gem of the sea,
Cumbria the gallant! – as gallant as ever,
Brave Caledonia, land of the free.

The words are intended to encourage young Christians to go forth and conquer their land for Christ, but the Biblical content is restricted to the conquering Christ of the Book of Revelation, and is mixed with nationalistic references. There is an almost total lack of biblical reference in what is, essentially, a rallying song.

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[28] *Belfast Telegraph*, 4th January, 1935, p.12

[29] He revealed this in the pages of *The Irish Endeavourer* in 1925 – Dudley Cooney, *op. cit.,* p.20

It is by now clear that Pollock, while improving technically, chose to restrict his themes to what he believed suited local CE circumstances. Moreover, his texts remained rooted in the language of the Old Testament, and he insisted in seeing his Endeavourers as latter-day Israelites. Why was this so? An answer is suggested as we move from texts written for the national Conventions to one written for the passion of Pollock's life, the movement itself. 'This,' said a close collaborator, 'is *par excellence* the song of Christian Endeavour.'[30] He was speaking of 'Our lives to Christ we dedicate', a first version of which was written for the sixth British National Convention held in Bristol in May 1896. Then the tune that Pollock wrote for it was named ENDEAVOUR, and so it appeared in the early CE Hymn Books and the *Scottish Mission Hymn Book* of 1912. Shortly thereafter it was rebaptised FOR CHRIST AND THE CHURCH, taking its title from the refrain. The focus here is on the motto of CE. And the key is the introduction of the word 'Church'. For Pollock, as a loyal CE member, is not simply interested in personal encounter with God, crucial though that is for him: he has a large place for the Church of God, which he typically sees in terms of the Church Militant. CE was an interdenominational, if protestant, movement, which encouraged members to stay in their local church and seek its wellbeing. Here Pollock gives the movement its 'battle hymn'. Dr Francis Edward Clark, none other than the founder of CE, sang its praises in his book 'Christian Endeavour in All Lands', published in the early years of the twentieth century. 'Sung at the great Conventions in the US and Britain,' he says, 'it has set many hearts beating fast and inspired many young souls to endeavour and new love for the Church'.[31]

Dudley Cooney, the historian of Irish CE, has pointed out that the text of 'Ireland for Christ' went through some revision before Pollock was happy with it – so far as to the removal of even more militaristic language than has been handed down to us. CE headquarters in Belfast has the original manuscripts of 'For Christ and the Church': from these, the changes are clear. What is striking about these words, set out in Pollock's neat, regular script, is his reasonably rapid means of coming up with his definitive version. Firstly, he decided to alter the metre. From 'For Christ who hath died that His life might be ours' – that is, based on an 11-syllable metre – he moved to one based on a less unwieldy alternating 8-and 6-syllable line. Secondly, he put his pen through such pseudo-Wesleyan syntax as:

'That He should deign to consecrate
Such **w**orthless **w**orms as **w**e.'

No doubt Pollock feared the extreme alliteration would provide too heavy a diet of worms to be wholly digestible. More seriously, it seems clear that, on reflection, he sought a more balanced expression that would indicate the reciprocal nature of the singer's part in consecration. When we get to the third page, only minor corrections are needed. The fourth page contains the final draft, this time in pen.

Pollock's way of working suggests his increasing skill at knowing which metre would get young people singing. In his day, he was widely recognised as being a remarkable preacher who always seemed to find the right word to say.[32] In his texts, he tends to be concise, while the vivid, rousing nature of the words is often indicated by an exclamation mark:

Our lives to Christ we dedicate
Who reigns our glorious King! *(v.1)*

Again, the familiar elements of covenant, struggle and victory, are present, couched in the language of the day, where the male warrior rescues the female in distress:

Our fathers fought her battles oft,
And died to set her free;
And now 'tis ours to bear aloft

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[30] Carey Bonner, *op.cit.*

[31] FE Clark, *op.cit.*, p.568

[32] See the various funeral tributes

Her flag of liberty. *(v.2)*

In the second half of the work, however, the militaristic tone is tempered with a more Catholic vision that sees the Church as a mother and affirms the singers as God's Covenant children, while the whole anticipates the consummation of Revelation ch.21. Verses 3 and 4 thus stand in contrast to the preceding ones:

'Twas in her gentle bosom we
Did find our early food;
'Twas her instruction made us see
The path that leads to God;
'Twas her own hand that guided us,
And brought us to the tryst,
When we took up the sacred cup,
And pledged ourselves to Christ. *(v.3)*
For Christ and the Church of Christ!
Be this our fond Endeavour!
For Christ and the Church of Christ!
These twain no pow'r can sever;
One on earth, and one in heav'n,
For ever and for ever!
The stains that mar her beauty now
Shall shortly disappear;
Soon, in remembrance of His vow,
The Bridegroom shall be here!
Then her divisions shall be healed,
Her tears shall all be dried,
And she shall stand at His right hand
A faultless, glorious Bride! *(v.4)*
For Christ, etc.

Here is the reciprocity of the nature of the word 'Covenant' that Pollock was at pains to emphasize in a talk to the 1899 Conference. In his Consecration Service Address[33] he noted: '…a covenant is a mutual pledge, a reciprocal engagement.'… 'Believing God's promise to me, I promise him…' For Pollock, just as God's commitment to believers will last through time into eternity, so the believer's endeavour must be a lifelong one.

In his Presidential comments in the 1907 *Year Book of the British and Irish CE Union*, John Pollock gives an insight into the seriousness with which he personally took the notion of 'Covenant'. It is a masterly feat of writing – clear, concise and powerful - bearing witness to the skill Pollock displayed with words, something that made him beloved of his congregations, Convention crowds, and his own young people in CE. He calls the article 'Faithful', and urges his readers to remain faithful to Christ in his Church, to the end of their days. Here is the key to Pollock's preoccupation with Old Testament images and vocabulary and his readiness to see Endeavourers as latter-day Israelites. Of particular interest is his understanding of the word 'Endeavour'. Its etymology, he says, comes from the Old French *'en devoir'*. This was the promise of a knight to do his duty to his lord. His own honour depended on maintaining that duty, as did his lord's, which was engaged on his behalf: 'CE…stands for the revival of true chivalry, the sense of honourable obligation in Christian service'.[34] Although the analogy of the knight is not in itself a biblical one, Pollock seems happy to add it to his poetic armoury as a means of conveying spiritual truth which *is* biblical. It is an analogy which, as we will note, was to recur in his writing.

There remains no trace of a tune which accompanied this, nor can we be sure of the exact date of writing: all that remains in the CE archives is a torn manuscript. The text, however, refers to the CE Covenant or pledge in verse 1 ('Relying on His mighty power'), and urges the singers to submit to the Kingship of Christ.

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[33] 1899 Convention Handboo*k*, p.169

[34] *Year Book of the British and Irish CE Union, 1907*, p.7

One clue to the date is in the reference to actual fighting in verses 2, 3 and 4:
There come from fields afar
The sounds of mortal strife,
The tidings of inhuman war,
The waste of human life *(v.2)*
We love our native land,
For which our comrades fight *(v.3)*
When warring man shall dwell again
In loving brotherhood *(v.4)*

It is just possible that this was written during the First World War, but it seems more likely to refer to the very bloody Second Boer War (1899-1902). Always allowing for the poetic use of language, the 'tidings' coming from 'afar' seem to chime more with that period than with the 1914-18 conflict, when news reached the homeland much more regularly and speedily. Looking at it like this would also set the text within the period of Pollock's greatest productivity, from 1895 to 1907. Be that as it may, we have here a rare case in Pollock's writing of a recognition of the existence of social issues: 'inhuman war', 'the waste of human life' (v.2). As a congregational minister, Pollock, we know, had encouraged his flock to get involved in the war effort in 1914[35]: any thoughts, therefore, that he may have become a pacifist overnight are surely banished by the references in verse 3:

The righteous cause for which we stand, -
May God defend the right!

There is a remarkable conflation here of the material and the spiritual. The first four lines of verses 2, 3 and 4 seem to point to the horror of war, the 'just war' and a prayer for human brotherhood, seen as the end of war. The second halves of these same verses, however, seem to suggest that the task of the Christian 'soldier' is to dedicate himself afresh to Christ and to proclaim the Gospel. Peace is thus understood as both 'peace with God' and literal cessation of confict. This is especially summed up in verse 3:

But to Emmanuel Christ
Our choicest gifts we bring:
We throng His feet in loyal tryst
To crown Him King!
To crown Him (etc.)
Although the implication in v.2 seems to be different:
Men of the Prince of Peace,
Abroad your banners fling!
Proclaim the year of glad release,
And crown Him King!
And crown Him (etc.)

The logic is similar: by proclamation of the reign of Christ, or indeed the Gospel of Christ, literal (not just spiritual) peace will follow. Verse 3, as we have seen, is a clear defence of the nationalistic spirit of the age – the 'just war'; but, says Pollock, our spiritual loyalty is to one greater, and he is worthy of our *best* efforts. Although Pollock is here responding to current events, and doing it with a now assured technique, the text itself cannot have served clearly to point the minds of the young singers to a Christian understanding of conflict, or of what it might mean to 'crown Christ King' in practice.

Pollock's next effort, 'The Hosts are Assembling', is a title which must seem rather alarming to twenty-first century ears. It is to be found in the 1901 edition of the CE Hymnal. Professor Dick Watson[36] says there is reason to believe that this was its first appearance. It was certainly not its last, as it survived in successive editions of the book. The tune, CONVENTION SONG, which Pollock notes is to be sung 'with spirit', is a clear indicator of why Pollock wrote it. He is not talking of the hosts of Midian but of the army of Christian Endeavourers, drawn together from many lands for their World Convention of 1900:

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[35] Belfast Telegraph, 4th January 1935, p.12
[36] In an email to Douglas Galbraith, 14th May, 2009

The hosts are assembling with banners unfurled
From over the ocean, from mountain and fen;
For the clarion has sounded throughout the wide world,
And marshalled the covenant men. *(v.1)*
Hark! Hark! (etc.)

Here again we have the familiar theme of 'banners', 'the clarion' and the (non-inclusive) 'covenant men'. And in the refrain Jesus is 'victorious', but this time, suitably, he is 'Lord of all rulers', ie greater than the rulers of all the countries represented. There are still references to the 'legions of darkness' who are 'united' and 'strong'. The injunction to the conquering Christ is to the only one strong enough to lead the singers to victory. As we might expect, Old Testament references appear in verses 3 and 4: the picture is of God's Messiah gathering 'all the nations as one' and of the Lord blessing 'His people with peace'. This looks forward to the coming of the Kingdom of God on a universal scale, a foretaste of which must have seemed to be the Convention itself, with its delegates from many lands. Pollock's poetic gifts are particularly apparent in verse 3, line 2:

Thy frontier fling far as the path of the sun;
This is grandiose, heady stuff, and just what the occasion must have seemed to demand.

Now established in Belfast, with his new-found Unionist beliefs to hand, Pollock was ready to leap to the service of CE yet again. When the 1903 British Convention was to be held in Derry (or Londonderry – both are used), he produced the tune DERRY, set to a text with what was then a particularly controversial title, 'No surrender!'. Why this title? The motto had been associated with the city since the historic siege of 1689. The celebrated boy apprentices led the refusal to let the city, the refuge of Protestants from many parts of the north of Ireland, surrender to the besieging forces of the Catholic James II, and shut the city gates in their face. While doing so, they apparently uttered these very words, which have been a monument to political insecurity and intransigence ever since! Although the text is nowhere to be found, the melody written by Pollock has been located in manuscript form. It was harmonised by an anonymous musician, possibly Pollock's collaborator in CE, Revd Carey Bonner. A clear characteristic is the martial element, rising each time to the final chorus 'No surrender!', which would doubtless have been 'uplifting' for the delegates. The expression mark, 'bold', indicates the masculine approach to the Christian life that Pollock so often favoured.

Pollock had become adept at taking a situation, local, national or worldwide, and finding a suitable spiritual response that young people wanted to sing. Such was the way his mind worked. But always there was the firm belief in the Covenant. And here it is again: if God has undertaken to be faithful to the singers, then they owe him nothing less than their total loyalty. Of course, the danger here is the cheapening of a worthy motive through direct association with a very strong political Unionism. CE can be criticised for this, and for its failure to speak 'Christian-ly' into the situation of conflict. It too simplistically equated the Union and the preservation of the protestant *status quo* with God's way for this part of his world.[37] And to some extent Pollock seems to have gone along with that.[38]

Subsequent to this period of creativity Pollock seemed to give himself over to travelling the world on behalf of CE as well as to looking after his own flock in Belfast, for there followed a period of some twenty years' silence. This was broken when 'Lord of our Vows', to the tune of that name, appeared as the 1929 Belfast Convention Song. The original long chorus was later suppressed when text and tune entered the 1933 CE Hymnal (co-edited by Pollock), the first time it appeared in any CE hymn book. Here Dr Pollock, as he now was, returns to his overwhelming preoccupation with the Christian's Covenant with God. Since the text was included in the Consecration/Covenant section of the 1933 book, it seems reasonable to assume that it was sung at the 'consecration', or vow-taking part of the 1929 Convention.

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[37] See, for example, the CE clergy contributions to the Belfast Convention in the 1899 Convention *Report*, pp.9, 11, 15, 171

[38] But not to the extent of signing the 'Ulster Covenant' in 1912. Signatories pledged themselves to resist, by force if necessary, the imposition of a (Catholic) Home Rule Parliament on Ireland. Pollock seems to have been unable to agree with the terms of this Covenant: consequently, his signature is absent from the on-line records

Lord of our vows! To Thee we bring
The tribute of our song;
With loud acclaim we hail Thee King
To whom our lives belong. *(v.1)*

In the form in which it appears in the hymnal, this text is different from all the others, in that, although it refers to Christ as King at the end of verse 2, the reference is oblique – and any direct reference to fighting is banished. Christ will indeed wield a sword, but clearly *symbolically*, as King of the singers' lives. However, in its original, Convention Song version, two other verses appeared, the last of which introduces the image of the Christian as a *knight*, the counterpart in verse of Pollock's 1907 article. It reads:

'With hearts aflame, we bow the knee,
Touched by thy brand of might,
May each of us arise, and be
Thy true and valiant knight;
To live or die at Thy behest,
To labour till Thou givest rest.
To Christ enthroned, we joyful raise
Our festal song of love and praise.'

As we have noted, this metaphor can be traced back to Pollock's entry in the CE Yearbook for 1907, written when he was British President. Although it is not a Biblical one, it is nevertheless associated with all those qualities Pollock saw as deriving from Biblical truth, such as chivalry, bravery and single-hearted commitment.

Of course, Pollock here again shows his close links to his own culture. In artistic circles the note of 'chivalry' had already been struck well before the First World War; during the conflict its associations readily chimed with the notion of 'duty'. We think of 'See the fair chivalry', Lionel Johnson's 1895 poem, and Robert Bridges' 'The Chivalry of the Sea', published in 1916. Is it too fanciful to claim that, once more, the astute Pollock was chiming with his times, with what was 'in the air'? After all, when he wrote the text, these qualities (although deliberately set in a pagan context) were precisely those espoused for the youth of Germany by the Nazi party, copied in a number of other countries, and claimed by some to take audible form in the music of Richard Wagner. And by the end of the second decade of the twentieth century in Germany, thanks to the cultural acceptance of the writings of such as the eugenicist Madison Grant (1865-1937), the idea of 'chivalry', had come to be regarded as one of a number of purely 'Nordic' traits, the signs of a superior race. We can only speculate here, as the author has left us nothing in writing about what he may have thought of the 'hijacking' of such metaphors in the service of much less worthy causes on the European mainland. Given his writings, we can be sure that his own devotion remained centred on Christ and the Church. He seems to have remained convinced, however, that the stirring imagery and words of covenant-based endeavour, even from non-Biblical sources, and used elsewhere as propaganda, were still a legitimate means of rousing young Christians gathered together under the banner of Christian Endeavour.

John Crothers