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Dykes, John Bacchus

(1823–1876)

W. B. Squire, revised by Leon Litvack

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Dykes, John Bacchus (1823–1876), composer and Church of England clergyman, was born on 10 March 1823 at Kingston upon Hull, the son of William Hey Dykes, banker, of Hull, and grandson of the Revd Thomas Dykes, incumbent of St John's Church, Hull. His appreciation of music was evident from an early age: when ten years old he played the organ in his grandfather's church. Shortly after 1840 his father moved to Wakefield, where Dykes attended the proprietary school until October 1843, when he entered St Catharine's College, Cambridge. There he distinguished himself as an amateur musician; together with William Thomson he founded the University Musical Society, and at early concerts his performances of comic songs were a popular feature. He graduated senior optime in January 1847, and in the same year was ordained deacon to the curacy of Malton, Yorkshire. In 1849 he was appointed minor canon and then precentor of Durham Cathedral. The University of Durham conferred on him the honorary DMus degree in 1861. On 25 July 1850 he married Susannah Thomlinson Kingston, daughter of George Kingston; they had two sons and four daughters.

In 1862 Dykes was appointed vicar of St Oswald's, Durham. During his fourteen years there his engaging personality and pastoral devotion won him great influence, but his high-churchmanship involved him in prolonged and trying disputes with his low-church bishop. Dykes needed two curates for the work of his parish, but the bishop refused to license them unless a pledge was given that they would not wear coloured stoles, burn incense, or turn their backs on the congregation during the celebration of communion. Dykes refused to give such a pledge, and appealed to the court of the queen's bench for a mandamus requiring the bishop to issue his licence without any such special declaration; in the end he lost the case, and was left to deal with the large parish on his own. The stress was too great for him: his mental and physical health broke down and he suffered some kind of stroke in 1874. Though at times he rallied, he never regained his strength and died at Ticehurst, Sussex, on 22 January 1876. He was buried in the churchyard of St Oswald's on 28 January. His wife and six children were left almost unprovided for, but the bishop of Durham inaugurated a memorial fund which raised £10,000.

While Dykes was distinguished as a preacher and writer on liturgics, he is best known for his hymn tunes, most of which appeared in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1861) and Chope's *Congregational Hymn and Tune Book* (1862); many of his tunes were still popular more than a century later. He had an extraordinary facility for mirroring natural musical speech through rhythmically repeated notes and rising accompaniment—a technique derived from opera. He was also fond of naming tunes after notable persons and places in northern England, such as 'Rivaulx', 'St Aelred', 'St Oswald', and 'St Godric'. He wrote nearly 300 hymn tunes, as well as services and anthems.

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Likenesses

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process block print, BM

Wealth at Death

under £1000: administration, 21 Feb 1876, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

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See also

Dykes, Thomas (1761–1847), Church of England clergyman

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