

November 22th

Memory verse

O Lord, how great are thy works!

and thy thoughts are very deep. Psalm 92:5

Younger children can learn the words in bold.

A story from history¹

“Captain Swing is coming!”

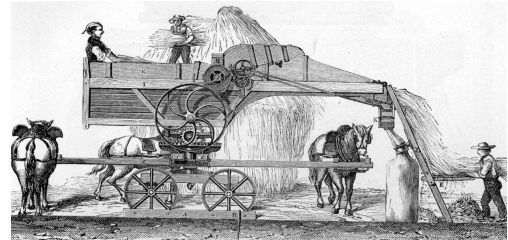
This was news to strike fear in farmers and country householders in November 1830. Some had received letters like this one:

Sir,

This is to acquaint you that if your thrashing machines are not destroyed by you directly we shall commence our labours.

Signed on behalf of the whole

Swing



Others were intimidated into signing petitions to ask for better pay and conditions for the men involved by threats to their property.

But who *was* Captain Swing and what was the “labour” he was threatening to commence?

In 1830 the nation was rocked by the so-called “Swing Riots.” Poor farm labourers all over the country were facing a desperate winter. In the lean months they had been accustomed to earn money by threshing grain by hand. The newly invented threshing machines (as pictured above) took over this work. Riots, rick burnings and machine breaking (the threatened “labour”!) occurred in many places as the men, led, so they said, by the mysterious Captain Swing, tried to get some improvement in their conditions. Harsh measures were used to contain the situation and in Wiltshire the yeomanry were called out. Convicted rioters were transported to Australia. At Andover in Hampshire the situation was very serious and on **22nd November** gangs of men smashed up Tasker's ironworks where metal parts for the threshing, or thrashing, machines were made, while the ironwork's owner looked on helplessly. In November the dreaded winter months were approaching fast. How would the farm labourers feed their families? It was the mysterious Captain Swing who signed the threatening messages received by farmers. Did he really exist?

Probably there was no real Captain Swing. He was a made up figure and his name “Swing” was a reference to hanging, a punishment likely to befall those who protested violently. It was not long before a terrible vengeance was taken on the rioters. At Fosbury near Andover, for instance, the yeomanry arrived with orders to ensure an exemplary punishment. Fifty Fosbury men were captured as the soldiers chased them over fields and dragged them away from their wives and children, forcing open cottage doors while the men tried to hide in hen coops or outbuildings. The yeomen had no time to be particular whom they apprehended. Innocent men were captured along with the guilty and had to prove that they had not taken part. The attempt to get better conditions had made matters worse than ever. Alas for the rioters! The winter of 1830 was long, freezing cold and snowy all over the country with icebergs in the Thames and impassable roads everywhere.

And what about Robert Tasker, whose iron works were smashed up by rioters on 22nd November?

¹ Adapted from Christina Eastwood, *Not Without Tears* the biography of Favell Lee Mortimer. Available here: <https://www.ritchiechristianmedia.co.uk/product/not-without-tears>

Mr Tasker was a Primitive Methodist preacher. He had found it hard to prosper in his business at first because of his Christian principles. Some people refused to buy from him because he was a Primitive Methodist – not a member of the Church of England. Mr Tasker sympathised with the rioters' plight. He knew what made them so desperate. He had been present and seen the devastation taking place at his works. When called to give evidence he refused to identify the men. He knew if he did it could lead to their transportation to Australia as a punishment or even their death. As a Christian he did not want vengeance on these poor people. I hope that those men whose lives he saved went to hear him preaching afterwards!

Something to sing



A terrible shipwreck took place on **November 22**, 1873. A French ship, the *Ville du Havre* sank in the north Atlantic after an unexplained collision with an iron Clipper the *Loch Earn*. She had left New York on 15th November with 313 passengers and crew on board and was heading for Le Havre, in France. Among the passengers were Mrs Spafford, wife of a Chicago lawyer and the Spafford's four young daughters. The ship sank in about 12 minutes and the captain of the clipper (which was far less damaged) managed to save only 61 of the

passengers. Many of the lifeboats on board the *Ville du Havre* had been impossible to launch as they had recently been painted and had become glued to the deck by the paint. Survivors were all transferred to a third ship which arrived in time to rescue them from the clipper which was also beginning to sink. Mrs Spafford was among them, having been pulled from the water unconscious. The little girls were all lost.

Lawyer Horatio G. Spafford had already suffered traumas and tragedies in his life. In 1871 he lost his young son and much of his wealth in the great Chicago fire. In 1873 his business interests suffered further during the economic troubles suffered by the USA at that time. When he received his wife's tragic telegram "Saved alone..." he walked the floor all night in anguish. His friend Major Whittle was with him. Toward morning Mr Spafford turned to him. "I am glad to trust the Lord when it will cost me something," he said.

At once he took ship to cross the Atlantic to bring his wife home. The captain of the ship called him into his cabin when they were out in the Atlantic to tell him that they were passing over the spot where the *Ville du Havre* had foundered.

It was at this time that Mr Spafford wrote what has become one of America's best loved hymns, *It is well with my soul*. It is popular in Britain too. Today would be a good day to sing it. I expect you can find it in your hymnbook but I have put it in the additional resources files for today in case you do not already know it.

Something to do with words

On **22nd November** 1977 British Airways began a regular supersonic flight from London to New York. Supersonic means "faster than the speed of sound." Do you know how fast that is?² Of course, the whole flight was not supersonic! The aeroplane used was Concorde, the first



2 Just over 767 mph.

supersonic airliner. Concorde was a very famous aeroplane and we learned its story in the lesson for 2nd March. It was built as a joint venture between Britain and France. But what does its name mean? *Concorde* in French or “concord” in English is an abstract noun. You probably know that a noun is a naming word:

*A noun's the name of anything
as BOOK or GARDEN, HOOP, or SWING,*

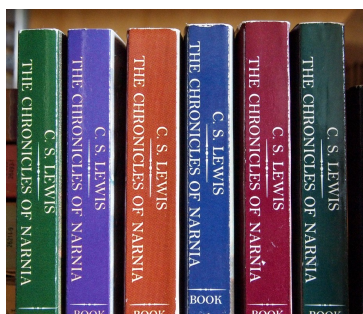
as the old rhyme says. Abstract nouns name things which we cannot see or touch as we can touch books, gardens, hoops or swings, but they are *things* just the same. “Concord” is a delightful abstract noun. It means “agreement” or “harmony”. The story of the construction of the supersonic aeroplane, Concorde, was not always one of agreement and harmony, as any of you who are plane enthusiasts will probably know.

Can you list some other abstract nouns and use them in sentences of your own?

The Bible uses many abstract nouns to tell us important things about ourselves and about God. How many can you find in Galatians 5:22-23, for example? There is an abstract noun in today's memory verse. Can you find it?³ human beings do not naturally have much concord with one another. They often have the opposite: strife and disagreement. All this is the result of the fall of mankind which we read about in Genesis chapter 3. In our families and our churches where there should be concord it is often sadly absent. Concord in a family is a great blessing. When you have a family prayer time today perhaps you could thank God for the measure of concord that you have and ask him to bless you with even more of it.

Something to Read

November 22nd is the anniversary of the death of a great Christian thinker, C S Lewis (1898-1963).



His broadcasts during the Second World War, which were later published as *Mere Christianity*, are still regarded as a classic of Christian apologetics (defence of the faith). His points are not only superbly logical but have a gracious and simple style that is very appealing. If your family allows fantasy reading, now would be a good time to read (or re-read) some of his allegorical *Chronicles of Narnia*. Please don't watch any film or TV version of the books though. The books require you to exercise your *own* imagination which is always best and all the subtleties are ruined in a film!