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# Some Baptist Hymnists.

## PART I.

THE realm of Hymnody is a realm of harmony. Here, when the worship of the Most High God is the theme inspiring the strains of song, discord is unknown; and, when the spirit of man expresses itself in adoration and praise, there is unity of desire and aspiration.

To achieve this glorious concord, many voices in many lands have combined in strong and beautiful notes of sacred minstrelsy. My aim in these articles is to show in what way Baptists have established their right to be counted as members of Christ's choir.

### FAMILIAR HYMNS.

The late Dr. Henry S. Burrage, of Portland, Maine, U.S.A., in 1888 published a volume entitled *Baptist Hymn-Writers and their Hymns*. Canon Julian, in the Appendix to his *Dictionary of Hymnology*, describes it as "a most exhaustive work," adding, "All nations where Baptists have been located are included. The work is very complete in its range, and is well done." Naturally, the present writer is indebted to this book, and to the works of other authorities, for several facts and incidents herein related.

Dr. Burrage, in his Preface, asserts that "to those who have not given attention to this department of Christian literature, it will be a surprise to learn how many of the hymns oftenest on the lips of believers of every name were written by Baptists." In the body of the volume, nearly 700 pages are devoted to authors who have helped to promote "*the Service of Song in the house of the Lord*." Most of these writers bear names unfamiliar to British people, yet my citing the first lines of twenty well-known hymns of Baptist origin will suffice to support the claim that "Baptists have an honourable place among writers of '*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*.'" Here are the first lines:

Awake my soul in joyful lays.  
Blest be the tie that binds.  
Come, Thou Fount of every blessing.  
Father of mercies, in Thy word.  
Head of the Church, and Lord of all.  
Holy Bible, Book divine.  
Ho! my comrades, see the signal.  
How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord.

S. Medley.  
J. Fawcett.  
R. Robinson.  
Anne Steele.  
J. Tritton.  
J. Burton, Senr.  
P. P. Bliss.<sup>1</sup>  
R. Keene.

<sup>1</sup> Major A. W. Whittle, in his Biography of Mr. Bliss, states that he was immersed, and joined a Baptist Church. Afterwards he attended other Churches.

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| I need Thee every hour.                            | <i>Mrs. A. S. Hawks.</i> |
| Just as I am, Thine own to be.                     | <i>Marianne Hearn.</i>   |
| Mighty God, while angels bless Thee.               | <i>R. Robinson.</i>      |
| My country, 'tis of thee (American National Hymn). | <i>S. F. Smith.</i>      |
| My hope is built on nothing less.                  | <i>E. Mote.</i>          |
| O Lord, I would delight in Thee.                   | <i>J. Ryland.</i>        |
| Praise to Thee, Thou great Creator.                | <i>J. Fawcett.</i>       |
| Saviour, Thy dying love.                           | <i>S. D. Phelps.</i>     |
| Shall we gather at the river.                      | <i>R. Lowry.</i>         |
| Sound the battle-cry.                              | <i>W. F. Sherwin.</i>    |
| Tell me the stories of Jesus.                      | <i>W. H. Parker.</i>     |
| Whosoever heareth, shout, shout the sound.         | <i>P. P. Bliss.</i>      |

## ANABAPTIST PIONEERS.

Dr. Whitley, in his *History of Congregational Singing in England*, writes: "It is seldom recognised how the Anabaptists pioneered in hymn-singing. . . . We hear of hymns composed in prison, of hymns sung on the way to the stake, and of men having to be gagged to prevent them singing." He gives instances of one prisoner being cheered by a fellow-prisoner's hymn-singing; of an Anabaptist woman singing to the monks who came to debate with her; of a Leyden disciple who, on the way to prison, sang,

O truth, how art thou now despised;

and of a martyr bound to a stake and singing right through a hymn of triumphant faith. His testimony is enforced by Dr. Burrage, who wrote a history of sixteenth-century Swiss Anabaptists and those of South Germany. Translations from some of their German verses are supplied. Most of these brave witnesses suffered constant persecution, and many were martyred. Yet, we are told that in the hymns "little that is polemical can be found. Faith and love are exalted, and steadfastness in persecution even unto death is exhibited as the mark of true discipleship."

The truth of this statement may be judged by quoting two or three stanzas from the compositions of Anabaptist hymnists.

Peter Riedemann, described by a contemporary as "rich in divine knowledge, who refreshed all who listened to him," endured long terms of imprisonment for preaching the Word, and died in 1556. From the dungeon he sang,

In anguish and distress,  
Give us the bread of heaven,  
And in the pain of death,  
Let peace to us be given.  
Thou Father, full of love,  
Who makest rich the poor,  
Oh, strengthen from above.

A stalwart soldier of the Cross was John Leopold, a citizen of Augsburg. When condemned to die for his faith, "Ye shall, by the sword, pass from life to death!" was the doom pronounced by his foes. "Nay, gentlemen of Augsburg," was his valiant response, "but, if God wills, from death to life!"

The opening and closing verses of his best-known hymn were,

My God, Thee will I praise  
 When my last hour shall come,  
 And then my voice I'll raise  
 Within the heavenly home.  
 O Lord, most merciful and kind,  
 Now strengthen my weak faith,  
 And give me peace of mind.

\* \* \*

To Thee, in every deed,  
 My spirit I commend,  
 Help me in all my need,  
 And let me ne'er offend.  
 Give to my flesh Thy strength,  
 That I with Thee may stand,  
 A conqueror at length.

#### BAPTIST HYMNODY—SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

In Britain, Baptist hymnody had its rise in the following century. Among General Baptists of that generation, promiscuous singing of metrical hymns or psalms was strongly condemned. But Particular Baptists did not all share that view.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the records of Broadmead Chapel, Bristol, show some of them to have been persistent vocalists.

#### (a) BROADMEAD PSALM SINGERS.

There, so Edward Terrill the writer of the early records relates, when the Mayor, accompanied by informers, came to arrest the preacher, the members "were all singing, so that the Mayor knew not who to take away more than another." In similar fashion other Bristolians thwarted their persecutors. The foes were untiring, and once again visited Broadmead. "On ye 14 day of March, 1674 [75], ye informers and officers were very rude, and used much violence." But "we were singing when they came in, Brother Terrill singing with the rest." A constable and an officer laid hands on Brother Terrill, but, failing to move him, "stood for a while, and ye people kept singing." A third attempt to seize Terrill followed, and failed. Then, a sergeant entreated the good man to come with him. To compel obedience, Terrill's hat was taken from the table and put on his head. Unmoved by the trick, the owner of the

<sup>2</sup> See Article by Rev. W. R. Stevenson in Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*.

hat calmly "pluckt it off againe, because he and they (the people) were still singing."

A delightful picture this! showing how Christian song was used as a weapon of victory over evil-doers. The leader, having in mind our Lord's injunction, "Be ye wise as serpents," announced beforehand the numbers of the selected Psalms, so that the congregation would be ready to sing when the officials and informers arrived. Moreover, as preaching was an indictable offence, the preacher, with certain members, was hidden behind a curtain. At a given signal the curtain was drawn back; the preacher, sitting down, would be intent on his Psalm Book like the other singers, for, according to the record, "ye people kept on singing looking on their bookes."

The folk at Broadmead doubtless used Sternhold and Hopkins' versified Psalms, issued one hundred years before the date of their persecution. As some of these versions contained from twenty to forty-nine four-lined stanzas, and one—Psalm cxix—had 176 verses, a single Psalm would enable the singers to keep going. At other times they would repeat again and again the eleven verses of Psalm xlvi., beginning,

The Lord is our defence and aid,  
The strength whereby we stand:  
When we with woe are much dismayed,  
He is our help at hand,

and ending with the Gloria Patri—

To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
All glory be therefore:  
As in beginning was, is now,  
And shall be evermore.

#### (b) BENJAMIN KEACH AND THE ADVENT OF HYMNS.

But the day was at hand when, for Baptists and for members of other denominations, hymns as well as psalm paraphrases were to be used as an integral part of worship-song in the house of the Lord. Many holders of the Baptist faith were, however, bitterly opposed to their introduction, and before their general adoption a long and tedious battle-royal raged. The details of this wretched wrangle, of the scores of pamphlets containing arguments for and against the practice, of solemn debates and resolutions in Association gatherings and in denominational assemblies, of churches split asunder on the question, need not be given here. Suffice it to record that final victory was won by the advocates of hymn-singing.

In the early stages the honours of war were gained by the redoubtable Benjamin Keach, pastor of Horsleydown Chapel,

Southwark. To him belongs the credit of issuing the first Baptist Hymn Book in Britain. With wise caution, he gradually trained his people to use hymns, gaining the consent of his Church members to each step taken. From the Epistle Dedicatory in one of his books, it appears that the training was spread over a period of many years. At first, he persuaded them to sing one hymn after each Communion Service. At the end of six years they agreed to sing also on days of Public Thanksgiving. Later, they adopted the plan of one hymn after the sermon on each Lord's Day.

In 1691 Keach published *Spiritual Melody*, containing nearly 300 original hymns. An examination of this work shows that, whilst the author was a "bonny fighter," he possessed no poetical gifts; and one does not wonder that the so-called "hymns" fell into disuse. In the Preface he claims that "these hymns being short, children will soon get them by heart." But even seventeenth-century children were not likely to be enamoured by verses that were merely sermon-points expressed in feeble rhymes, such as this on the text "*The Lord God is a sun and shield*"—

Like as a shield the blow keeps off,  
The enemy lays on,  
So Thou keeps off all hurt from us,  
And saves us everyone;

or by compositions of which the following verse is typical—

The antiquity of Scripture show  
That they are most divine;  
For no writings did the world know  
So soon as they did shine.

(c) OTHER EARLY HYMNISTS—SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

Far removed from the strife of words, another seventeenth-century Baptist preacher, immured in Bedford Gaol, was writing an immortal allegory. With no thought of producing hymns to be sung in general worship, John Bunyan penned verses possessing lyrical qualities, assigning them to some of his characters. The two best known are (1) *The Shepherd Boy's Song in the Valley of Humiliation*—

He that is down need fear no fall;

and (2) *The brave war-song of Valiant-for-the-truth*—

Who would true valour see.

These are found in several modern collections of hymns, including *The Baptist Church Hymnal (Revised)*.

Mercy's song,

Let the Most Blessed be my guide;

and Bunyan's versification of The Lord's Prayer—taken from his *Book for Boys and Girls, or Country Rhimes for Children*—have a place in other hymnbooks. Thus, the Dreamer of Bedford may rightly be counted among early Baptist hymnists.

A niche must also be provided for one of his contemporaries—Joseph Stennett (1663-1713), whose rare little volumes of *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1697) and *Baptism* (1702) are open before me while writing. Isaac Watts acknowledged borrowing lines from one of the Sacramental Hymns, "Because," he explained, "they expressed my thought and design in proper and beautiful language"; and he embodied them in one of his Odes.<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Stennett, the son of one minister and brother of another, received a sound education at the hands of his father, and after acting as a school teacher, became minister of the Seventh Day Baptist Church, which met in a Hall in Devonshire Square, London. He was held in high esteem because of his character and attainments. The Poet Laureate of that day described him as "a good poet"; and another writer spoke of Stennett, the patron and the rule of wit [i.e. in the sense of wisdom], The pulpit's honour, and the saint's delight.

Stennett's works fill three volumes. Though author of many poems, he will be best remembered by his hymn commencing,

Another six days' work is done.

#### EIGHTEENTH CENTURY WRITERS.

##### 1. BEDDOME. 2. STEELE.

The seed sown by Keach and Stennett brought forth an abundant harvest among Baptists in the following century, most of the hymnists in this period being preachers of the gospel.

Benjamin Beddome, of Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire, born in 1717, leads the way. At the age of twenty-six he was ordained as minister of the Church at Bourton. There he laboured till his death in 1793. As a faithful preacher and pastor, he lived in the hearts of his people. Many tempting calls to larger Churches were declined. The spirit of this good man was revealed by his declaration: "I would rather honour God in a station even much inferior to that in which He has placed me, than intrude myself into a higher without His direction." Hymn-writing was a passion with Mr. Beddome. Every Lord's Day he composed a new one to follow his sermon. After his death a volume of 822 hymns was published, with a commendatory Foreword by the celebrated Robert Hall. Among the compositions generally used were:

<sup>3</sup> See Dr. Hatfield's *Poets of the Church*.

My times of sorrow and of joy,  
 Let party names no more,  
 Did Christ o'er sinners weep?  
 Prayer is the breath of God in man,  
 Buried beneath the yielding wave,

(BAPTISMAL HYMN).

and the hymn for Ministers, No. 504 in the *Baptist Church Hymnal (Revised)*,

Father of mercies, bow Thine ear.

In an age when Paul's stern saying, "*I suffer not a woman to teach . . . but to be in silence*," was literally and rigidly enforced, two women dared to hymn the praises of their Redeemer, both using pen-names. Anne Dutton (1698-1765), wife of a Baptist minister in Great Gransden, Hunts., issued a selection of "sixty-one hymns on several subjects," but these are now forgotten.<sup>4</sup> Not so are those of Anne Steele (1716-1778), daughter of the Baptist pastor in Broughton, Hants., who wrote under the *nom de plume* of Theodosia. A great invalid, she "learned in suffering what she taught in song." Dr. Hatfield styles her "the female poet of the sanctuary."

Her hymns gained wide popularity both in the home-country and America. A volume made up of 144 Hymns, 34 Psalms, and various Poems, is accompanied by a Biographical Sketch from the pen of John Sheppard of Frome. From this Sketch we learn that hers was a gentle and affectionate nature. Although constantly suffering, she was always patient, and found opportunities for many unrecorded deeds of benevolence. In her last hour her thoughts centred on her Saviour. "*I know that my Redeemer liveth!*" she exclaimed, then gently fell asleep. She still lives in hymns such as,

Father of mercies, in Thy word,  
 My God, my Father, blissful name,  
 Father, whate'er of earthly bliss,  
 The Saviour calls, let every ear,  
 Dear Refuge of my weary soul,

and

To our Redeemer's glorious name.

The inscription on her tombstone in Broughton runs—

"Silent the lyre, and dumb the tuneful tongue  
 That sung on earth her great Redeemer's praise;  
 But now in heaven she joins the angelic song,  
 In more harmonious, more exalted lays."<sup>5</sup>

CAREY BONNER.

(To be continued.)

<sup>4</sup> See Transactions Baptist Historical Society, VII., 129.

<sup>5</sup> Varied wordings of the inscription appear in different books. The above has been supplied by Mr. Wardle, the present minister of Broughton.