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Bristol Baptist College and the Church's Hymnody

THE "palmy days of Baptist hymnody", according to Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*,¹ were the second half of the eighteenth century. Prior to that period the General Baptists had for the most part maintained their prejudice against congregational singing of any kind, and the Particular Baptists, though accustomed to singing the psalms, had proceeded somewhat cautiously in using the new hymns that by the turn of the century had been published by some of their own pioneers like Benjamin Keach and Joseph Stennett. It was not likely, however, that Baptists would long be able to resist the impetus given to hymn-singing by the publication of Isaac Watts' hymns and paraphrases and the hymns of Philip Doddridge; nor could they remain unaffected by the new waves of song that accompanied the evangelical revival under the Wesleys. So, by the middle of the eighteenth century the time was ripe for Baptists to begin to make their own significant contribution to the treasury of Christian hymnody.

I

One of the earliest contributors to these "palmy days" of Baptist hymnody was Edmund Jones. He had entered Bristol College in 1738, and three years later became pastor of the church at Exeter, where he remained until his death in 1765. Under his ministry, in the year 1759, singing was first introduced into the worship of that church and he himself wrote a number of the hymns they used. A volume of his work entitled *Sacred Poems* was published in 1760. None of his hymns is in use today, but one was still appearing in the 1863 edition of Rippon's *Selection*. It began

Come, humble sinner, in whose breast
A thousand thoughts revolve,
Come, with your guilt and fear oppress,
And make this last resolve:
I'll go to Jesus, though my sin
Hath like a mountain rose;
I know his courts, I'll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.²

Other pastors like Edward Trivett and Job Hupton, both of Norfolk, and lay writers like Anne Steele of Broughton were by this time also writing hymns, chiefly for local use; and it was this growing practice that led two Bristol men to compile a collection of hymns from every available source for use by congregations which hitherto had depended entirely on Watts' hymns or, lacking the necessary books altogether, depended on the practice of "lining out". John Ash, minister of Pershore Baptist Church, and Caleb Evans, President of

Bristol College, together published *A Collection of Hymns adapted to Public Worship* in 1769. This was the first hymn-book in the sense in which we understand the term, i.e. a compilation of hymns from various sources, and it made available to the churches of our denomination a wide choice of hymns, 412 in all, including many by Watts, Wesley and Doddridge, as well as Baptist authors.

In the "advertisement" to this book, Dr. Evans speaks of psalmody as one of the most elevating parts of divine worship, and recommends singing without reading line by line (then the common practice). He suggests that as many as could do so should bring books to worship and look on the words as they sing. The publication of the *Collection of Hymns* certainly encouraged that practice, as, for example, in the case of St. Mary's, Norwich. In 1784 Joseph Kinghorn had entered Bristol College and in a letter to his parents that year, he tells them that Dr. Evans had presented him with a copy of this hymn-book ("being a compilation from others"). Five years later he became pastor of St. Mary's and in that year (1789) the church which had already used part of a legacy to buy Ash and Evans' hymn-book for the choir, now bought "12 hymn-books for ye poor".³ The implication is that many of the congregation would have bought their own copies, and it is clear that this hymn-book had now supplanted Watts' *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* which was formerly used at St. Mary's. What is even more interesting is that Ash and Evans' hymn-book made so great an impression on the church that in 1814 Kinghorn himself produced a special edition of it for use at St. Mary's, in which he added a supplement of twenty-two hymns, including Robert Robinson's "Come, thou fount of every blessing". This was so popular that a second edition was printed in 1827.

Ash and Evans' *Collection of Hymns* and its reprints by Kinghorn were certainly a landmark in the development of hymn-singing in this country. But of far greater importance—for future developments at any rate—was the appearance in 1787 of a new hymn-book compiled by another former student of Bristol College, Dr. John Rippon, and entitled *A Selection of Hymns from the best authors, intended as an Appendix to Dr. Watts' Psalms and Hymns*. After leaving college, Rippon became minister of Carter Lane Baptist Church, London, where he remained until his death in 1836 at the age of 85; he was one of the most influential ministers of his time. His hymn-book quickly became popular both in this country and in America. The first edition contained 588 hymns, 300 of which had not before appeared in any collections for public worship. For the tenth edition, published in 1800, he added a further sixty hymns. It was further enlarged in 1827, and a sort of omnibus volume called *The Comprehensive Rippon* was published in 1844 after his death; it contained nearly twelve hundred hymns. Rippon was catholic in his choice; he drew heavily on Doddridge and also included hymns by Addison, Cowper, Newton, Toplady and Charles Wesley, besides various Baptist authors. His book included also some of his own hymns, as he

himself claimed in the preface to the tenth edition, though he modestly forbore to indicate which they were. It is, therefore, a matter of conjecture as to which hymns can be ascribed to him. It is certain, however, that he largely rewrote Edward Perronet's hymn "All hail the power of Jesus' name", adding several new verses of his own, including the last two in the version in current use, beginning

Let every kindred, every tribe

and

O that with yonder sacred throng⁴

and a verse which has now dropped out of use:

Babes, men and sires, who know His love,

Who feel your sin and thrall,

Now joy with all the hosts above,

And crown Him Lord of all.⁵

He then gave to each verse an appropriate title, as follows:

1. Angels. 2. Martyrs. 3. Converted Jews. 4. Believing Gentiles.
5. Sinners of every age. 6. Sinners of every nation. 7. Ourselves.

The verdict of one of the greatest hymnologists, Dr. Louis Benson, is that Rippon's "judgment and taste, his command of originals and his editorial discretion, were such as to secure to himself a permanent place in the history of hymn-singing".⁶

Amongst Baptist writers whose works Rippon included in his *Selection* are several former Bristol students. Most outstanding of these in the world of hymnody is Benjamin Beddome. He entered college in 1737 and became pastor of the Baptist church at Bourton-on-the-Water in 1740. Here he remained until his death in 1795. Like other dissenting ministers of his day it was his practice to compose hymns for use after his Sunday morning sermons. He was, however, more prolific than most, and left in all some 830 hymns. Though they were not originally intended for publication, he did allow thirteen of them to be included in Ash and Evans' *Collection* (1769) and some thirty-six in Rippon's *Selection* (1787). In 1817 a posthumous collection of all his hymns was published with an introduction by the Rev. Robert Hall, a former tutor at the college and minister of Broadmead, who commends them in these words: "The man of taste will be gratified with the beauty and original turns of thought which many of them exhibit".⁷ Three bound volumes containing over 300 of his hymns in his own careful hand-writing are in the Bristol College library. Not many of his hymns are in common use today, though two will be found in the *Baptist Hymn Book*, a hymn on Baptism—"Witness, ye men and angels, now",⁸ and one on the Ministry—"Father of mercies, bow thine ear".⁹ It is not surprising that present-day congregations would hesitate to sing a Communion hymn beginning

Lo, what delicious food!¹⁰

though the quality of a hymn cannot always be judged by its first line! This is certainly true of one of Beddome's best hymns, long since discarded by hymn-book editors, who were no doubt put off by its

opening line. But note the warmth and clarity of thought and breadth of outlook as the hymn progresses:

Let party names no more
 The Christian world o'erspread;
 Gentile and Jew, and bond and free
 Are one in Christ their Head.
 Among the saints on earth
 Let mutual love be found,
 Heirs of the same inheritance,
 With mutual blessings crowned.
 Let envy and ill-will
 Be banished far away;
 Those should in strictest friendship dwell
 Who the same Lord obey.
 Thus will the Church below
 Resemble that above,
 Where streams of pleasure ever flow
 And every heart is love.¹¹

Such a hymn justifies James Montgomery's high commendation of Beddome. "His compositions", said Montgomery, "are calculated to be far more useful than attractive, though on closer acquaintance they become very agreeable as well as impressive", each one containing "a single idea, always important, often striking, sometimes ingeniously brought out".¹²

Another son of the college whose hymns were included in Rippon's *Selection* (1787) was the Welshman, Benjamin Francis. He entered college in 1753 and after a short pastorate at Sodbury settled as minister at Horsley in Gloucestershire, where he remained for forty-two years until his death. A poet of considerable ability, he published a number of elegies and two satirical pieces on the baptismal controversy. But he is best known for his hymns, five of which appeared in Rippon's *Selection*. The only example of his work now in common use in English churches is his revision of a hymn by Joseph Grigg, "Jesus, and shall it ever be".¹³ He is better known for his Welsh compositions, nearly two-hundred of which he published in two volumes in 1774 and 1786. Of these, fifteen are in *Y Llawlyfr Moliant Newydd* (1956), the most recent Welsh Baptist hymnal.

Samuel Pearce, who entered the college in 1786, later became minister of Cannon Street, Birmingham, and was one of the founders of the Baptist Missionary Society, also had a gift for writing. Andrew Fuller included a number of Pearce's hymns and poems in his *Memoirs*, as did Rippon in his *Selection*, including one headed "A Song in a Storm", beginning

In the floods of tribulation.

The metaphor is continued in the line

Singing as I wade to heaven

but gets badly mixed in the next verse with

'Mid the thorn-brake beauteous flowrets
 Look more beautiful and gay.¹⁴

Perhaps the most famous Baptist represented in Rippon's *Selection* was John Ryland, who after a pastorate in Northampton, during which he had played a leading part in the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society, became President of Bristol College and pastor of Broadmead, in succession to Dr. Caleb Evans. He started writing hymns at the age of sixteen, and thirty-six of his earliest compositions appeared in his *Serious Essays* published in 1771 when he was only eighteen. These were never republished, though others appeared later in various magazines and in Rippon's *Selection*. In 1862 Daniel Sedgwick published a collection of ninety-nine of Ryland's hymns, reprinted from his own manuscripts, together with a biographical sketch under the title *Hymns and Verses on Sacred Subjects*. Only three of these hymns survived in common use into the twentieth century, to one of which Ryland himself appended in his original manuscript the note, "I recollect deeper feelings of mind in composing this hymn, than perhaps I ever felt in making any other".¹⁵ The hymn began

O Lord! I would delight in thee,
 And on thy care depend;
 To thee in every trouble flee—
 My best, my only friend!

and the verses that follow express the same simple faith in typically simple language:

He that has made my heaven secure
 Will here all good provide:
 While Christ is rich, can I be poor?
 What can I want beside?¹⁶

The other two hymns that survived are "When the Saviour dwelt below",¹⁷ a hymn on the earthly life of Jesus, and "Let us sing the King Messiah",¹⁸ a paraphrase of Psalm 45, written for a missionary prayer meeting in Bristol and still deservedly popular in Baptist circles.

It will be seen, therefore, that the college was well represented amongst the Baptist hymn-writers whose work has a place in Rippon's *Selection*. Four years after the first edition of the *Selection*, Rippon published a companion volume of over two hundred tunes (1791), the first tune-book to be compiled for the Baptist denomination. His own musical abilities were such that he wrote an oratorio *The Crucifixion* which he published in 1837, but for the tune-book he called in the professional services of Thomas Walker. This book, like the *Selection*, went through many editions, often being known as *Walker's Companion*. The title page of the seventh edition (1815) gives the full title as follows: "A Selection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes from the Best Authors, in three and four parts; adapted principally to Dr. Watts' Hymns and Psalms, and to Dr. Rippon's Selection of Hymns; containing in a greater variety than any other volume extant the most approved compositions which are used in London, and in the different

congregations throughout England; also many original tunes never before printed; the whole forming a publication of above three hundred tunes, odes etc., by John Rippon, D.D." It then went on to say that copies "may be had at the vestry of Dr. Rippon's meeting house in Carter Lane, Tooley Street, price 8s. 6d. half-bound; 10s. 6d. fine bound in calf. Fine ruled paper may be added, 6d. every twelve leaves. Those Persons who purchase six Copies of Mr. R. may have a seventh Gratis". This was certainly the most extensive tune-book of its kind. Many of its tunes have endured to the present day; it also had the dubious distinction of being the first book to insert expression and tempo marks (*p*, *ff*, *mf*, and *grave*, *lively* etc.).

It is of special interest to us that Rippon here includes a tune called TIVERTON, which he ascribes to a composer named Grigg. No initials are given and it has long been conjectured (without any evidence) that this is the hymn-writer Joseph Grigg whose hymn "Jesus, and shall it ever be" was worked over by Benjamin Francis, as we have already noted. But Dr. W. T. Whitley made the interesting suggestion¹⁹ that the composer of the tune TIVERTON might well be a Jacob Grigg who entered Bristol College in 1793 and two years later became a pioneer missionary to Sierra Leone, then one of the chief centres of the slave trade in Africa. Grigg was the third missionary to be appointed by the B.M.S., the other two being William Carey and John Thomas who were sent to Bengal. Becoming involved in some unhappy disputes with local officials, Grigg was actually expelled from the colony in the following year, and went to America where he became pastor of a negro Baptist church in Virginia. He is known to have been a man of musical ability, and his home town of Launceston had been introduced to hymn-singing by John Wesley on his many visits there; it may well be, therefore, as Whitley suggests, that when Rippon came upon this tune, recognised its merits and learnt that it was by a student of his own Academy, he gave it a place in his *Selection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes* and named it TIVERTON after his own home church. This tune is still in common use.²⁰

Another pioneer missionary, though not an original hymn-writer, deserves mention here. Joshua Marshman was already a married man and a schoolmaster in Bristol when he entered the college two years after Grigg. In 1799 he was accepted by the B.M.S. and went to Serampore, where he worked with his colleagues Carey and Ward and became renowned for his skill as a translator of the scriptures into many of the languages of India. What he has also given us is a translation into English of a hymn written by Krishna Pal, the first convert won from Hinduism by Carey and his colleagues at Serampore:

O thou, my soul, forget no more
The friend who all thy misery bore.²¹

II

The proximity of the college to Wales naturally drew many students from the Principality. Since the Welsh are well-known for their love

of music, we would expect to find that some members of the college made a significant contribution to Welsh hymnody. The work of Benjamin Francis we have already noted. In 1777 Thomas Thomas entered college and began a career of some distinction in the denomination, becoming the first secretary of the Baptist Union upon its formation in 1812, and in the following year also secretary of the Baptist Academy in Stepney (now Regent's Park College). He wrote a number of elegies and hymns in Welsh, none of which, however, is now in use. More notable in the world of hymnody was Joseph Harris who entered college in 1804, chiefly, we are told, for the purpose of improving his knowledge of English. He was at that time pastor of a Baptist church in Swansea, to which he returned on leaving college, and where he remained until his death in 1825. He was a writer of some distinction, using the name "Gomer", and edited a Welsh periodical and a Welsh and English parallel version of the Bible. His special contribution to hymnody was a volume of 800 hymns he published in 1821, the first collection made for Welsh Baptists. It contained hymns by Harris himself, some by his son, and others by Benjamin Francis and other Welsh writers; it remained the chief book in use in Wales for many years. Some of his hymns are still sung. In the new Welsh Baptist hymn-book *Y Llawlyfr Moliant Newydd* (1956) there are ten of Harris's own compositions, as well as translations by him of hymns by Watts, Doddridge, Benjamin Beddome, Anne Steele and others.

III

The "palmy days" of Baptist hymnody had by this time passed. By contrast the nineteenth century produced few notable hymn-writers among Baptists, though several new hymn-books were compiled for the denomination's use. As before, among the names that stand out in Baptist hymnody of this period, a good proportion are of Bristol men.

In England Rippon's *Selection* remained widely popular until 1828, when John Haddon senr. published *A New Selection of Hymns*. One of the committee responsible for this book was Edward Steane, who had entered Bristol College in 1819 and became one of the leading ministers of his day, serving for many years both as a secretary of the Baptist Union and as a member of the Executive Committee of the B.M.S. It was due to him, no doubt, that the *New Selection* was the first to include Marshman's translation of Krishna Pal's hymn. It also included the only hymn known to have been written by Steane himself; this was entitled "The Triumphs of Christ anticipated", and began

Prophetic era! blissful day!²³

Of particular interest to us is that the entire profits from this book were to be given to the widows and orphans of Baptist ministers and missionaries, thus beginning the long connection between Baptist hymnody and that charity, which has continued unbroken to the present day.

The *New Selection* of 1828 also contained a hymn by another

former Bristol student who became a prominent leader of the denomination, John Howard Hinton, son of James Hinton the minister of New Road, Oxford, under whose ministry Edward Steane had been brought up and baptised. Hinton entered college in 1811 and in addition to several outstanding pastorates was secretary of the Baptist Union for many years. He was an indefatigable writer, his published works including volumes of theology, a lengthy biography of his father, and a large number of hymns, most of which he had written for use after his sermons in his own churches. In addition to the one which appeared in the *New Selection*,²⁴ two more were added in the enlarged edition of that book ten years later, and these were also included in the next denominational hymn-book which was published in 1858—*Psalms and Hymns*.²⁵ But none is now in use, more recent judgment confirming the estimate of these hymns given in Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* where the writer describes them as "fair in quality" and goes on to add that Hinton was "greater as a public man and theologian than as a hymn-writer".²⁶

Psalms and Hymns contained over one thousand hymns and was soon being widely used in our Baptist churches, replacing both Rippon's *Selection* and the *New Selection*. It included the best of Watts and Doddridge and many more of Wesley's hymns than previous Baptist hymn-books. Among the many nineteenth-century authors which it also drew upon, was yet another Baptist from Bristol College. John Eustace Giles received his early education, like Edward Steane and J. H. Hinton, under James Hinton of New Road, Oxford; he then entered college in 1826 to train for the ministry. In 1833, while minister of Salter's Hall Chapel, London, he received an invitation to become tutor in classics and mathematics at the college, which he declined. He later held several notable pastorates, including one brief year at Broadmead, Bristol. He was President of the Baptist Union in 1846, and at one point in his ministry was invited to become secretary of the B.M.S., though he did not accept the invitation. He had previously been requested by the Society to write a hymn in celebration of the emancipation of slaves, and wrote several other hymns on missionary themes. But he is best known for his baptismal hymn

Hast thou said, exalted Jesus,
 "Take thy cross and follow Me"?²⁷

written for a baptismal service at Salter's Hall, London, in 1830. It was published in *Psalms and Hymns* and remained in use throughout the next hundred years or more, appearing in the *Baptist Church Hymnal* (1900) and the *Revised Baptist Church Hymnal* (1933) before being dropped in 1962 when the *Baptist Hymn Book* was published.

Another hymn that suffered a similar fate was the translation by F. W. Gotch of Freylinghausen's "Wer ist wohl wie du?". This was one of the German pietist's most beautiful hymns on the inner life and one of the finest of the German "Jesus hymns". It first appeared in Dr. Gotch's translation in the *Baptist Magazine* 1857, and was later included in the 1880 Supplement to *Psalms and Hymns*, the *Baptist*

Church Hymnal (1900) and the *Revised Baptist Church Hymnal* (1933). Its first verse was as follows:

Who, as Thou, makes blest,
Jesus, sweetest rest?
Choicest good, all good outvying,
Life of sinners lost and dying,
And their Light so blest;
Jesus, sweetest rest!²⁸

Dr. Gotch, who entered college in 1832 and later became President, translated a number of hymns from the German, though none attained such popularity as this one. He died in 1890; his granddaughter Katherine Gotch Robinson is a Life Deacon of Tyndale Church, Bristol, today.

IV

The twentieth century, especially the latter part, has seen a great revival of hymn-writing and the publication of numerous hymn-books and supplements. Unfortunately it has not produced a great deal from Baptist authors. Among those connected with Bristol College two in particular should be mentioned. Maurice Hewett who entered college in 1907 wrote a considerable number of hymns during his ministerial life. A slim volume of these, published in 1940, was entitled *Brookfield Hymns*, so named after Hewett's first pastorate at Chudleigh, Devon, where from the porch of the church "one can listen to the music of the brook, and rejoice in the beauty of the fields".²⁹ Though the reviewer of this collection in the *Baptist Quarterly* at the time³⁰ expressed the hope that the next denominational hymn-book might include some of these, none have since been published.

More promising is the work of Keith Clements, at present a tutor at the college, whose hymn on race relations was published in *Praise for Today* (1974), the supplement to the *Baptist Hymn Book*:

Father of glory, whose heavenly plan
Was wholly made flesh in the life of a Man

—an admirable example of the new style of hymn emerging in the late twentieth century, combining sound biblical imagery with current concerns, and written in contemporary idiom:

Give us the vision of all things made new,
Of enmity ended, your promise come true;
That while in this city as neighbours we live,
We may to each other true dignity give.³¹

If it is true, as Dr. Hugh Martin affirmed,³² that Baptists have never produced a great hymn-writer, we have nevertheless made very significant contributions from time to time to the hymnody of the Christian church, sometimes from the pen of scholars, sometimes the fruit of faithful pastoral care in city and country churches. And of these scholar-pastor-poets Bristol College has had an honourable share.

NOTES

- ¹ *Dictionary of Hymnology*, ed. J. Julian (1892), article on "Baptist Hymnody" by W. R. Stevenson, p. 112.
- ² *Rippon's Selection*, No. 355.
- ³ St. Mary's, Norwich, church records.
- ⁴ *Baptist Hymn Book*, No. 180.
- ⁵ *Rippon's Selection*, No. 177 (Part I).
- ⁶ Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn*, p. 144.
- ⁷ *Hymns of the late Rev. B. Beddome, M.A.* (1817). Recommendatory preface by Rev. Robert Hall, p. vii.
- ⁸ *Baptist Hymn Book*, No. 304.
- ⁹ *Baptist Hymn Book*, No. 346.
- ¹⁰ Hymns composed by the Rev. Mr. Beddome, (MS.) No. 100.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, No. 175; see also *Psalms and Hymns*, No. 646.
- ¹² J. Montgomery, Introductory essay to *The Christian Psalmist* (1825).
- ¹³ *Baptist Hymn Book*, No. 293.
- ¹⁴ *Rippon's Selection*, No. 541 (Part I).
- ¹⁵ J. Ryland, *Hymns and Verses on Sacred Subjects*, p. 30.
- ¹⁶ *Baptist Church Hymnal*, No. 354.
- ¹⁷ *Revised Baptist Church Hymnal*, No. 103.
- ¹⁸ *Baptist Hymn Book*, No. 377.
- ¹⁹ W. T. Whitley, "The Tune Book of 1791", *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. 10 (1941), pp. 434-43.
- ²⁰ *Baptist Hymn Book*, No. 292.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, No. 213.
- ²² S. A. Swaine, *Faithful Men; or Memorials of Bristol Baptist College* (1884), p. 226.
- ²³ *New Selection of Hymns*, No. 373.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 32.
- ²⁵ *Psalms and Hymns*, Nos. 382 and 402.
- ²⁶ *Dictionary of Hymnology*, article by W. R. Stevenson, p. 526.
- ²⁷ *Revised Baptist Church Hymnal*, No. 472.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 321.
- ²⁹ Author's note in *Brookfield Hymns*.
- ³⁰ *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. 10 (1940), p. 184.
- ³¹ *Praise for Today*, No. 17.
- ³² Hugh Martin, "The Baptist contribution to early English hymnody", *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. 19 (1962), p. 195.

ERIC SHARPE.

The Baptist Historical Society will hold its Annual General Meeting on Monday, 23rd April, at 4.15 p.m., in the Institute Hall, Westminster Chapel. We are glad to announce that Dr. L. G. Champion will speak on "Evangelical Calvinism and the Structure of Baptist Church Life".