

A Musical History Lesson
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Songs of the Bethel

In Job's Daughters we include many beautiful songs that enhance our ceremonies with both the melodic strains of their music and the inspirational words of their verses. I have recently read a most informative book entitled, "Then Sings My Soul" that explains the history of many of the hymns that have become a part of religious rituals for centuries. I am pleased to share with you from this volume the history of the creation of many hymns familiar to Job's Daughters. If you copy this article or share the contents with your Bethel, please remember to refer to this book by title and to include the author's name in your presentation.

Nearer, My God, To Thee

Because our organization encourages young women to become intelligent and caring contributors to their communities and society, in general, it is so fitting that the song with which we conclude most of our meetings was written by a young woman.

(Page 115, "Then Sings My Soul, 150 of the World's Greatest Hymn Stories" by Robert J. Morgan, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. 2003.)

...Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven. Genesis 28:12

It was reported that the band aboard the *Titanic* gallantly played "Nearer, My God, to Thee" as the great liner sank to its watery grave on April 14, 1912. A Canadian survivor told of being comforted by its strains. Historians, however, have never been able to nail down the validity of the story.

Never mind. It's a great hymn anyway, written by a woman named Sarah Flower Adams. She was born in Harlow, England, in the winter of 1805. Her father was a newspaper editor and a man of prominence.

Sarah grew up enjoying the spotlight. She showed great interest in the stage and dreamed of being an actress. In 1834, she married William Bridges Adams, a civil engineer. The couple lived in London where Sarah could be near the great theaters. In 1837, she played "Lady Macbeth" in the Richmond Theater in London to rave reviews.

Her frail health hampered her career, however, and she found herself focusing more on her literary gifts. It's said that she wrote quickly, as if

under compulsion; and seldom did editors find anything to change in her work. Among her compositions were hymns of praise to the Lord. Sarah's sister, Eliza, a gifted musician, often wrote the music for her hymns. The two were very close.

One day in 1841, their pastor, Rev. William Johnson Fox of London's South Place Unitarian Church, paid a visit. He was compiling a church hymnbook and he wanted to include some of their hymns. He further mentioned that he was frustrated at his inability to find a hymn to go along with the upcoming Sunday's message, which was from the story of Jacob at Bethel in Genesis 28:20-22.

Sarah offered to write a hymn based on those verses. For the rest of the week she poured over the passage, visualizing Jacob sleeping with a stone for his pillow as he dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven. The following Sunday, South Place Unitarian Church sang Sarah's "Nearer, My God, to Thee."

Eliza, who was suffering from tuberculosis, died in 1846. Sarah had faithfully cared for her sister during the illness, but by the time Eliza died, Sarah, too, was showing signs of consumption. She passed away on August 14, 1848, at age 43.

He Leadeth Me

The Twenty-third Psalm is one of the most beautiful portions of the Bible and certainly one of the most quoted. It forms the basis for one of our loveliest installation ceremonies and the melody and words of "He Leadeth Me" impart the strength of purpose expected of our members.

(Page 145, "Then Sings My Soul, 150 of the World's Greatest Hymn Stories" by Robert J. Morgan, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. 2003.)

...He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Psalm 23:3

On autumn nights as we sleep peacefully in our beds, millions of songbirds travel under cover of darkness, heading south. Somehow, they know their way. God has given them a state-of-the-art internal guidance system....If God guides His [smallest] creations, will He not also guide His children? The Psalmist thought so, saying "He leadeth me...He leadeth me..." (Psalm 23:2-3).

Dr. Joseph H. Gilmore, son of a Governor of New Hampshire, gave this account of writing his famous hymn on this theme:

As a young man recently graduated...I was [substituting] for a couple of Sundays...at the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia. At the mid-week service, on the 26th of March, 1862, I set out to give the people an exposition of the Twenty-third Psalm, which I had given before on three or four occasions, but this time I did not get further than the words “He Leadeth Me.” Those words took hold of me as they had never done before, and I saw in them a significance...of which I had never dreamed.

It was the darkest hour of the Civil War. I did not refer to that fact – that is, I don’t think I did – but it may subconsciously have led me to realize that God’s leadership is the one significant fact in human experience, that it makes no difference how we are led, or whither we are led, so long as we are sure God is leading us.

At the close of the meeting a few of us in the parlor of my host, Deacon Watson, kept on talking about the thought I had emphasized; and then and there, on a blank page of the brief from which I had intended to speak, I penciled the hymn, talking and writing at the same time, then handed it to my wife and thought no more of it. She sent it to *The Watchman and Reflector*, a paper published in Boston, where it was first printed. I did not know until 1865 that my hymn had been set to music by William B. Bradbury. I went to Rochester to preach as a candidate before the Second Baptist Church. Going into their chapel...I picked up a hymnal to see what they were singing, and opened it at my own hymn, “He Leadeth Me.”

How Great Thou Art

When we study Job’s life, his struggles and the reward for his steadfastness, our lessons conclude with the mighty words of this beautiful hymn of awe and gratitude.

(Page 213, “Then Sings My Soul, 150 of the World’s Greatest Hymn Stories” by Robert J. Morgan, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. 2003.)

...For thus says the Lord, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: “I am the Lord, and there is no other.” Isaiah 45:18

Carl Boberg, a 26-year-old Swedish minister, wrote a poem in 1885 that he called “O Store Gud” – “O Mighty God.” The words, literally translated to English, said: When I the world consider, Which Thou has made by Thine almighty Word, And how the web of life Thou wisdom guideth, And all creation feedeth at Thy board. Then doth my soul burst forth in song of praise, Oh, great God, Oh, great God!

His poem was published and “forgotten” – or so he thought. Several years later, Carl was surprised to hear it being sung to the tune of an old Swedish melody; but the poem and hymn did not achieve widespread fame.

Hearing this hymn in Russia, English missionary, Stuart Hine, was so moved he modified and expanded the words and made his own arrangement of the Swedish melody. He later said his first three verses were inspired, line upon line, by Russia’s rugged Carpathian Mountains. The first verse was composed when he was caught in a thunderstorm in a Carpathian village, the second as he heard the birds sing near the Romanian border, and the third as he witnessed many of the Carpathian mountain dwellers coming to Christ. The final verse was written after Dr. Hine returned to Great Britain.

Some time later, Dr. J. Edwin Orr heard “How Great Thou Art” being sung by Naga Tribespeople in Assam, in India, and decided to bring it back to America for use in his own meetings. When he introduced it at a conference in California, it came to the attention of music publisher, Tim Spencer, who contacted Mr. Hine and had the song copyrighted. It was published and recorded.

During the 1954 Billy Graham Crusade,...George Beverly Shea was given a leaflet containing this hymn. He sang it to himself and shared it with other members of the Graham team. Though not used in London, it was introduced the following year to audiences in Toronto. In the New York Crusade of 1957, it was sung by Mr. Shea ninety-nine times, with the choir joining the majestic refrain: Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee, How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

Holy, Holy, Holy

At the quietest time of dedication to the principles of living an exemplary life, “our song shall rise to Thee” who is both “merciful and mighty”.

(Page 99, “Then Sings My Soul, 150 of the World’s Greatest Hymn Stories” by Robert J. Morgan, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. 2003.)

...And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!” Revelation 4:8

Reginald Heber was born April 21, 1783, to a minister and his wife in an English village. After a happy childhood and a good education in the village school, he enrolled at Oxford where he excelled in poetry and became fast friends with Sir Walter Scott. Following graduation, he

succeeded his father as vicar in his family's parish, and for sixteen years he faithfully served his flock.

His bent toward poetry naturally gave him a keen and growing interest in hymnody. He sought to lift the literary quality of hymns, and he also dreamed of publishing a collection of high-caliber hymns corresponding to the church year for use by liturgical churches. But the Bishop of London wouldn't go along with it....

[Heber] continued writing hymns for his own church, however, and it was during the sixteen years in the obscure parish of Hodnet that Heber wrote all 57 of his hymns, including the great missionary hymn, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," which exhorted missionaries to take the gospel to faraway places like "Greenland's icy mountains," and "India's coral strand."... This hymn represented an earnest desire for Reginald, for he felt God was calling him as a missionary.... His desire was fulfilled in 1822, when, at age 40, he was appointed to oversee the Church of England's ministries in India.

Arriving in Calcutta, he set out on a 16-month tour of his diocese, visiting mission stations across India. In February 1826, he left for another tour. While in the village of Trichinopoly on April 3, 1826, he preached to a large crowd in the hot sun, and afterward plunged into a pool of cool water. He suffered a stroke and drowned.

It was after his death that his widow, finding his 57 hymns in a trunk, succeeded in publishing his "*Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Service of the Church Year.*" In this volume was the great Trinitarian hymn based on Revelation 4:8-11, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."

My Faith Looks Up to Thee

One of my favorite hymns that we sing in Job's Daughters is "My Faith Looks Up to Thee". Most of our religious music was written by English and European composers, so I was very pleased to learn that this favorite of mine was written by an American.

(Page 101, "Then Sings My Soul, 150 of the World's Greatest Hymn Stories" by Robert J. Morgan, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. 2003.)

...But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 1 Peter 4:13

In the early 1830s, Lowell Mason moved to Boston from Savannah, where for sixteen years he had worked in a bank while directing church choirs on

the side. In relocating to Boston, he wanted to focus exclusively on his musical interests. Soon he was directing three choirs, publishing hymns, compiling a songbook, and trying to get music education in the Boston public schools.

One day in 1832, he [met] Ray Palmer. Palmer, 24, was exhausted. For years, he had burned the candle on both ends, working as a clerk in a dry goods store, attending classes at Yale, teaching at a girl's school in New York City, and preparing for the ministry.

Now, Mason wanted Palmer to write for him, to compose some hymns for his projected hymnbook. Palmer, too tired to produce anything new, hesitatingly opened his little leather journal and showed Mason a poem he had written two years before. It was a personal prayer for renewed zeal and courage, composed in his rented room one night in 1830 when he had felt sick, tired, and lonely.

He later explained that he had wept that winter's evening upon finishing this poem: "The words for these stanzas were born out of my own soul with very little effort," he said. "I recall that I wrote the verses with tender emotion. There was not the slightest thought of writing for another eye, least of all writing a hymn for Christian worship."

After reading the words, Mason ducked into a nearby store for a piece of paper and hurriedly copied the poem. That evening in his studio, he hammered out the perfect tune for it. Shortly after, the two men met again and Mason told the young man, "Mr. Palmer, you may live many years and do many good things, but I think you will be best known to posterity as the author of 'My Faith Looks Up to Thee.'"

Lowell Mason was right. Ray Palmer did go on to do many good things and to write many fine hymns. But he is remembered by posterity for his first hymn, one written before he had even entered the ministry.

Onward Christian Soldiers

I was delighted to learn the history of this song. It isn't difficult to imagine young children tramping from one village to another in step with this 'marching' beat.

(Page 161, "Then Sings My Soul, 150 of the World's Greatest Hymn Stories" by Robert J. Morgan, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. 2003.)

... You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, Who is with you... 2 Chronicles 20:17

Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould was born in Exeter in 1834. His father, an officer with the East India Company, had a disabling carriage accident and

decided that if he couldn't work, he could at least travel. As a result, little Sabine was dragged from one end of Europe to the other, year after year. It gave him an unsettled childhood, spotty schooling, and a wanderlust he never outgrew. He later managed to scrape through Cambridge, but for the most part he is remembered as a brilliant, self-taught scholar. That helps explain why he developed certain eccentric habits. When he taught school, for example, he kept a pet bat on his shoulder.

From Sabine's...mind flowed an endless number of books, articles, poems, hymns....This particular hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers," was written on a Whitsunday's evening in the mid-1860s. Whitsunday is better known as Pentecost Sunday. It got its "nickname" because it became a popular day for new Christians to be baptized. The baptismal candidates marched to the rivers or fonts wearing robes of white. Thus it came to be called "White Sunday" or Whitsunday.

It was on this day in 1865, in the little town of Horbury, England, that Sabine stayed up late searching through hymnbooks for a martial-type hymn for children. The next day, Monday, all the village children were marching to the neighboring town for a Sunday School rally. Sabine wanted to give them a "marching song" for the trip. Searching his hymnals and finding nothing, he began scribbling on a piece of paper playing with words, dashing off lines until he had written a hymn of his own just for the occasion: "Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus, Going on before."

"It was written in great haste," he later said, "and I am afraid some of the rhymes are faulty. Certainly, nothing has surprised me more than its popularity."

Several of our greatest "adult" hymns were originally written or translated for children....for example,..."O Little Town of Bethlehem." Add "Onward Christian Soldiers" to that list, and visualize this eccentric preacher, singing in step, marching alongside the children – perhaps with a pet bat on his shoulder.

Now The Day is Over

From the study of Mrs. Mick's life, we know that she altered the words of this song and renamed it "Now Our Work is Over." At the conclusion of our time together, this song comes as a benediction upon our efforts.

(Page 159, "Then Sings My Soul, 150 of the World's Greatest Hymn Stories" by Robert J. Morgan, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. 2003.)

...When you lie down, you will not be afraid; Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Proverbs 3:24

Highly productive people have one thing in common – they know how to plunge into their work. Basketball star Jerry West said, “You can’t get much done in life if you only work on the days when you feel good.”

That was the attitude of British pastor Sabine Baring-Gould, author of “Onward Christian Soldiers.” In addition to shepherding his village church, teaching in the local college, dabbling in archaeology, publishing travelogues, and writing hymns, he wrote fiction. For many years he published a new novel annually. His novels have recently been republished in England and are finding a new generation of fans.

...He is primarily remembered in southwest England for his work as a collector of local folk songs. For years, he traveled through the west of England, visiting old people and recording the songs they remembered from childhood. In 1889, he published a remarkable book, “*Songs of the West*” which established him as an authority in the field of British folk music.

No one really knows how many other books and publications he penned. It was an astonishing number--at one time, he was responsible for more books in the British Museum Library than any other author. The ensuing income allowed him to travel, explore, compose poetry, raise a [large] family,...restore his vast estate, rebuild the old village church, and pursue his multitude of hobbies.

Sabine Baring-Gould declared that he often did his best work when he felt least inclined to apply himself to the task. Rather than waiting for inspiration, he plunged into his work and plodded on until it was finished. “The secret is simply that I stick to a task when I begin it,” he said. “It would never do to wait from day to day for some moments that might seem favorable for work.” Did his massive workload shorten his life? No, he lived to be ninety, and was buried in his own churchyard across the street from his estate.

“Now the Day is Over” is a fitting epitaph for this prodigious man. It was written for a vesper service in 1865, based on Proverbs 3:24, and is one of Church history’s classic “bedtime prayers.”