

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bq\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php)

# Some Baptist Hymnists.

## PART II.

[NOTE. It will add to the interest if readers turn to the hymns in books named. *B.C.H. Rvd.* is *Baptist Church Hymnal Revised*; *P. and H.* is *Psalms and Hymns.*]

### EIGHTEENTH CENTURY—*Concluded.*

A FEW other prominent writers of this period are worthy of note.

#### 3. SAMUEL STENNETT.

Duffield states that "for more than a century the succession of Stennetts enriched the ministry of the Baptist denomination in England."<sup>1</sup> A grandson of the Joseph Stennett already named was born in 1727 in the city of Exeter, where his father was pastor. When the lad—Samuel—was ten years old, the family removed to London. Here the father settled as minister of a Seventh Day Baptist chapel, in Little Wild Street, Lincolns Inn Fields, remaining there for thirty years. Samuel gave early evidence of possessing remarkable abilities. After a thorough course of training he became assistant-pastor until the father's death, when he was appointed his successor.

In course of time he proved himself to be a scholar and thinker; a keen controversialist; a linguist proficient in Latin, Greek and other languages; having also an extensive knowledge of oriental literature. His writings revealed him as a man of cultured mind, with power of original thought, and skill of writing with grace and purity of diction. After his death, his works were published in three volumes, with a Biography from which particulars of his career here given have been taken. In Rippon's *Register* he is thus described:

"To the strength of natural faculties, vigour of imagination, and acuteness of judgment, he had added, from his earliest years, so close an attention to reflection and study that there was scarcely a topic in science or literature, in religion, or even politics, but he seemed to have investigated."

While pursuing his ministry and literary work, he resided for some years in Hatton Garden, afterwards removing to Muswell Hill, then a pleasant rural retreat, where he died in

<sup>1</sup> See *English Hymns*, page 35.

1795. Most of his hymns were contributed to Dr. Rippon's Selection, 1787; two of them,

and  
On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,

Majestic sweetness sits enthroned,

attained wide popularity. Four others appearing in the Baptist *Psalms and Hymns* began :

Come, every pious heart,  
How charming is the place,  
How various, and how new,  
Where two or three with sweet accord.

Dr. Hatfield quotes six verses from one of Samuel Stennett's best hymns, of which the first two and the last two are printed here.

To God, the universal King,  
Let all mankind their tribute bring;  
All that have breath! your voices raise,  
In songs of never-ceasing praise.

The spacious earth on which we tread,  
And wider heavens stretched o'er our head,  
A large and solemn temple frame,  
To celebrate its Builder's fame.

\* \* \* \*

The listening earth with rapture hears  
Th' harmonious music of the spheres;  
And all her tribes the notes repeat,  
That God is wise, and good, and great.

But man, endowed with nobler powers,  
His God in nobler strains adores;  
His is the gift to know the song,  
As well as sing with tuneful tongue.

#### 4. ROBERT ROBINSON. Two Great Hymns.

About the middle of this century two great hymns appeared, the author of which was Rev. Robert Robinson, of Cambridge, whose dates were 1735-1790. They are generally acknowledged as belonging to the front rank of sacred verse; and, from early days up to the present time, have been included in Hymn Collections of Britain and America. Their importance justifies a lengthened notice of the author.

One was first entitled, "A Christmas Hymn," beginning,  
Mighty God, while angels bless Thee.

Rev. Garrett Horder, a notable and discriminating hymnologist, pronounced it to be "one of the most vigorous and distinctive hymns in the English tongue." An interesting story of its origin is related by Dr. Belcher in his *Historical Sketches of Hymns and their Writers*, dated 1859.

It was composed for the use of Benjamin Williams, deacon of the Baptist Church at Reading, who, when a boy, was a favourite of Robinson. One day the poet took the boy into his lap, and under the influence of that affectionate feeling which a child's love inspires, he wrote—

Mighty God, while angels bless Thee,  
 May an infant lisp Thy name?  
 Lord of men as well as angels,  
 Thou art every creature's theme.

So far the poet's mind seems to have been influenced by the child he was holding. But a warm glow of religious feeling was awakened within him, and the second stanza was one of remarkable fervour and power—

Lord of every land and nation,  
 Ancient of eternal days,  
 Sounded through the whole creation,  
 Be Thy just and lawful praise.

After completing the whole hymn, he read it to the child and put it playfully into his hand. Well do we remember the deep feeling with which Deacon Williams described to us the scene, as we sat with him by his own fireside.

Although Dr. Belcher in his book seems, at times, to draw upon his imagination for his facts, yet here so circumstantial are the details that the incident may be accepted as true. It is paralleled by other instances of hymns born in an inspired hour, and the use of the words in line two, "May an infant lisp Thy name?" confirms it. The word "infant" is now generally changed to "mortal," and "lisp" to "sing."

As to the second hymn, the official records of the Cambridge Church contain the following entry in a list that Mr. Robinson supplied, giving the titles of his various works.

Mr. Wheatley, of Norwich, published a hymn beginning, "Come, Thou fount of every blessing," since reprinted in the hymn-books of Messrs. Madan, Wesley, Gifford, &c., 1758.<sup>2</sup>

The controversy concerning the authorship of this hymn started by Daniel Sedgwick, who, for flimsy reasons, claimed Lady Huntingdon as its writer, is now looked upon as a curious instance of mistaken supposition. Usually, the hymn is printed in three eight-lined stanzas. The late Mr. W. T. Brooke, a tireless searcher into the original texts of hymns, points out that this "abbreviated form seems disjointed." He discovered what he affirms to be the first and complete version, consisting of six verses. Readers of this article may care to compare the

<sup>2</sup> See page 94 in *Select Works of Robert Robinson*, Bunyan Library, II.

ordinary form—found in the *B.C.H. (Rvd.)*, No. 425, or in other books—with the additions now given.

Verse 1 remains, though two or three lines have been changed from the original.

Verse 2 commences—

Sorrowing shall I be in spirit  
Till released from flesh and sin,  
Yet from what I do inherit  
Here Thy praises I'll begin;  
Here, I'll raise my Ebenezer, etc.

Verse 3 opens with the four lines,

Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
ending—

How His kindness yet pursues me,  
Mortal tongue can never tell,  
Clothed in flesh, till death shall loose me  
I cannot proclaim it well.

Verse 4 is the same as verse 3 in the *B.C.H. (Rvd.)*. Then follows—

5 Oh! that day when freed from sinning,  
I shall see Thy lovely face,  
Clothèd then in blood-washed linen  
How I'll sing Thy boundless grace;  
Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,  
Take my ransomed soul away,  
Send Thine angel host to carry  
Me to realms of endless day.

6 If Thou ever didst discover  
Unto me the promised land,  
Let me now the stream pass over,  
On the heavenly Canaan stand;  
Now destroy whate'er opposes,  
Into Thine embrace I'd fly,  
Speak the word Thou didst to Moses,  
Bid me, Lord, come up and die.

Mr. Brooke's comment is: "There can be no question as to the superiority of this fuller form, in which the hymn is a coherent whole." He discovered this version in a volume of Wesleyan hymn tracts, dating from 1747 to 1762, where, at the end, it is written in MS. with two other sets of verses, one from Whitefield's Collection, the other by James Allen.<sup>3</sup> He does not prove, however, that this is Robinson's own version. The lines may have been added to the original by an unknown writer.

ROBERT ROBINSON. Biographical Details.

The facts of Robert Robinson's career are found in three Biographies. The first, issued a few years after his death, was

<sup>3</sup> Verse 4, "Oh! that day," etc., also appears in the Angel Alley Collection, 1759.

by George Dyer, a member of his congregation and, at one time, a student under his guidance. The second, issued in 1804, was from the pen of Benjamin Flower, father of Sarah Flower Adams, and Editor of *The Cambridge Intelligencer*, also an attendant upon Mr. Robinson's ministry. The third, published in 1861, was a Memoir by Rev. Wm. Robinson, of Cambridge.

Briefly summarised, these facts are: born in Swaffham of poor parents; pupil in a "Latin School" in that place, and later in an endowed Grammar School at Mildenhall, where the master pronounced him to be "a youth of large capacity, uncommon genius, and of refined taste"; apprenticed in London, proving himself to be an omnivorous reader, studying early and late day by day; converted while listening to a sermon by Whitefield; after a long spiritual struggle, "found full and free forgiveness through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, Dec. 10th, 1755." Removing back to Mildenhall, he preached in churches of Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. At length, called to be Minister at Cambridge, married, preached on trial for two years, then, in 1761, was ordained as Minister, remaining in that office until the day of his death.

As to his character, his great love of children should be noted. An amusing account is preserved of his playful conversation with the little son of a friend in Hitchin. As the boy sprang upon his knee, Mr. Robinson began: "Well, Ebenezer, so you have taken your old seat; but how is it my other knee is unfurnished? Where's Michael?" This is mentioned because it throws light upon the story just quoted of his writing,

Mighty God, while angels bless Thee,

for a small boy's Christmas Hymn. He was eccentric, but his was the eccentricity of genius. A passionate lover of liberty and charity, he was broad in his sympathies; but there was little foundation for the accusations some have made that he was unorthodox in his religious opinions and held Unitarian beliefs. His sermons on "A plea for the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "The death of Jesus Christ obtained the remission of sins," combined with his own published statements as to his evangelical beliefs, make his position clear. His literary and intellectual powers are displayed in upwards of thirty volumes evidencing historical acumen and deep learning. He also achieved fame as one of the great preachers of his age. Robert Hall, his successor at Cambridge, composed a noble inscription for Robinson's Memorial Tablet, describing him as,  
The intrepid champion of liberty civil and religious, endowed with a genius brilliant and penetrating, united to an indefatigable industry; his mind was richly furnished with

an inexhaustible variety of knowledge; his eloquence was the delight of every public assembly, and his conversation the charm of every private circle. In him, the erudition of the scholar, the discrimination of the historian, and the boldness of the reformer were united in an eminent degree with the virtues which adorn the man and the Christian.

#### 5. SAMUEL MEDLEY.

Two men of the North next claim our attention. One is Samuel Medley, chiefly known as author of

Awake, my soul, in joyful lays,

No. 163 in *B.C.H. (Revd.)*. Born in 1738, he came of a good stock, his father being a Tutor and Schoolmaster (a friend of Sir Isaac Newton), who gave his son a sound education. The lad loved the sea, joined the Navy, rose to the position of Master's Mate, but retired after being severely wounded in a naval battle in 1759. Converted under the influence of his mother's father, helped by the preaching of George Whitefield and Dr. Gifford, he was baptised, joined Dr. Gifford's Church, married, took a post as Tutor in a Soho school, and became a preacher. He was called to a pastorate first in Watford, then in Liverpool, where under his ministry the cause so flourished that new premises had to be built.

In Liverpool he wrote verses to illustrate his sermons, but instead of following the usual custom of giving out two lines at a time for the congregation to sing, he had the hymns printed as leaflets. From 1786 to 1790 this plan held the field. Later, three editions of his compositions were published.

He was an earnest pastor, greatly beloved, but most of his hymns are now forgotten. They were only prose in rhyme.

Awake, my soul, etc.,

and

Mortals awake, with angels join,

are exceptions considered by Mr. Horder to be "of great spirit and much lyric force." Some readers may recall four other of Medley's productions included in our own *Psalms and Hymns* collection—

Father of mercies, God of love,  
Hear, gracious God, a sinner's cry,  
Now in a song of grateful praise,

and

Oh, what amazing words of grace.

#### 6. DR. JOHN FAWCETT. Blest be the tie.

The second man of the North was Dr. John Fawcett, of Wainsgate and Hebden Bridge, a man held in high honour

among Baptists of his day. From his Biography by Rev. John Parker, we learn that he was born in 1731 at Bradford, Yorkshire. When an apprentice sixteen years of age, he heard George Whitefield preach from John iii. 14. Henceforth, he became a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. In 1763 the Bradford Church of which he was a member sent him forth to preach, and he entered upon the pastorate at Wainsgate. Fourteen years later a new building was erected at Hebden Bridge, where he laboured until his Home-call in 1817. At his residence, Brearley Hall, and afterwards at Ewood Hall near by, he trained students. As an author he produced *The Devotional Family Bible* and several other prose works, *Poetic Essays*, and a book of 166 original hymns. The spirit of the man may be judged by two or three sentences culled from the preface to the latter volume, dated 1782: "I blush to think of these plain verses falling into the hands of persons of an elevated genius, and refined taste. To such, I know they will appear flat, dull and unentertaining. . . . If it may be conducive, under divine blessing, to warm the heart or assist the devotion of any humble Christian in the closet, the family, or the house of God, I shall therein sincerely rejoice, whatever censure I may incur from the polite world."

Renowned for his character and learning, he was invited to become Principal of Bristol College, but declined the call; but his ardent desire to promote the efficient training of ministers led him to found The Northern Education Society, known now as Rawdon College.

Generally, his hymns were of average quality. Those most widely used were:

How precious is the Book Divine,  
 Infinite excellence is Thine,  
 Praise to Thee, Thou great Creator (in part only),  
 Thus far my God hath led me on,

and

Thy way, O God, is in the sea.

The circumstances leading to the writing of his chief hymn, Blest be the tie that binds (*B.C.H. Rvd. No. 457*),

are not related in his Biography, but, as Canon Julian observes: "Failing direct evidence, the most that can be said is that internal evidence in the hymn itself lends countenance to the statement that it was composed under the circumstances given." Therefore, whether or not historical, the story as related by the fertile Dr. Belcher, with a few verbal changes, is here quoted for what it is worth.

When at Wainsgate, Dr. Fawcett was called to succeed Dr. Gill in London. Feeling drawn to accept, he preached his



farewell sermon. "Six or seven wagons were loaded with the furniture, books, etc. All this time the members of his poor church were almost broken-hearted, . . . men, women, and children clung around him and his family in perfect agony of soul. The last wagon was being loaded, when the good man and his wife sat down on the packing cases to weep. The devoted wife exclaimed, "Oh, John, John, I cannot bear this!" "Nor I either," said Fawcett; "nor will we go; unload the wagons, and put everything where it was before!" The people cried for joy. A letter was sent to London stating that it was impossible for him to come. And the good man buckled on his armour for renewed labours.

#### 7. DR. JOHN RYLAND.

One of the outstanding figures of this century was that of John Ryland, who lived from 1753 to 1825. As theologian, scholar, preacher, author, and administrator, he was pre-eminent. His father, John Collett Ryland, was minister, first at Warwick, then at Northampton. A man of learning, a past-master of the Hebrew and Greek tongues, he devoted his abilities to the thorough education of his children.

John's earliest knowledge of the Bible, however, was gained from his mother. From his own testimony we are enabled to see them both in the Warwick homestead. He sits at her knee before a parlour chimney-place, surrounded by Dutch tiles illustrating Bible incidents. He listens intently as she tells the stories pictured on the tiles, thus awaking in her small son a love for Scripture history.

The father, who eked out a meagre salary by fees from students trained in the Manse, must have used severer modes when teaching his children. Witness his amazing statement concerning the lad, dated August, 1764, when John was eleven years and seven months old.

"He has read Genesis in Hebrew five times through; he read through the Greek Testament before nine years old. He can read Horace and Virgil. He has read through Telemachus in French";

adding Pope's Homer, Dryden's Virgil, and Rollin's Ancient History as having been devoured by the youthful prodigy, besides other literature giving him a surprising knowledge of Pagan mythology! No wonder, therefore, that the gifted youth became a great scholar!

Later, we learn of his being converted and baptised; earnestly entering into church activities; training for the ministry under his father's guidance; and being approved by the

Church members as a preacher in 1771, when barely eighteen years of age.

During the next decade he taught in school; constantly preaching in Northampton and nearby villages; pursuing his classical and theological studies, till in 1781 he was ordained as Assistant-Pastor. Five years after, when the father removed to London, the son was chosen as sole Minister. His labours as a notable preacher and author, as a founder of the B.M.S. and, at a later date, its Secretary, as Pastor of the Church in Broadmead, Bristol, and President of Bristol Baptist College from 1793 to the day of his death, are familiar to students of Baptist history.

With all his learning and intellectual gifts, Dr. Ryland was a humble-minded and devout Christian. This is manifest in his hymns, especially in,

O Lord, I would delight in Thee. (*P. and H.*, No. 498.)

Of this he wrote: "I recollect deeper feelings of mind in composing this hymn than perhaps I ever felt in making any other." His simplicity and tenderness were revealed in the verses written at the request of Andrew Fuller's wife for her six-year-old daughter who lay at the point of death. The first two lines are,

Lord, teach a little child to pray,  
Thy grace betimes impart.

(*P. and H.* No. 950).

Daniel Sedgwick, the Hymnologist, reprinted ninety-nine of Dr. Ryland's hymns, prefacing the collection by a short Biography of the author. In addition to the two just named, the following are still found in certain collections:

When the Saviour dwelt below. (*B.C.H. Rvd.* No. 103.)

In all my Lord's appointed ways. (For Baptisms, *P. and H.* No. 706).

Sovereign Ruler of the skies. (*P. and H.* No. 508).

Rejoice, the Saviour reigns. (*Missionary, P. and H.* No. 204.)

Let us sing the King Messiah. (*Missionary, B.C.H. Rvd.* No. 526.)

## 8. MINOR HYMNISTS.

"Time would fail me to tell" of Edmund Jones, author of

Come, humble sinner, in whose breast,

a hymn once popular among Nonconformist churches; of John Fellows, a man much addicted to verse-writing, who brought out a volume of Baptismal hymns; of Robert Keene, author of

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord;

of Dr. John Rippon, compiler of hymnbooks; or of Joseph

Swain, Samuel Pearce, William Gadsby, and a host of lesser known hymnists who flourished in this century. Although pious men, their hymnic efforts have not survived; partly because the theological phrases used by them are now out of date, or their hymns were turgid and lacked poetic simplicity and grace, or were too introspective in character.

In the next article, hymnists of the nineteenth century will receive notice.

CAREY BONNER.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PUNCTUALITY. Method is the very hinge of business; and there is no method without Punctuality. Punctuality is important, because it promotes the peace and good temper of a family: the want of it not only infringes on necessary duty, but sometimes excludes this duty. The calmness of mind which it produces is another advantage of Punctuality: a disorderly man is always in a hurry; he has no time to speak to you, because he is going elsewhere; and when he gets there, he is too late for his business; or he must hurry away to another before he can finish it. Punctuality gives weight to character. "Such a man has made an appointment, then I know he will keep it." And this generates Punctuality in you; for, like other virtues, it propagates itself. Servants and children must be punctual where their leader is so. Appointments, indeed, become debts. I owe you Punctuality, if I have made an appointment with you; and have no right to throw away your time, if I do my own.

The original states that the foregoing was revised by JAMES UPTON, Minister of the Gospel, Church Street, Blackfriars Road (1785-1834), and particularly recommended to all Christians, with reference to their early, devout, and regular attendance on the worship of God.