

The Hymns of Katherine Sutton

THE appearance of *The Baptist Hymn Book* has once again brought into focus the subject of hymns, their use and their origin. As far as Baptists are concerned, historical research has done nothing to detract from regarding Benjamin Keach as the fountain-head of congregational hymn singing. Nonetheless, every fountain draws its supply from elsewhere and, before Keach, there were hymn-writers and hymn users and others who, though not actively engaged in hymn-writing themselves, encouraged others and brought their labours to light. One such encourager was Hanserd Knollys and recognition of his work is a fitting prelude to the main theme of this article.

We first come across Knollys in connection with the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey church in London, so called from its succession of pastors. From this Independent paedo-baptist church arose various Particular Baptist congregations, the parent church finally becoming what would now be regarded as a "Union" church of Baptist and Congregational loyalties. Knollys, as a member of the original church, became convinced of Believer's Baptism. He was pastor of one of the seceding churches but the secessions were obviously of a friendly nature for it was Knollys who baptized Jessey in 1645. Knollys lived through the troubled yet fruitful years of the seventeenth century, being implicated in the Fifth Monarchy movement. After the collapse of the Commonwealth government, the restoration of the monarchy and the subsequent execution of those who had put Charles I to death, the Fifth Monarchy men, under Venner, made the last desperate attempt to set up the Fifth Monarchy (i.e., the Kingship of Christ) by force. The rebellion was instantly and easily crushed. Knollys, along with a number of other Baptists, was held in custody for 18 weeks, being released at the time of the coronation of Charles II. When again threatened, Knollys went to Wales, then Lincolnshire and finally escaped with a party to Holland. His property in this country was confiscated. For a short time he was with his wife and two children in Germany, returning to England in 1664.

Knollys, along with Kiffin and Keach and four other ministers, was responsible for the calling together of the first Particular Baptist Assembly in 1689. Over 100 churches were represented and it is from this assembly that the idea came for a fund to maintain ministers and preachers and assist ministerial candidates in their

studies. It was another twenty-eight years before the Particular Baptist Fund was actually founded.

One of Knollys' earliest contributions to Baptist thought was his *Moderate Answer*, 1645, in which he followed Smyth in stating that the Church was built not upon the Covenant principle, whereby members agree to walk together in God's ways, but upon baptism. Faith, repentance, public testimony and baptism were the marks of the true entry into the Church. "Knollys died at a ripe old age, occupying his later years writing upon apocalyptic which had always interested him and infected his mind with Fifth Monarchy views." (Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, p. 110.)

A Fifth Monarchy Baptist, Anna Trapnell, produced *The Cry of a Stone* in 1654. This was a collection of prayers and spiritual songs from which it would appear that some sort of primitive hymnody was known in this movement which claimed Hanserd Knollys' interest.

Another close contact between Knollys and an early pioneer of hymn-singing was in the person of Thomas Tillam who was a member of Knollys' church and later founded the Baptist church at Hexham. Three hymns of his own appeared in a work published by him in 1657. These were "An Hymn celebrating the Lord's Sabbath, with joyful communion in the Lord's Supper . . .," "An Hymn in honour of the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost" and "That Hymn especially designed for the Sabbath" (Psalm 92).

It seems likely that Knollys would have had knowledge of, even if he had not given active support to, these efforts of Tillam and, later, Keach. Beyond doubt is the preface which he wrote to the publication of Katherine Sutton's works in 1663. We have already noted his presence in Holland during that year and it is almost certain that Katherine Sutton was a member of his church and went over to Holland with him.

The title page of Katherine Sutton's book reads as follows: "A Christian Womans Experiences of the Glorious Working of God's Free Grace. Published for the Edification of others, by Katherine Sutton, Luk. 24. 24 And they found it even so, as the Women had said. At Rotterdam Printed by Henry Goddaeus, Printer in the Newstreet. Anno 1663."

In his preface Hanserd Knollys commends this book not as a clear exposition of the Christian life but as the account of a sincere woman's experiences. He writes somewhat apologetically of the rather bad arrangement of the material but bids the reader remember the circumstances of the writer. He describes the work as a "Basket of Fragments of the Gospel." He commends Katherine Sutton's witness in her own family circle—her example of family prayers.

Knollys refers to the hymns contained in the book and brings the support of scripture to bear on the matter of singing, as well as praying, in the Spirit. He says this, however, "The singing of Psalms ought to be performed by a gift and the assistance of the spirit as well as prayer. Now as to take a book and read a prayer out of it or to say a prayer without a book, is not to pray in the Spirit, so to read a Psalm in a Book, and sing it, or to sing the Psalm without the Book is not to sing in the Spirit."

From this it would appear that Knollys approved only of unprepared, *ex tempore* prayer, and of hymn-singing, as we would say, on the spur of the moment. This would limit hymn singing to a solo voice and not permit of congregational singing. Katherine Sutton would have sung her hymns as solos. To Keach must still belong the credit for introducing a hymn book for public worship. To Katherine Sutton's publications we now turn.

Katherine Sutton commences the story by recounting her first contact with a religious meeting. She went not out of any love for the people of God but to watch what she could observe. The minister's text was *Romans 2 : 4, 5, 6* "or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee unto repentance : but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous Judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds." "Verily at this opportunity the dread of God did much smite upon my heart, that I had so long sinned against his patience and goodness." The experience was followed on the next night by a temptation to starve herself to death. "I then cast away my prayer book, for it did not reach my necessities, and I cried unto the Lord alone to teach mee (sic) to pray." Then followed a deep conviction of sin "with fears that I could not be a child of God" but the Lord upheld her. Two years passed. "In this time I was called by my friends into a dark corner of the land full of ignorance." Her friends persuaded her that she should get married. She married a God-fearing man. The differences between herself and her husband on spiritual things led to deeper prayer and searching of the scriptures. Various sermons and texts which proved of help are then listed and briefly commented upon : *John 1 : 2, 3*; *Heb. 6 : 5, 6*; *Mark 6 : 20*, etc. Her account reveals an introspective approach, refusing all comfort save that which would come when God was pleased to do so by the power of His Spirit. ". . . and a particular person was set on my heart to begge of God for, and in a short time the Lord was pleased to answer my desire in working a work of grace in that soul."

Going to live with a family (against her own wishes because there was antagonism to religion, but submitting to God's will) one

of the household was converted. The death of her child caused heartsearching as to her own state before God and whether the child was saved, but after six months she recovered her sense of assurance. "After this the God of comfort was pleased to withdraw and leave mee in a deserted condition." She learned the discipline of God's apparent desertion as a teaching against self-sufficiency. "Further while I was under that ministry, God was pleased to convince mee of the falsness of their Worship, which in that place was then used, and having an opportunity to go with others to communion (as they call it) I could not kneel as the rest did, but sat down as if I had kneeled : and as I there sat, it came upon my heart to think thus (as if it had been spoken to mee) why dissemblest thou a worship before the Lord, hee that commands thee to kneel there, may as well command thee to kneel at an Altar, (although at that time there was nothing known of setting up of Altars) which thing I made known to that Minister, and did warn him that if Altars should be set up, that he would not (for filthy lucre sake) kneell at them himself, nor compel others so to do : But he told mee he could not believe any such thing should be : but if it should bee so he promised mee he would not conform to them. But in a short time he found it too true, for Altars were reared up, and he poor man (contrary to his promise) did conform himself in that thing, and compelled others so to do : but the first time he did so, it pleased the Lord to smite him with a sore languishing disease, that he went out no more. . . . Soon after I was at the Christening of a child (as they call it) at which time God was pleased to convince mee of the evil and falseness of that piece of Worship also."

Following the use of a formal prayer on a national fast day, she withdrew from this congregation (quoting *Revelation* 22 : 18, 19 in support of her viewpoint), gave herself to prayer and fasting with some others, and finally moved house "to a place where I did enjoy the hearing of a good man preach, and had the sweet benefit of some private meetings." A period of spiritual joy and assurance followed, then one of temptations, but, believing in the prayer of Jesus Christ Who had prayed for her (*John* 15 : 17, 19), she recovered, and enjoyed further and fuller communion with God in His ordinances. The death of a child, a "distemper that my joynts and sinnews were by fits bound up" were her next misfortunes. The illness, however, departed while the congregation prayed for her.

She desired baptism. "Now that which made me willing to obey the Lord, in this Ordinance, was the command of Jesus Christ in *Mat.* 28 : 19 and *Acts* 10 : 48 and the example of Christ and the practice of the Apostles, and primitive Saints, together with the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost annexed (sic) thereunto."

A prayer for the pouring out of "his blessed Spirit upon mee "

was offered. "And after long seeking (especially one day) being very earnest and importunate with the Lord, after which I went out to walk, and on a sudden I was indued with the gift of singing, in such a way and manner as I had not been acquainted with before: and immediately this following song came in (as fast as I could sing it) as followeth: it was in the year 1655 in the Moneth (sic) of February.

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| <p>1 <i>Come home, come home, thy work is done, My glory thou shalt see; Let all the meek ones of the earth Come home along with thee.</i></p> <p>3 <i>Admire, admire, my love to thee, Which took thee from so low, And set thee in high places free, Where thou my love might'st know.</i></p> <p>5 <i>Let not the wicked know thy joy: But let my servants hear. What I have done for thee my love Since thou to mee drew'st near.</i></p> <p>7 <i>I will appear in my glory, and be a perfect light. Admire, admire, the thing that I will do, All nations shall it hear, and know What I am doing now.</i></p> <p>9 <i>All they that in high places sit, And takes their honours low, Shall be made tremble, quake and pine When they my justice know.</i></p> | <p>2 <i>Cast off the world, it is too base And low for thee to dwell; I have redeem'd thee from the pit, And lowest place of Hell.</i></p> <p>4 <i>Wing thou aloft, and cast thyself Into mine Arms of love; Look up, look up, and thou shalt see My glory is above.</i></p> <p>6 <i>My servants walk in clouds and begg They do not see my light: The day draws near, and will ap- pear, That I will shine most bright.</i></p> <p>8 <i>I will a habitation be To them that fear my name; They shall lie down in safty, and Give glory to the same.</i></p> <p>10 <i>Come hide, come hide, come hide with me. Come hide thee in the Rock; Come draw thy Comforts high from mee, I my treasures unlock.</i></p> |
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Immediately after this poem, she introduces her next: ". . . this following prophesye (sic) given in unto mee.

*Shall light appear, and darkness done away:
Shall sommers green be cloathed all in grey:
Shall a bright morning set in shadowes dark,
Oh! England, England, take heed thou dost not smart."*

She then records her conviction that God will afflict the nation, and a catalogue of its sins follows: sloathfulness, deadness, unfruitfulness, unbelief and idolatry in four forms: 1. Ways of worship, 2. "in respect also of resting upon duty, and so not resting upon Jesus Christ that Rock of Ages," 3. Covetousness, 4. Pride. She asks:

*"Didst thou not hear a voyce from on high,
Deny your selves (take up the crosse) or verily you shall die?"*

About 1658 to the best of her remembrance (having lost the original book) these words came :

*Awake therefore to righteousness,
The Lord is near at hand:
And will afflict now very sore
By sea and like by land.*

“This was again brought to mind in January 1662.” “And this seems to agree with, and is a further addition to what was given mee in before in the Year 1657 which is as followeth

*There is a time approaching near at hand,
That men shall be in fear by sea and land:
There is a time, there will be alteration;
And this same time doth hasten to this nation;
Let now my children hearken to my will,
And they shall see I will be with them still.”*

Suggestions for personal conduct are followed by numerous scriptural quotations concerning God’s judgment on, and dealings with a rebellious nation (the 8th century prophets naturally play a large part in this treatise).

*Oh, now my soull! give glory to the Lord.
For this rich mercy he doth thee afoard;
He made the heavens, and ordered every light;
He takes the hearts up of his people quite. (1658)*

“And as I was on a Journey this also was given in :

*When that this green shall blossome bear,
And birds shall pleasant sing;
Then shall there be a knell most sad,
In every place, heard ring.”*

Repeated “sickness of agues and feavours,” which continued throughout her life, led to a sense of sin at not having shared these prophecies with the Church. “I did declare something, but not so fully as I should: and indeed would have done fearing it would not be born, for which I was mourning before the Lord: and as I was mourning, I was put upon singing, as followeth :

*Cease thou thy mourning, and see thou dost praise,
For thou shalt do my will in all my wayes:
Thy work shall be praises now for to sing,
Because thou hast chosen Christ to be thy King.*

*Lift up your heads redemption draweth near,
Do not at all possess thy heart with fear:
Lift up your heads, and look to heaven high;
For God will make his people glorify.*

*Draw water from the wells that are so deep;
You shall drink flaggons of my love when others are asleep."*

The conviction to record her experiences of thirty years comes. She mentions that the two main periods of prophecy were in 1655 and 1658. "Then by his (God's) hand of providence I was removed again out of England into Holland." The original book was lost in the shipwreck. (It would appear that no lives were lost.)

A time of spiritual dryness: "Then this came in:

*Upon the fountain thou shalt live,
Fresh streams of love I will thee give:
Thou shalt be made all times to see,
There is a fountain flowes in mee."*

Further comments regarding spiritual truths, most of them extremely obvious, e.g., several paragraphs are devoted to quoting scripture in support of the truth that one can pray to God without words. She is concerned to emphasise that these teachings of the spirit come not of herself, but of God's Spirit. "And verily the more watchful I was against sin unto duty, the more of his divine presence was afforded." Persistence in prayer, especially in dry periods, leads to blessing, neglect of prayer to deadness. She commends family instruction by reading, prayer and catechising.

*As for the work of Babylon,
It is a mighty work, and strong:
But yet my power shall it compleat,
For my wisdom is mighty great:
They must sit still, behold my power,
Which worketh for them hour by hour.*

Then comes a plea not to delay in any leading of the Spirit, and not to neglect any Gospel ordinance and commandment of our Lord. Do not be discouraged to do duty "though never so weak." "Oh! let us be wary how we spend our precious time, for it hath a lock before, but none behind: I am of a fearful timorous spirit naturally, but I find it a great help to dash Babilons brats in the first rice." Next a sort of homily on the failure of works to justify, and one on "now the Spirit is Truth, light and love" consisting almost entirely of scriptural quotations. Her oft-repeated theme is the exhortation to offer praise and thanks to God. "Beware of evil thoughts, idle words and foolish jesting, for the sweet refreshing joy of the Lord is a thousand times better than all sinful mirth." "Sins of fleshly pride will bring God's Judgment." Following the theme of *Galatians* 5: 16^f, she closes with the example of *Daniel*.

The address to the COURTEOUS READER which follows expresses the hope that the setting forth of her experiences will be of

help to some if not to all. She herself is filled with much self-loathing but she believes to have been guided by God in the writing of these experiences. To testify that she has received the gift of singing as well as that of prayer, she presents a few of "those Hymnes and Spiritual Songs." "As I was waiting on the Lord, in that Ordinance of the Lord's Supper, this following short Hymne was immediately given in.

- 1 *O now my soul go forth with
praise
For God excepteth thee alwayes;
Thy life is bound up now in mee,
My precious death hath set thee
free.*
- 2 *This Testimony I thee give,
As this bread was broaken, so
was I,
That thou in mee mightest never
dye:
My blood doth justify the same,
That thou mayest praise my holy
Name.*
- 3 *My Covenant I have made with thee,
So that thou are now whole set free:
Sin nor Sathan cannot thee charge,
Because my love hath thee enlarg'd,
So sure as I am plas't above,
So sure art thou now of my love."*

"Another time I have been waiting on the Lord in breaking bread :
And soon after was given in this following :

- 1 *The Spring is come the dead is
gone,
Sweet streams of love doth flow:
There is a Rock, that you must
knock,
From whence these streams do go.*
- 2 *The Banquet's set, the King is
come,
To entertain his Guest:
All that are weary of their sins,
He waites to give them rest.*
- 3 *Then come, and take your fill of
love,
Here's joy enough for all.
And see our King so richly clad,
And give so loud a call.*
- 4 *Here's Wine without money or
price:
Here's milk to nurish babes:
You may come to this banquet
now,
And feede of it most large.*
- 5 *Then comfort you your selves in him;
Tis sweet to see his love,
That they, that are redeemed by him,
May live so free above."*

"And while the afflicting hand of God was upon mee in some measure, this following was given in one evening, as a song of instruction.

- 1 *Afflictions are not from the dust,
Nor are they in vain sent:
But they shall work the work of
him,
That is most nobly Bent.*
- 2 *Then let thine eyes look upon
him,
Which worketh in the dark:
And let thine heart imbrace his
love,
Least thou from him should'st
start.*

- 3 *Although thou canst not see his work,
Yet waite on him with joy:
For none shall hinder now his work,
Nor none shall him Anoy.*
- 4 *Thou must be willing to take up
The cross, to follow him,
And waite till he will make his cup,
To flow up to the brim.*
- 5 *Seeing thou art now called unto
The purpose of his will,
Let not afflictions trouble thee,
Believe, and stand thou still.*
- 6 *If that the Lord did not thee love,
He would not this pains take,
To let thee see his grace in thee,
And also thee awake.*
- 7 *It scowers away the drosse from thee,
And takes away thy tinne:
It makes thy soul fit for to hear
The voice of thy sweet King.*
- 8 *It makes the soul further to know
The Sonship of his grace,
And weanes the soul from things below,
That it may seek his face.*
- 9 *It puts the wise to see his work,
And puts him in the way,
That he may forthwith seek the Lord,
Without further delay.*
- 10 *It makes him now resolve upon
Obedience to his grace;
And watchful in the way he goes,
That he may seek his face.*
- 11 *It makes him look for strength from God,
To heale his sliding back:
It makes him look up to the Rock,
For that which he doth lack."*

Nov. 20, 1656.

- 1 *Zion is God's precious plant,
The Lord will watter it every day:
Oh! Zion is God's holy one,
It shall not whether nor decay.*
- 2 *Zion is that fenced wall,
A Tower that none shall throw down:
O! Zion is that glorious hold
That God will keep both safe and sound.*
- 3 *Zion is that pleasant Plant,
That God will hedge about each hour;
O! Zion is God's heritage,
And he will keep it by his power.*
- 4 *Therefore let not thy heart now faint,
For Zion's sake hold not thy peace;
For our God will hear Zion's Plaint;
Therefore give thy God now no rest,
Till thou with Zion he hath blest.*
- 5 *Let Zion know her time drawes near,
She may look up now without fear:
Let Zion know her God doth live,
That hath her portion for to give.*
- 6 *Let Zion's children now rejoyce,
And let them praises sing:
O! let them lift up pleasant voyce,
In honour to their King.*

- 7 *Let Zion know her God is true,
That will her mercies now renew,
She shall receive great things
from him,
Who is her glory, and her King.*
- 9 *Our King shall reign in right-
eousness,
His glory shall shine forth;
He will come forth in Judgment
then,*
For his poor saints comfort.*
- 11 *Then let my people quiet sit,
And wait on him with joy;
There is a time drawes near at
hand,
Nothing shall them Anoy.*
- 8 *Although afflictions should hold
on,
And troubles should arise;
Yet God will own his precious
one,
Their prayers he'll not despise.*
- 10 *Our King shall reigne in glory
then,
He shall himself come up,
His enemies then shall fall with
speed,
And be made but a puff.*
- * For the confirmation hereof do
ye mind these two Scriptures:
Esai 45: 13 and Psalm 89: 19.

- 1 *The poor then of the flock shall find a rest,
And I their God, and portion, will them bless
And they shall to me for a refuge fly,
And I will be their helpe continually.*
- 2 *Then shall their souls alone in mee rejoyce,
That I have made of them my onely choice;
I will fill them in that day with my power,
So shall they wait on me then every hour.*
- 3 *Their soul shall be as watered plants with dew,
And I my mercy will to them renew;
Their beasts shall be engaged with my love,
For I will move in them from power above.*
- 4 *This is the portion that I now will give,
Unto all those that strifes humbly to live;
Therefore rejoyce in God your onely guide,
Which in this day of trouble will you hide.*

- 1 *Awake, awake, put on my strength,
And mine owne comelyness,
Look upon mee for I have
Wrought thy deliverance.*
- 3 *I waited long on thee, to see,
When thou wouldst mee imbrace,
And when thou wouldst look up
to mee,
To see my glorious face.*
- 2 *Thou art black but comely in
Mine eyes, that doth behold,
Thee swearing mine own right-
eousness,
Which glory cannot becould.*
- 4 *And now, what say'st thou unto
mee?
Have I not done thee good?
And have not spar'd to set thee
free,
Mine own Son's pretious blood.*

- 5 *Therefore let all thy life be now,
A sacrifice of praise,
And let my holyness give up
Thy self in all my wayes.*
- 6 *Let not the World so sad thy
heart,
Nor cast thee down so low,
For if thou wait upon my grace,
My secrets thou shalt know.*
- 7 *Be watchful, and keep close to
me,
Thy Garments: do not staine;
And that will be to thy poor soul,
A certain heavenly gain.*
- 8 *Take heed of glorying in my
love—
But walk humbly and low,
For it is onely my fulness,
That makes thee thus to flow.*
- 9 *There is by pathes to wander in,
That Sathan would advance,
But I will keep thee in my power,
And be thy deliverance.*
- 10 *Be watchful and keep close to
mee,
My Garments do not soyl,
For they are thine to cover thee;
Be watchful the a while.*

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- 1 *Oh! where shall I find now
A people quicken'd still,
That seek all times to live on God,
And eek to do his will.*
- 2 *A people that deny themselves,
And eek the cross up take,
That doth delight in God alone,
And eek the World forsake.*
- 3 *A people that abhor themselves,
And over their sins weep,
A people mourning o'er the land,
And doth him dayly seek.*
- 4 *A people that believes in God,
By faith drawes vertue still;
Lay hold on promise which is true,
Contented with his will.*
- 5 *A people that the world esteem,
Keeping close there dayly,
And for a rule the same to take,
When others from it fly.*
- 6 *Their hearts are fastened on the
Lord,
They for a refuge fly,
That God would now help by his
power,
In their extremity.*
- 7 *Their cries are now unto the Lord,
They seek in him to hide,
To take of now his heavy hand,
And let not wrath abide.*
- 8 *With such a people would I spend,
My life and days now here:
Oh! think upon thy servant, Lord,
And to me now draw near.*

“I assure you Courteous Reader these are not studied things, but are given in immediately.”

It was at Dr. Payne's request that research into the contents of Katherine Sutton's book was undertaken. To him I am indebted for the suggestion of an account of Hanserd Knollys preceding the account of Katherine Sutton and for much of the information about Knollys himself. Readers familiar with Dr. Payne's chapter in the *Baptist Hymn Book Companion*, “Baptists and Their Hymns,” will recognise the quotations concerning Thomas Tillam.