

The Psalms and Hymns Trust and “Praise for Today”

The Psalms and Hymns Trust is a most unusual combination of a publishing business and a charity. Its story and its work are comparatively little known outside its own Trustees, apart from the fact that people see its name at the foot of the title page of their hymn book. Yet it has had a spiritual and financial importance for Baptists here and overseas out of all proportion to its size.

At what is now a new stage in its history, as we shall see, a summary of its story and work ought to be put on record in the pages of the *Baptist Quarterly*. Many of the Trust's records were destroyed in the blitz on London in the Second World War, but facts have been pieced together from other records and from the memories of people. When its centenary was reached in 1960 I published for the Trust a short history, but this was only produced in a small edition, is now out of print, and in any case it could only look forward to the publication of *The Baptist Hymn Book* and not speak of the outstanding results of its publication.

Set out briefly the work of the Trust stems from the early individual hymn books of the denomination. Readers will know how Benjamin Keach introduced hymn singing to his church at Horsley Down in London in 1673. In 1691 he produced *Spiritual Melody*, a book of nearly 300 hymns (some of them very poor), the first general hymn book (as distinct from psalms) to be used by any congregation, established or dissenting. Other ministers followed with collections some of which achieved fame beyond their locality (see *Baptists And Their Hymns*, by Dr. Ernest Payne in *The Baptist Hymn Book Companion*). Probably the most famous of these collections was made by a Particular Baptist, Dr. John Rippon. His *Selection of Hymns*, including many of the best of Watt's hymns, was published in 1787, a tune book four years later. This hymn book with some revisions went into 30 editions. When a revision called *The New Selection* was published in 1828 the book was so successful that a new procedure was adopted—a share of the profits was devoted to aiding widows and orphans of Baptist ministers and missionaries (this came to about £180 yearly). This was to have a great influence on the Trust soon to be formed.

About 1855 it was discovered that John Haddon, the printer of the book mentioned above, was collecting together material for a new hymn book. It was also learned that Haddon was in financial difficulties and was selling the collection to a Bristol leather merchant, a Baptist named Thomas Waterman. But a number of BU, BMS and College personalities thought the time had come for an “official” hymn book.

They raised some money and bought the collection for £650. Hymns were added by Dr. S. G. Green, Rev. J. P. Chown and others, and it was determined to form a Trust to publish the book. John Haddon had proposed to call it *Psalms and Hymns*. The group agreed to use the name for both the book and the Trust. *Psalms and Hymns* was published in 1858 (John Haddon was allowed to print it), but it was not until 1860 that a Trust was formulated and signed by 28 ministers and laymen of prominence in the denomination. At first the book sold slowly for other collections retained their popularity. In time it grew in favour, and on the 21st anniversary of the Trust it was disclosed that over 900,000 copies of the large words edition had been sold, and were in use by Baptist churches here, in Jamaica and India. (When *The Baptist Hymn Book* was launched in 1962 it was discovered that fourteen churches in the British Isles still used *Psalms and Hymns*!) The original selling price for the large type words edition was 1s 8d.

The first Chairman of the Trustees was Dr. Richard Glover. Other chairmen, in order were, Mr. John Chown, Mr. Herbert Marnham, Dr. Charles Brown, Dr. P. W. Evans, Dr. M. E. Aubrey, Rev. R. L. Child and today Dr. L. G. Champion. Trustees in every generation have included some of the well known personalities in BU and BMS circles. The first secretary was Mr. J. E. Tressider, then Mr. J. Templeton. Mr. H. W. Pewtress served from 1890-1934, Mr. C. H. Parsons from 1934-1958, and I followed him (undertaking the work part-time along with the duties of Asst. General Secretary of the BU). On my retirement from that office I have continued the work from my retirement home at Loughborough. A small and devoted staff of three in an office in Baptist Church House undertake the routine work of receiving orders, keeping the books, seeing the parcels through the dispatch department of the BU; and I undertake the non-routine work from home and keep in daily touch with the office, visiting it regularly.

The original Trust was eventually redrawn. In 1900 the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland asked for a new hymn book and a new deed was drawn up in which it was agreed that the Trust should have the sole right of publishing Baptist hymn books for the denomination on the understanding that the profits (after putting aside reserves for the next book) should be divided as to 2/3rds for the help of widows and orphans of Baptist ministers and missionaries, and 1/3rd for the Baptist Union Sustentation Fund (now the Home Mission Fund). In 1925 because of tax difficulties a small Subsidiary Charity was set up to receive and handle the profits, the Trustees being three appointed by the BU and three by the BMS. For many years the Rev. B. Grey Griffith was chairman of this subsidiary, then the Rev. Henry Bonser and today Dr. Ernest Payne.

The Trust has always believed that most standard hymn books have an effective life of about 30 years, for whilst many hymns stand the test of time and express eternal truths in terms which always remain relevant, every generation needs and produces new hymns whose style, expressions and themes speak more directly to that generation. Therefore apart from a number of small books for special purposes (for

instance, *Psalms and Hymns* was abbreviated into a Sunday School edition in 1882, and sold for 2d), the Trust has produced three other major hymn books—*Baptist Church Hymnal*, 1900; *Baptist Church Hymnal (Revised)* 1933; and *Baptist Hymn Book*, 1962.

By the end of its life *Psalms and Hymns* had sold 2,900,000 copies. *The Baptist Church Hymnal* had a sale of approximately 1½ million copies. *The Baptist Church Hymnal (Revised)* sold well over a million copies.

The Baptist Hymn Book, published in 1962, proved an outstanding success. In Scotland it was produced for the Scottish BU by the Trust in a special edition bound up with the *Psalter*, English speaking churches in Wales adopted it, almost every Baptist church in England, Australia, New Zealand now uses it; and the churches of Jamaica are fast going over to it. Many musicians beyond the denomination have bought and use the music edition; a famous public school in England uses it for its choir.

To date over £150,000 has been given to Widows and Orphans, and over £60,000 to the BU.

The Trustees began to feel, two years ago, that changes have been so rapid in modes of worship during the past twelve years, and so many new hymns written on contemporary themes that a supplement to the BHB should be prepared. Young people, and older people, had become familiar with many of the new hymns through schools, radio and TV, and the Trustees were under some pressure from ministers, organists and youth leaders to collect together the best of these recent hymns and religious folk songs. The Trustees therefore appointed a selection committee under the chairmanship of the Rev. Eric Sharpe, with myself as secretary, with power to prepare not a major hymnal but a supplement of about 100 recent hymns. The committee was representative of ministers, musicians, youth leaders, laymen and women, and included Mr. Alistair Stewart (Secretary of the Scottish Baptist Music Society). It was a larger and more representative committee than had ever been used before by ourselves, or probably any other denomination for this purpose. Following an announcement or two in the *Baptist Times* hundreds of letters were received from all over Britain, and from the Commonwealth, suggesting hymns for inclusion and in some instances including original compositions. The committee had a very difficult task studying through these letters and the many public and private collections of hymns published since 1962. Finally 104 hymns were chosen; some which we wanted to include had to be left out because permission to use them was refused. Virtually all were under copyright. Fees for use will amount to £2,250, in spite of the fact that a number of authors and composers here and in the Commonwealth generously waived any fee.

The hymns chosen come from Britain, Australia, Canada, USA and Asia. 31 hymns and 51 tunes have never appeared in any hymn book. 5 Baptist authors and 22 composers are represented. 71 hymns are of traditional style, 11 of the "folk song" type, and 22 fall somewhere between. In answer to requests some fine new hymns for Christmas,

Easter, Harvest and Communion have been included—as many as seemed right in a small book. This would appear to be the right time to produce a supplement, as many feel the need for such a collection, and many advance orders have been received, and much interest shown in Australia and New Zealand. On the other hand, from the point of view of rapidly rising printing, and binding costs, and the current shortage of paper it has given the secretary many headaches. However, the cost has been kept as low as possible.

This book of 104 hymns, most of which were written in recent years, is intended as an up-to-date supplement to the regular hymn book of a church. The contents cover the normal themes of a larger hymn book, with particular emphasis upon the person and work of Christ; the Church's mission and unity; and the Christian life. There are new hymns for Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Communion. A number of hymns are suitable for children. Guitar chords make the book specially useful for youth groups. The book has an attractive cover in three colours.

The Trustees and the Selection Committee, trust that this supplement will add to the Church's praise for today.

Publication day is expected to be at the end of October 1974.

RONALD W. THOMSON.

Praise for Today

RETAIL PRICES: Music Edition: 70p.
Melody Edition (with guitar chords also): 45p.

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