

The Music Herald

“Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

Colossians 3:16

A Person Unknown

It is only fitting that we follow last month's article on Isaac Watts with an article on his great admirer and follower, John Rippon.

John Rippon was born on April 29, 1751, just three years after Watts had died. His life early evidenced genuine conversion, and he early manifested a desire to serve the Lord in the Gospel ministry.

By the young age of twenty, he had finished his studies in that direction, and in God's providence, a pulpit was immediately open and available to him. Just a few months before, the venerable pastor of Carter Lane Baptist Church in London, John Gill, had gone to be with his Lord. Gill had been the pastor of Carter Lane for over fifty years, a Particular Baptist church also called by the colorful name the Horse-Lie-Down Church. Now, in the absence of their longtime pastor, who was to many in the congregation the only pastor they had ever known, the congregation asked young Rippon to preach for them. After a year of doing so, Rippon was asked if he would be their new pastor.

It was quite a responsibility and at the same time quite a privilege to take the place of such a man as Gill. Gill's sermons and writings filled volumes, including a truly remarkable contribution, a verse-by-verse exegetical commentary on the whole Bible. To this day his writings are still invaluable aids to students of the Bible. But God's grace was to be with Rippon just as it had been with Gill. He would be the pastor of that church until his own death sixty-three years later, and he, like Gill, would make invaluable contributions through his pen.

It was in 1787, fourteen years after he became the pastor, that Rippon published his great work, modeled off of Watts' work. For years, Rippon had admired Watts' work. He agreed wholeheartedly with Watts that congregational singing was in a deplorable state and needed to be revived. Along with Watts and Gill, Rippon was one of the early advocates of hymns, in contrast to the exclusive Psalmody that was the standard of the day. He said of Watts' Psalms and hymns, *“They appear to me better adapted to public worship, than any other book which I have seen . . . I do, with the greatest pleasure, rank among their warmest admirers.”*

Rippon's own work is a manifestation of his zeal in this cause. It was called by the lengthy title *“A Selection of Hymns from the best Authors, including a great Number of Originals, intended as an Appendix to Dr. Watts' Psalms and Hymns.”* It is commonly called *“Rippon's Selection.”*

In this book, Rippon endeavored to carry on the work that Watts had begun. There were areas of the Christian life that he believed had not yet been covered in hymn form, so he took that task upon himself. He set about collecting, editing, and even writing new hymns in order to fill up what was lacking and to provide a more complete body of hymnody. The result was this book of 588 hymns.

Indeed, his work has been abundantly successful. Many of the hymns that appeared for the first time in this collection are still sung and loved today. Few knew it then due to his modesty, but many of these were of his own writing, or at least his own editing. In his preface, he writes that the hymns that have no author's name given were *“composed by persons unknown.”* It is now known that one of these *“persons unknown”* was himself. And even today, it is still unknown just how many of the unattributed hymns are from his own pen. One of the ones that is almost assuredly his is given on page 4 of this newsletter.

Out of this book have come some of the most beloved hymns of all time. Rippon edited and altered the hymn *“All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name,”* which is sung the world over. The last stanza so well known today, which begins *“O that with yonder sacred throng,”* was written entirely by him. And the timeless hymn *“How Firm a Foundation”* had its first printing in this book. Lord willing, next month, we will devote a whole newsletter to this hymn alone, perhaps the most precious jewel to come out of Rippon's collection.

Almost one-fourth of Rippon's collection was made up of original hymns, but in the rest of the book, he also preserved and passed on hymns that were not entirely new. Here is a list of some of our most beloved hymns that were printed in his book and thereby passed to our generation. Due to the influence that this collection has had on successive hymnals, it is quite possible that many of these are known today largely because they were included in this book: *“Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,” “Rejoice, the Lord Is King,” “There Is a Fountain Filled With Blood,” “On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand,” “Rock of Ages,” “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow,” “Jesus Lover of My Soul,” “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness” (altered), “Jesus and Shall It Ever Be,” “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken,” “Awake, My Soul, in Joyful Lays,” “Bless'd Be the Tie That Binds,” “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” and “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus.”*

"*Rippon's Selection*" enjoyed amazing success. In 1792, five years after it was first published, it had its first American printing and became very popular there. In 1800, its tenth British edition was published, enlarged by 60 hymns. In 1827, the 27th edition was already necessary, which was also enlarged. By this time, 200,000 copies were in circulation in the British Isles, besides those that were in America, which had had a second edition in 1813.

To go with his "Selection," Rippon published a companion book of tunes four years after the texts, in 1791, containing 320 tunes. This book, called "*A Selection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes*," was put together by Rippon's precentor, Robert Keen. These tunes also, like the texts, have been remarkable for the great number that have endured in common use since their first printing here, about one-third.

This tune book also gives us some interesting insight, for the tune names in it reveal key men and churches in the movement to introduce hymns and to improve congregational singing. For example, Benjamin Beddome, author of 822 hymns who was a Baptist pastor in Bourton, is commemorated in this tune book with the tune "*Bourton*." Another tune, "*Maze Pond*," is named for a congregation with an interesting story; Abraham West became their pastor only after the congregation agreed to sing hymns.

The tune "*Tooley Street*" is named for the first church to sing hymns. This church is none other than Rippon's own church before Gill's ministry and before its name became Carter Lane. Under the name Tooley Street, the congregation in the late 1600s, while Watts was but an infant, had been encouraged to adopt the singing of hymns by their then pastor, yet another eminent man named Benjamin Keach. Rippon's church in his own time is commemorated with the tune "*Carter Lane*."

In 1801, Rippon made another major contribution to hymnody. Here we get a further picture of his love and admiration for Watts. Rippon had spent years collecting and poring over all the editions of Watts' books that he could find, seeking the most accurate version of every Psalm and hymn, paying particular attention to what he called "*the Doctor's own Editions*." He said, "*I have gone through more than Ninety printed volumes of Hymn-Books, Hymns, Psalms, &c. attentively perusing all the collections I could obtain in this country and from America*." Indeed, in his day, he was the supreme authority on Isaac Watts. The result was the most accurate edition of Watts' work that has ever been published, "*An Arrangement of the Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.*"

It was also Rippon who completed "*An Index of all the Lines in Watts' Hymns and Psalms*" in

1810, making it a much easier task to locate Watts hymns. This index remains an invaluable tool today.

Rippon at last closed his eyes on this world on December 17, 1836. He was eighty-six years old and had pastored his church for sixty-three years. Thus, together, the ministries of Gill and Rippon spanned a remarkable 117 years. At his death, Rippon was no longer "*a person unknown*," but known and loved by Christians on both sides of the Atlantic.

But in his own eyes, he was but a small contributor in the whole of Christ's church. He wrote very humbly in the preface of his Selection, "*I am not so vain as to suppose, that these materials would not have appeared to greater advantage, if they had passed through other hands*." He calls his collection simply "*a sheaf of gratitude . . . presented by an affectionate pastor to his affectionate people*."

Three years before Rippon died, in 1833, he had moved his church and renamed it the New Park Street Chapel. It would be under this name that this church, having been pastored by such eminent men as Keach, Gill, and Rippon, would one day gain a further distinction when it would call a new pastor by the name of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a truly remarkable legacy for a church. Under Spurgeon, it would have yet another name change to that of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

"*Rippon's Selection*" remained the hymnal used by this church until 1866. In that year, Charles Spurgeon compiled a new hymnbook that contained the choice pieces from both Watts and Rippon, thereby carrying on both men's vision, preserving the best work of both men, and finally uniting these likeminded men in a single volume. It was called "*Our Own Hymn Book*." Still today, a book modeled off of this one, containing both Watts and Rippon, is used in that church.

Rippon's body was buried in Bunhill Fields, the burial ground for dissenters, just as Isaac Watts' body had been almost ninety years earlier. Together at last in the presence of Christ, the two hymnists no doubt joined in singing new praises to Him whom they had so loved to praise on earth.

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- L. Russ Bush & Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999.
 Edwin F. Hatfield, *The Poets of the Church*, New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Company, 1884.
 Guye Johnson, *Treasury of Great Hymns and Their Stories* Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 1986.
 HistoricHymns.com
 Hymnary.org
 Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003.
 Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1982.
 W. T. Whitley, "The Tune Book of 1791," *The Baptist Quarterly*.

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

This hymn has become a universal favorite. Edward Perronet, of French Huguenot descent, wrote it in 1779. Originally it had eight stanzas. Rippon, however, removed three of them and added two of his own composition, stanzas five and seven with the headings "Sinners of every age" and "Ourselves." The last stanza has become permanently attached to this text and has been more enduring than some of Perronet's original stanzas.

Rippon also altered several of the other stanzas. For example, stanza four originally read, "Sinners, whose love can ne'er forget." Rippon changed this address to a command not to forget. In doing so, he also corrected the mechanics of the poetry so that the accented syllable of the

word "sinners" now matched the accented syllable of the poetic rhythm.

The stanzas in brackets were in this way marked by Rippon as the stanzas that could best be omitted if a shorter hymn was needed for a particular occasion.

Notice also that the name "Jesus" in this version is instead "Jesu."

"Miles's Lane" is the tune to which Rippon and, indeed, most English churches sang this hymn in that day. It is still found in most hymnals today as an optional tune for this text.

The title given here for this hymn is that found in Rippon's book, as is also the verse from Song of Solomon. All the headings are Rippon's, and the emphases with italics are also his. This is the hymn as it was known in that day.

The Spiritual Coronation

*Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon
with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals,
and in the day of the gladness of his heart. -- Cant. 3:11.*

Edward Perronet, Alt. John Rippon

William Shrubsole

Maestoso
Miles's Lane C. M.

1. All hail the pow'r of Je - su's name! Let an - gels pros - trate fall: Bring forth the roy - al

Slow

Crown him, Crown him, Crown him Lord of all.
di - a - dem, And crown him, Crown him, Crown him, Crown him Lord of all.
Crown him, Crown him Lord of all.

1. Angels

All hail the power of *Jesu's* name!
Let angels prostrate fall:
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown him *Lord* of all.

2. Martyrs

[Crown him ye martyrs of our *God*,
Who from his altar call;
Extol the stem of Jesse's rod,
And crown him *Lord* of all.]

3. Converted Jews

[Ye chosen seed of Israel's race,
A remnant weak and small;
Hail him who saves you by his grace,
And crown him *Lord* of all.]

4. Believing Gentiles

Ye Gentile sinners, ne'er forget
The wormwood and the gall;
Go — spread your trophies at his feet,
And crown him *Lord* of all.

5. Sinners of every age

[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.]

6. Sinners of every nation

Let every kindred, every tribe
On this terrestrial ball,
To him all majesty ascribe,
And crown him *Lord* of all.

7. Ourselves

O that, with yonder sacred throng,
We at his feet may fall;
We'll join the *everlasting* song,
And crown him *Lord* of all.

