

Chapter 2: A Community Without Music

The Christadelphian community was without music in two areas. Firstly, they did not have their own specific hymn book. Instead compilations were produced in individual ecclesias. Secondly, the early publications that were sold for wider use were words only editions and did not contain any music. The development of the concept of a Christadelphian hymn book came from many areas at the same time. The religious movement had its beginnings in 1848 when Dr John Thomas (1805-1871) founded a group in America known as the Thomasites. Through his travels and his magazines, Thomas brought together a community with similar beliefs in countries such as America, Scotland and England⁷. From these early days, the community searched for music that would suit their worshipping purposes. Prior to the publication of the first *Christadelphian Hymn Book* in 1869, various hymnals and hymn books sprung up in each of these countries as the need presented itself. Some of the compositions and texts contained in these early books have survived through to today, while some books mentioned in Christadelphian histories cannot be found at all.

Singing was an important part of worship practices in Christadelphia from an early stage. Thomas had written in 1847:

“as to singing, when the matter is scriptural, the music good, and heart attuned to Praise, it is a most delightful, soul inspiring and reviving exercise - a spiritual sacrifice of fragrant odour to the Lord”⁸.

In Benjamin Wilson’s preface to his hymn book (America, 1860), he wrote of the significance of singing:

“To sing the praises of the Lord is one of the most pleasing and sublime exercises of social worship. To sing with ‘the spirit and the understanding’, to ‘praise the name of God with a song’, ‘to sing of the mercies of the Lord’, ‘to sing of his power and righteousness’, and ‘to abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness’, pertain to the Christian even in the present state; and, if properly engaged in, will act as preparative for joining in that nobler ascription of praise to God and the Lamb, which will be sung in the coming age . . .”⁹

The first hymns used by Christadelphians were taken from many other religions. In the Halifax ecclesia, England, for example, in 1857, members had come from General Baptists, Episcopalians, Unitarians, Campbellites and Wesleyans and brought their respective hymns¹⁰. However a lot of these hymns had been considered unsuitable for the changed doctrines of the

⁷ Thomas’ magazines included *Apostolic Advocate* (1834); *The Investigator and Independent Advocate of Truth* (1842); *Herald of the Future Age* (1845); *Herald of the Kingdom* (1851).

⁸ Thomas, John. *The true spirit in singing. The Voice of Truth*. (First quarter, 1986) 2.

⁹ Wilson, Benjamin. *Preface to Sacred Melodist*. As quoted in Thomas’ *Notices of Books. Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come*. Vol X, No 7, July 1860, 168

¹⁰ Wilson, Andrew R. *The history of the Christadelphians: 1864-1885. The emergence of a denomination*. Shalom: Sydney, 1985, 24.

Figure 1. John Thomas, from an engraving by N. Fowler, New York, 5th October, 1847¹¹.



new community. An earlier hymn book in England (unpublished) used in Birmingham consisted of:

“a dozen or so hymns collected and stitched together by a worthy old man named Truman, who has since gone to his rest. These were millennial and fairly scriptural in character, but were so soiled with the current theological taint as to be quite unfit for the use of enlightened believers of the Scriptures, as well as being too limited for regular use”¹².

The millennial character mentioned above is one of the most important textual features of Christadelphian hymns. The new doctrines of the community included the teachings of the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth to set up a Godly kingdom. Many of the hymn texts of other religions did not stress the importance of this doctrine, so new texts had to be found or written.

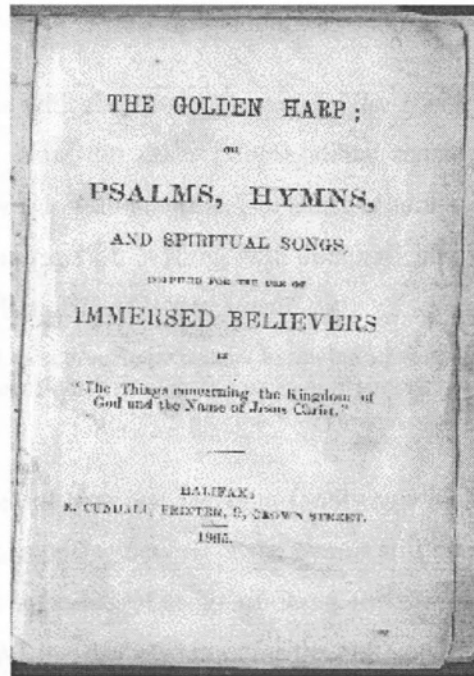
In England, the editor of the *The Ambassador of the Coming Age* magazine and the *Christadelphian* magazine, Robert Roberts (1839-1898), was also the compiler of the first *Christadelphian Hymn Book*, 1869. Prior to this event, Roberts had compiled another hymn book that could be used by like members in other ecclesias. Although it originated from needs arising in the Birmingham ecclesia, where Roberts attended, it was “a suitable text book of praise for all of like precious faith throughout the world”¹³. Roberts named the compilation *The Golden Harp*, “a pretentious name for a very poor production, but which most

¹¹ Wilson, Andrew. 43.

¹² Roberts, Robert. *Robert Roberts: an autobiography, with an appendix by C.C.Walker*. Dawn Book Supply: Bristol, London, date unknown, 150

¹³ Roberts, R. *Preface. The Golden Harp*. Ed R. Roberts, 1864.

Figure 2. Title page of 'The Golden Harp'



comfortably supplied our needs in that line for a few years”¹⁴. This collection consisted of 136 hymns and 19 anthems with text only, in metrical notation.

In the preface to *The Golden Harp*, Roberts acknowledges sources from the Psalms of David (the “best of David’s Psalms”) as metrically arranged in Scottish versions, original compositions, anthems from the Old and New Testament and “the most scriptural of uninspired compositions . . . culled from several published hymn books”¹⁵. Although the book was published in 1865, the preface is dated November 8, 1864, which predates the official ‘naming’ of this denomination as *Christadelphian*. This is why the title *Christadelphian* does not appear anywhere on the cover or preface. Instead the community are referred to as “immersed believers”. This is important as the Christadelphians distinguished themselves from other Christian churches through their belief in adult baptism, with baptism being full immersion.

Each hymn contained in *The Golden Harp* is set out in verses, with the syllabic metre listed in the top right hand corner of the page. No authorship is acknowledged for verse used in this book. It is only through recent research that some of the hymn writers have been identified in conjunction with the publishing of the *Christadelphian Hymn Book*, 1964. Each hymn is given a title in accordance with its subject matter, to aid with choosing relevant hymns for relevant occasions. This was very important as there was concern expressed about

¹⁴ Roberts, *Robert Roberts: an autobiography, with an appendix by C.C.Walker*. 151.

¹⁵ Roberts, *Preface. The Golden Harp*. 1864.

unbelievers at public activities singing words that only believers had the understanding to sing.

With *The Golden Harp* as with the 1869 *Christadelphian Hymn Book*, only the words were printed with no music. How did other congregations outside of Birmingham learn the melodies attached to the words with no music? In Birmingham, there is mention of some musicians who led the congregation in song, with one particular musical family being part of the reason for the production of *The Golden Harp*:

“our interest in this direction [to produce a hymn book] was stimulated by the advent among us of a musical family who led us in our singing with a flute, violin, and basso”¹⁶.

The musical family spoken of here was the Flint family to which James Flint belonged, who was also responsible for composing several of the hymns still used today. James Flint (1813 - ?), a general smith, was appointed Leader of Song for the Birmingham ecclesia and the congregation met every Wednesday evening “for the cultivation of singing”¹⁷. There was an ecclesial orchestra that accompanied the congregation for services which consisted of a flute (played by Henry Flint), a cornet (played by James Drew), two violins (played by Thomas Webster and Robert King), and a harmonium (played by Charles Jennings)¹⁸. Flint probably remained Leader of Song until 1875. After this time, there is no record of the Flint family on the Birmingham Ecclesial Roll¹⁹. Flint’s role as leader of song included choosing the hymns to be sung and it is recorded that Christadelphian anthems were sung by the congregation, probably referring to anthems from *The Disciples’ Choral Service*, a publication by George Dowie that is further discussed in chapter two²⁰. There are no records of the Leaders of Song conducting congregations in Christadelphia, even though some compositions would have required this, for example chanted Psalms. A similar term ‘Song Leader’ was used in the 19th century Reformed Church and Church of England in reference to a person who conducted the congregation in the singing of metrical Psalms, so this tradition may have also found its way into the Christadelphian community²¹. However, no Leaders of Song or Song Leaders exist in today’s Christadelphian society. Most of the Leaders of Song that were used in the early days of Christadelphianism did not have musical qualifications but some could play an instrument. Possibly, the Leaders of Song were those who could remember the hymn tunes from their previous churches to fit to the new Christadelphian texts. Some ecclesias had more than one Leader of Song, which could indicate a reliance on memory for music.

¹⁶ Roberts. *Robert Roberts: an autobiography with an appendix* by C. C. Walker. 150-151.

¹⁷ Cowlshaw, Stuart. *Brief biographies of some past Christadelphian hymn writers and composers*. Bournemouth, England: S. Cowlshaw, 1991, 12.

¹⁸ Cowlshaw, 12.

¹⁹ Cowlshaw, 12.

²⁰ Cowlshaw, 12.

²¹ Davidson, James Robert. *Song Leader. A Dictionary of Protestant Church Music*. Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow

112. *A Doxology.* P.M.
- 1 G LORY and blessing be
 Ever ascribed to thee
 Uncreate unity,
 Father of all;
 Angelic spirits bright
 Gaze on thy living light,
 Veiled from our mortal sight
 And prostrate fall.
- 2 Strength, honour, majesty,
 Ever becometh thee.
 Uncreate unity
 Fountain of life
 Mighty of mighties, thou
 From thee all blessings flow
 To all—above—below
 Healer of strife.
- 3 Source of salvation free
 Word of infinity
 Uncreate unity
 Author of peace.
 Thy grace and truth became
 Flesh for a saving name
 The "Iēuē Aleim"^{*}
 Never to cease.
- 4 Holy of holies we
 Worship and bow the knee
 Uncreate unity
 Spirit divine.
 * Old Hebrew without Masoretic points.
- Ancient of endless days
 Remember Zion's ways
 And for her children's praise
 Arise and shine.
 (REFRAIN)
 Glory to the Father be
 By the Son's supremacy
 In the Spirit's mystery
 Hallelujah, yeamen. D. BROWN.

One of the hymn tunes that Flint composed, according to Flint family tradition, is the tune DOXOLOGY, which was to accompany text written by David Brown (dates unknown)²². Brown had written the hymn text "Glory and blessing be" by 1864, as it was included in *The Golden Harp*, no. 112 on page 97. The tune for the text was not published until the 1874 *Christadelphian Hymn Book* was issued, so the date for the composition remains unknown. It can be concluded that the text and tune were written at a similar time as the metre is different in the verses to the refrain, which would have been difficult to match to any other existing tunes. It is the one of the only hymns composed and written by Christadelphian members that has survived from one of the earliest hymn books, and that has been consistently presented in each publication to the present date²³. David Brown wrote other texts for *The Golden Harp* that include: "Jesus! Thou Sun of Righteousness"; "We come, O God, to bow"²⁴; "Be careful

Press, 1975, 292.

²² Audio example 1: DOXOLOGY, 2 verses and refrain, played by R. Hocking on pipe organ. Tune by James Flint.

²³ For a detailed look at hymns and tunes featured in Christadelphian hymn books, as well as their composers and authors, please see Appendix B and C.

²⁴ Audio example 2. DEVOTION NO 1: Introduced by Geoff Henstock. 3 verses. Recorded 13.07.1993 at

for nothing”; “O weep not for the dead”; and possibly “Most glorious things are spoken”. Some of these hymns were set to music by James Flint and Charles Rayer, who aided Flint with leading the congregation in song.

Example 2. David Brown’s “Jesus! thou Sun of Righteousness” from The Golden Harp, 1864, no 111, page 96. Reference nos. Appendix B, 486 and Appendix C, S173²⁵.

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111. *The Sun of Righteousness.* C.M.

- 1 JESUS! thou Sun of Righteousness
 Shed forth thy living rays;
 Stir up thy strength, thy mightiness,
 And manifest thy praise.
- 2 In former years, thy words of power,
 'Midst darkness scattered light;
 Now reproduce thy early shower,
 And rain upon our night.
- 3 Send down refreshings from on high,
 And cause thy life below;
 The good seed of thy kingdom nigh,
 In faith and hope to grow,
- 4 The faith that made thy saints of old
 In patience to endure:
 The Hope which in the covenant fold,
 Beholds the promise sure,
- 5 So shall thy waiting people feel
 By their increase in love,
 Thy presence,—and thy truth reveal
 In them the Spirit Dove.
- 6 Jesus our Christ, exalted Lord!
 Come to thy bride! come:
 Seal to thy spouse her full reward,
 Call her in glory home.

D. BROWN.

It is interesting to note that some of the anthems included in *The Golden Harp* appear in *The Disciples’ Choral Service*. Perhaps many of these anthems were already being used in ecclesias throughout Great Britain prior to being published in these hymnals. Joseph Stones, a Christadelphian member, composed three of the anthems included in *The Golden Harp* and *The Disciples’ Choral Service*. Stones, who also was a Leader of Song at the Edinburgh ecclesia, is described as being “gifted musically”, but no formal musical training is mentioned²⁶.

There were hymn books being compiled and published in America at the same time as the developments in England, with their reviews appearing in Thomas’ magazines. An example of this appears in *The Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come*, July 1860²⁷. In the article, the editor (Thomas) gives notice of a hymn book titled *Sacred Melodist*, which contains no

Strathfield, Sydney. Congregation accompanied by Bob O’Toole, piano. Tune by James Flint or Charles Rayer, text by David Brown.

²⁵ Audio example 3. RIGHTEOUSNESS. 1 verse, played by R. Hocking on pipe organ. Tune by James Flint, text by David Brown.

²⁶ Cowlshaw. 24.

²⁷ Thomas, John. *Notices of books.* Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come. Vol X, No 7, July 1860, 168.

tunes, published by Benjamin Wilson of Geneva, Illinois, a Christadelphian brother. Thomas also makes reference to another hymn publication titled *Millennial Harp*, published by “Elder” Marsh, which contained words and tunes. These two hymn books were published in America at least four years prior to the publication of *The Golden Harp*.

It is worth noting that the title of *The Golden Harp* includes the words *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, taken from a biblical passage²⁸. However, no music appears in the volume to suggest that hymns or spiritual songs appear within its pages. In his review of the *Sacred Melodist*, Thomas mentions a similar situation, where the publisher Benjamin Wilson has given his collection a musical name, but no music appears in the book. This collection is even divided up into three sections under the titles *Psalms* (Part I), *Hymns* (Part II) and *Songs* (Part III), but with no music accompanying the text at all. Like *The Golden Harp*, the setting of tunes to the texts in the *Sacred Melodist* is left up to the musical leaders of the congregations, with the instructions:

“be careful to select tunes adapted to the Hymns, and in singing to enunciate each word with distinctness, proper emphasis, and feeling, so that all may be edified”²⁹.

The emphasis placed on text over music demonstrates how important the idea of breaking away from other religions and establishing a new doctrine was for the Christadelphian movement. The religious music from other churches was not unacceptable because of its musical style, but because of its lyrics. With these text-only hymn books, the early Christadelphians were united in words, but not in music. The musical leaders of each congregation would have borrowed tunes that they personally knew rather than using tunes prescribed in the books. Therefore, tunes could vary from region to region. Christadelphian visitors, although they may have known the words very well, may have had to learn different tunes to the same familiar words. Christadelphians were to find that they would have to wait ten years before they would have their own Christadelphian printed music.

²⁸ Ephesians 5 verse 19

²⁹ Wilson, Benjamin. *Preface from the Sacred Melodist*, as appears in Thomas’ review, July 1860, 168.