

G. Samuel Stennett – (1727-1795)



Samuel Stennett

- i. Samuel was the great-grandson of Edward Stennett, and the grandson of Joseph Stennett, the author of *"Another six days' work is done,"* of which we have already mentioned in these notes.
- ii. Samuel's father, Joseph Stennett, was for many years the pastor of a Baptist Church in Exeter, where Samuel was born in 1727. Ten years later they removed to London, after Samuel's father accepted the call to pastor the Baptist Church in Little Wild Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields.
- iii. Stennett first pursued his studies under John Hubbard, an eminent theology instructor at Stepney, and afterward under John Walker, of the Academy at Mile End.
- iv. In 1747, Mr. Stennett's became assistant under his father, and after his father's death he was ordained his father's successor at Little Wild Street, June 1, 1758. According to Henry Burrage, "The Baptist denomination lay particularly near his heart, and his concern for it ran uniformly through his whole life."
- v. In 1767, he received a call to come pastor the Sabbatarian Baptist congregation that his grandfather had pastored; but though he did not accept the call, he would preach for the church every Saturday morning for 20 years.
- vi. In 1769, he published his volumes of "Discourses on Practical Religion." This was followed several more works over the span of 20 years. All of his writings were marked by great elegance of style. His scholarship

was recognized by King's College, in Aberdeen, which, in 1763, conferred upon him a doctorate degree. He enjoyed friendship with King George III, and, like his grandfather, could have held a high position in the church of England if he would have been willing to renounce his Baptist and nonconformist principles.<sup>15</sup>

vii. Samuel Stennett's Hymns and Songs

1. Thirty-nine of his hymns found their way into Rippon's *"Selection"* (1787). One of them is a familiar song of the time:

"Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned" – #152 in PHSS

2. Other well-known hymns by Stennett:

- a. "On Jordan Stormy Banks I Stand" – #960 in PHSS
- b. "How charming is the place"
- c. "Here at thy table, Lord, we meet"
- d. "Where two or three with sweet accord"
- e. "What Wisdom, Majesty, and Grace" – #337 in PHSS
- f. "'Tis Finished! So the Saviour Cried"
- g. "To GOD the Universal King" – #9 in PHSS
- h. "Come, every pious heart"
- i. "He Comes! To Judge the World" – #926 in PHSS
- j. "Prostrate, dear Jesus, at thy feet"
- k. "O! May I Never Forget" – #458 in PHSS
- l. "Not all the nobles of the earth"

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<sup>15</sup> Baptist Hymn Writers and Their Hymns, by Henry S. Burrage, 1888, pgs. 56-57.

H. William Cowper – (1731-1800)



William Cowper

i. Early Life

1. Cowper (pronounced “Cooper”) was born November 15, 1731 in Great Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire, England. Cowper, 1 of 6 children, his life was marked with sadness; at the age of 6 his mother died, this deeply saddened and troubled young William and was the subject of a poem entitled “On the Receipt of My Mother’s Picture,” written more than 50 years later. Because of his mother’s death, William grew close to her brother Robert and his wife Harriot. They instilled in him a love of reading and gave him some of his first books. After his education was completed in the Westminster School, Cowper was trained for a legal career by a Mr. Chapman.
2. While destined for the bar as a young man, it was during this time that he spent much of his leisure time in the home of his uncle Bob Cowper. While at his uncle’s he fell in love with his uncle’s daughter Theodora, whom he wished to marry. However, according to James Croft, who first published the poems that Cowper addressed to Theodora, wrote, “*her father, from an idea that the union of persons so nearly related was improper, refused to accede to the wishes of his daughter and nephew.*” This refusal left Cowper distraught.

## ii. Cowper's Depression

1. In 1763, Cowper was offered the position of Clerkship on the House of Lords, however he broke under the strain of the examinations from which he experienced depression and insanity. He tried three times to commit suicide, he was sent to Nathaniel Cotton's asylum at St. Albans for recovery. His poem beginning "Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portions" was written in the aftermath of his suicide attempt.
2. After his recovery he settled in Hutingdon, England with a retired minister name Morley Unwin and his wife Mary. Cowper grew to be so well liked by them that he went to live in their house with them, and moved with them to Olney, England. There he came to meet John Newton (author of the famed hymn "Amazing Grace").

## iii. Cowper's Life at Olney

1. At Olney, Morley Unwin was killed in a fall from his horse not long after the family had moved. However, Cowper would continue to live with the Unwin's for some time.
2. Newton invited Cowper to contribute to a project that he was planning, a hymnbook that he was compiling. The result was known as *Olney Hymns*, it was not published until 1779 but includes such hymns and songs as; "There is a fountain filled with blood", "God moves in a mysterious way", both of which remain as some of Cowper's most familiar songs.
3. In 1773, Cowper again experienced an attack of insanity, believing that not only that he was eternally condemned to hell, but that God was commanding him to take his own life. Mary Unwin took great care of him, and after a year he began to recover. In 1779, he began to write poetry once again.
4. In 1789 Cowper befriended a cousin, John Johnson, a Norfolk minister. In 1795 Cowper and Mary moved to Norfolk to be near him and his sister Catherine. They originally stayed at North Tuddenham, then at Dunham Lodge near Swaffham and then Mundesley before finally settling in East Dereham, with the Johnsons, after Mary Unwin became paralyzed.

5. Mary Unwin died in 1796, plunging Cowper into deep depression yet again. From this depression Cowper never fully recovered. He did continue to write poetry and did translation work, also doing some revision work on a piece that he had written some time before.
6. In the Spring of 1800, Cowper was seized with dropsy and died. He was buried in the chapel of St. Thomas of Caterbury, St. Nicholas's Church, East Dereham. A window in Westminster Abbey honors him.

iv. Cowper's Hymns and Songs

1. "A Glory Guilds the Sacred Page" – #190 in PHSS
2. "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" – #113 in PHSS
3. "Hark, my Soul! It is the LORD" – #584 in PHSS
4. "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood" – #320 in PHSS
5. "Oh! For a Closer Walk with God" – #576 in PHSS
6. "My God How Perfect Are Thy Ways!" – #124 in PHSS
7. "Never Be Dismayed" – #116 in PHSS
8. "Jesus, Where'er Thy People Meet" – #692 in PHSS

I. Robert Robinson – (1735-1790)



Robert Robinson

- i. Robinson was born in Swaffham, Norfolk, September 27, 1735. When he was eight years old his parents moved to Scarning, in the same county, where he received an excellent education in the endowed grammar school. When Robinson was fourteen, the death of his father reduced the family to poverty, and he was apprenticed to a hairdresser in London.
- ii. Robinson had acquired a love for learning and would rise early to continue his studies of the classics. In fact, he was more ready to give attention to such books as came his way than to business. When he was seventeen, he went to hear Whitefield preach. In a letter to Whitefield, written six years later, Robinson wrote: "I confess it was to spy the nakedness of the land I came – to pity the folly of the preacher, the infatuation of the hearers, and to abhor the doctrine."  
Mr. Whitefield's sermon was taken from the text of Matthew 3:7. Of the sermon Robinson says: "Mr. Whitefield described the Sadducean character: this did not touch me. I thought myself as good a Christian as any man in England. From this he went to that of the Pharisees. He described their exterior decency, but observed that the poison of the viper rankled in their hearts. This rather shook me. At length, in the course of his sermon, he abruptly broke off, paused lifted up his hands and eyes, and exclaimed, 'Oh, my hearers, the wrath's to come! *the wrath's to come!*' These words sank into my heart like a lead in the waters. I wept, and when the sermon was ended retired alone. For days and weeks I could think of little else. Those awful words would follow me wherever I went." They would follow him for two years and seven months before he found peace. On December 10, 1755, to use his

own words, he “found full and free forgiveness through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.”

iii. Becoming a Baptist

1. For some time after completing his apprenticeship, Robinson continued with his employment in London. After hearing both Wesley and Whitefield, and associating with them in Christian work, he was requested by some Christians in Norfolk to preach while visiting some friends in the same town. He yielded to their requests, and subsequently preached in Norwich. The people flocked in crowds to hear him, and his preaching was in demonstration of the spirit and with power. At this point Robinson had not left the state church (The Church of England), and a rich relative offered liberal inducements to him if he would leave the Methodists and take orders in the Established Church; but he declined.
2. Around this time, he had doubts about infant baptism. These doubts led to a thorough examination on the said subject. As a result of these examinations he became a Baptist.
3. Not long after he was invited to preach by the Baptist Church in Cambridge, though he did not accept the pastoral office until nearly two years later. He was ordained June 11, 1761.

iv. His Pastoral Service

1. At Cambridge Robinson was very successful. Members of the University, and other hearers, who had never in their lives entered a Baptist Meetinghouse, became regular attendees. In 1764, a new building was erected, capable of seating six hundred persons. While his ministry in Cambridge prospered he also enlarged his circle of influence by extensive village preaching in the surrounding countryside, and wherever he went ‘the common people heard him gladly.’ ”
2. In the year 1770, he entered an extended literary career which covered the next 20 years of his life. Among these works are, “A Plea for the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ” in 1776, “An Essay on the Composition of a Sermon” in 1778, “Village Sermons” in 1786, a “History of Baptism” in 1790, and in 1792 “Ecclesiastical Researches,” which appeared two years after his death.

v. The Claim of Unitarianism

1. There are those that have claimed that Robinson became a Unitarian in his latter years. However, this claim has been proven false over the years by his biographer William Robinson and other historians. It is claimed that around the year 1780 Robinson began to keep company with men that were Unitarian in doctrine; while this claim is partially true, the claim that he became Unitarian in his belief is not.
2. Records show that Robinson was preaching sermons that would have contradicted Unitarian belief as late as 1781, this date is after the claimed time that he became Unitarian. In his sermon, he says of Christ, "he was God." – (See *Baptist Hymn Writers and Their Hymns*, Henry Burrage, 1888, pg. 72.) Therefore it is unlikely that he embraced Unitarian doctrine. History shows that Mr. Robinson stood fast in his beliefs till the day he passed from this world.

vi. Robinson's Hymns and Songs

1. Robinson was the author of two well-known hymns.
  - a. "Mighty God, While Angels Bless Thee" – #55 in PHSS
  - b. "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" – #20 in PHSS
2. History of the writing of the Hymns
  - a. The writing of "Mighty God, While Angels Bless Thee"
    - i) This hymn had its origin in a young boy that had been a favorite of Mr. Robinson.
    - ii) Benjamin Williams, deacon of the Baptist Church at Reading. Williams was a boy when Robinson wrote "Mighty God...", According to Joseph Belcher, "One day the poet (Robinson) 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 praise thy name?"



Lord of men as well as angels,  
Thou art every creature's theme."

- iii) The author then turns his attention to his Lord and Saviour.

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

- b. The writing of "Come, Thou Fount..."

- i) Dr. Sedgwick, a well-known hymnologist, asserts the claim that the Countess of Huntington was the author of this hymn.

- ii) However, Miller in his "Singers and Songs of the Church," (pg. 267-268), shows that it is in fact by Robinson. He recounts the following:

"William Robinson, Robert Robinson's biographer, who has the book in his possession, and is assured by him that this entry ("Come, Thou Fount") is in the same hand writing as that of the whole book,..."

"And the Rev. J. T. Wigner, who recently revised the names and dates of the authors in the Baptist 'Psalms and Hymns,' writes that he was recently in the society of an elderly Christian lady, who informed him that her parents were members of the church under Mr. Robinson, and she heard them say they asked him if he were the author of this hymn. He admitted that he was, and they accordingly marked his name at the foot of it."

- iii) Based upon these facts and others that are not named here, it is safe to say that Robinson in fact did write the hymn/song "Come Thou Fount."

J. John Fawcett – (1740-1817)



John Fawcett

- i. John Fawcett was born in Lidget Green, near Bradford, Yorkshire, England. His father died when he was only 11-years old, leaving Fawcett's mother a widow with several children in humble circumstances.<sup>16</sup>
- ii. When Fawcett was 13 years old, he was apprenticed to a trader in Bradford, with whom he remained 6 years. It was while he was in his apprenticeship, he had the fortune to hear George Whitefield preach, from which he was saved. The message that Whitefield brought on that fateful day was from the text, John 3:14, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." Fawcett referring to this sermon some time later, wrote, "As long as life remains I shall remember both the text and the sermon."
- iii. For awhile Fawcett attended the services of the church of England, however early in 1758, he united with the Baptist church in Bradford.
- iv. At once Fawcett made himself useful in the church at Bradford. Soon the question came up whether he felt the call to preach. Fawcett, wanting to be sure that his motive was pure wrote in his diary the following: "O Lord, I know now what to do, but my eyes are upon thee. If in thy wise counsel thou hast fixed upon me to bear thy name to Gentile sinners, I earnestly implore that thou wouldst give me a right spirit, for that most difficult, and important work. If thou dost not call me to do it, O Father, not my will, but thine be done."
- v. The decision was finally made, and in 1763 he began to preach.

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<sup>16</sup> Baptist Hymn Writers and Their Hymns, by Henry S. Burrage, 1888, pg. 79.

- vi. In February 1764, he became the pastor of the church at Wainsgate, near Halifax, West Riding, of Yorkshire, where he was ordained July 31, 1765.
- vii. In 1772, Fawcett went to preach in London for Dr. Gill, the eminent expositor, then drawing near the end of his long and useful life. After Gill's death the church in London called for Fawcett to come and be their pastor. It seemed Fawcett's duty to accept, and he had made the decision to go. However, when the time came to leave, he and his wife could not bear to part from the congregation that they had come to labor in and love. – (See pages 80 and 81 of *Baptist Hymn Writers and Their Hymns, Burrage, 1888* for more info.)
- viii. Fawcett's Hymns and Songs
  - a. "As They Days They Strength Shall Be" – #589 in PHSS
  - b. "Blest Be The Tie That Binds" – #758 in PHSS
  - c. "The King of Dread Could Not Detain" – #276 in PHSS
  - d. "How Precious Is the Book Divine" – #199 in PHSS
  - e. "The Sacred Page" – #184 in PHSS