

Joseph Smith, the American religious leader who was to found the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), was born in Sharon, Vermont, on 23 December 1805. Later his family moved to a village in western New York State, by which time the young Joseph had become interested in religion and the welfare of his soul. Praying for guidance one day in 1820, Smith had what he claimed to be a vision in which God told him that the churches of the day had turned away from the true gospel. Three years later, on the night of 21 September 1823 Smith experienced another vision, in which he maintained that he had been visited by the Angel Moroni who had told him about a stone box containing some golden plates on which were printed important sacred texts. However, it took him some four years to find these plates, buried as they were in a hill near his home. It seemed that these writings, which had been put together by Moroni's father, a fourth-century prophet and historian called Mormon, chronicled the life of an indigenous American tribe. Once Smith had translated them into English they were to become known as *The Book of Mormon*.

Having founded his new church in 1830, Smith set about looking for a suitable place in which to establish it. He first took his Latter Day Saints (or Mormons, as they were less formally called) to Kirtland, Ohio, to Missouri and then, in 1839, to Nauvoo, Illinois. From there missionaries were sent to Europe and elsewhere and soon converts were flooding in. It was during this period that Smith introduced the practice of polygamy for his followers. Before long, however, Smith found himself in dispute not only with those of his own people who did not approve of this controversial policy but also with the local authorities who charged him with treason. However, before he could be brought to trial, an armed mob broke into the prison and, on 27 June 1844, killed both Smith and his brother, Hyrum. As Hyrum had been Joseph's chosen successor, a new leader had to be found and the task fell to Brigham Young. It was therefore Young who was to lead the Latter Day Saints to Utah where, in 1847, he founded Salt Lake City which has been their headquarters ever since.

It was barely a month after the Mormon pioneers had arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, that a choir was formed to sing at the first general conference. From the beginning, Joseph Smith had considered hymn singing to be an important part of LDS worship and following another of his visions, he had decreed that his wife, Emma, should put together a collection of appropriate hymns to be sung in the churches in Kirtland and Nauvoo. The first of these were published in

1832. Eventually, a Tabernacle was built in Salt Lake City and the soon-to-be-named **Mormon Tabernacle Choir** gave its first concert there on 4 July 1873 – Independence Day.

Since then the Choir has become world-famous, has toured extensively, made many recordings and, from 1929, has taken part in a weekly broadcast entitled *Music and the Spoken Word*. It has also sung for several US Presidents and was referred to by Ronald Reagan as ‘America’s Choir’. Its choristers are all members of the LDS Church, are between twenty-five and sixty years old and do not get paid for participating in rehearsals or concerts.

In 1959, the Choir, under the direction of Richard P. Condie, who was its conductor from 1957 until 1974, won a Grammy Award for the ‘Best Performance by a Vocal Group or Chorus’ for its recording of ***The Battle Hymn of the Republic***. The tune to which this hymn is sung is that of the song *John Brown’s Body*, which is said to have been composed in about 1856 by an insurance salesman from Philadelphia called William Steffe. The words, however, are the work of the American poet and social activist Julia Ward Howe who wrote them in November 1861, some seven months after several of the southern states of America had broken away from the United States to form their own Confederate States of America, thereby triggering the start of the American Civil War. Soon after visiting the newly-elected President Lincoln at the White House, Howe had attended a review of the troops and had heard the crowds singing *John Brown’s Body*. So impressed was she that she decided to write some new words to this tune, words beginning *Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord*. In this arrangement of the hymn by Peter J. Wilhousky, the Choir and the Philadelphia Orchestra are conducted by Eugene Ormandy

The song ***Lorena*** was first published in Chicago in 1857 and thus pre-dates the Civil War by some four years. It was, however, to become a favourite of soldiers on both sides of the conflict. Its words were written by the Revd Henry D.L. Webster, in the aftermath of a broken engagement, and the music was composed by his friend Joseph Philbrick Webster. Henry Webster’s fiancée had been called Ella but his namesake needed a three-syllable name to fit his melody – hence Lorena.

Sweet Evelina was published in New York in 1863, midway through the Civil War, but it might date from somewhat earlier than that since the sheet music indicates that it had been sung by 'all the Minstrel Bands'. It soon became very popular among the Confederate troops and was said to be a favourite of J.E.B. Stuart, a Confederate General who was to be killed during the War. The publishers did not name the creators of this song apart from identifying the lyricsist as 'M' and the composer as 'T'.

Another song to become popular with both sides in the Civil War is *When Johnny comes marching home*. It was also published in 1863, the words and the music being credited to one 'Louis Lambert'. This was, however, a pseudonym for an Irish-American bandleader called Patrick Gilmore who is said to have written this song for his sister as she prayed for the safe return of her fiancé from the Civil War. Gilmore did admit later that he had not actually composed the tune but that it was 'a musical waif which I happened to hear somebody humming in the early days of the rebellion'.

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child is a traditional Negro spiritual which dates back to era of slavery when it was the common practice to take the children of slaves from their parents and sell them. One of the aims of the Unionists when fighting the Civil War was to abolish slavery which the Confederates considered to be one of their constitutional rights.

Another song to have started its life in the black-face minstrel bands of the 1850s is *Dixie*. Its words and music are said to have been written by Daniel Decatur Emmett but several others have laid claim to its composition. Whoever wrote it, it soon became very popular and indeed became the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy. It also probably helped to ensure that the term 'Dixie' became synonymous with the southern states of America.

Aura Lee is another song that was popular during the Civil War and, indeed, was first published in 1861, the year the war started. It tells of a maiden with golden hair and has words by William Whiteman Fosdick, a American lawyer, poet and writer from Cincinnati, and music by George R. Poulton who was born in the Wiltshire town of Cricklade in 1828. *Aura Lee* was to be given a new life in 1956 by Elvis Presley when it was adapted to become the best-selling song *Love me tender*.

Written by George Frederick Root in 1862, *The Battle Cry of Freedom* was first intended as a patriotic song advocating the causes Unionism and the abolition of slavery. So popular did it become that it was soon adapted for use by the Confederates. Abraham Lincoln and his Vice-President, Andrew Johnson, also used a modified Union version of this song during the run-up to the 1864 presidential election. The composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk, who used this tune in a piano composition of his own, once suggested that it should become the American national anthem.

Katherine Kennicott Davis is now mostly remembered for *The Little Drummer Boy*, the popular Christmas song that she wrote in 1941. Born in Missouri in 1892, she studied at Wellesley College in Massachusetts and with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. As a teacher, many of her compositions were written for the choirs in the schools in which she taught. These included cantatas, operettas, piano pieces, choruses and songs. It was in 1947 that she made her arrangement of the North Carolina folk song *He's gone away*.

Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! (sometimes known as 'The Prisoner's Hope') is another song with words and music by George Frederick Root that became very popular with the Union soldiers during the Civil War. Written in 1864 it tells its story from the point of view of the prisoner. (The Mormon hymn, *In our lovely Deseret*, also uses this tune, Deseret being the name proposed by Brigham Young and his followers for a new state to be centred on Salt Lake City.) Root was born in Massachusetts in 1820 and named after the composer George Frideric Handel. After studying in Europe for a while he returned to his native state where he worked as assistant to Lowell Mason.

Yet another song popular with the Union soldiers was *Tenting on the Old Camp Ground* (also known as 'Tenting Tonight'). This was written by Walter Kittredge in 1863, the year in which he received his draft to fight in the Civil War but was rejected on medical grounds. It was one of many Civil War songs that he wrote at about that time. He was a talented self-taught musician who played several instruments and was also a keen abolitionist and supporter of the temperance movement.

The arrangement of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Sheep may safely graze* used by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir is another by Katherine K. Davis. Originally intended to celebrate the birthday of Duke Christian of Weissenfels, the cantata from which it comes is therefore not one of Bach's many sacred ones. Instead it a secular work on the theme of hunting, the good shepherd being the Duke and the sheep the people he governs. In 1940, William Walton was to use this melody in his score for *The Wise Virgins*, a ballet with choreography by Frederick Ashton.

Sabine Baring-Gould, who wrote the words for both *Onward, Christian Soldiers* and *Now the day is over*, was born in Exeter in 1834. Much of his early life was spent travelling in Europe with his family but, in 1852, he enrolled as a student at Cambridge University. He was subsequently ordained and it was in 1865, while he was a curate at Horbury Bridge in Yorkshire that he wrote the words for *Onward, Christian Soldiers*. His original intention was for them to be sung to a melody from a Haydn Symphony but, in 1871, Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame) wrote the tune to which it has been sung ever since. Sullivan named it St Gertrude after the wife of a friend of his at whose house he was staying when he composed it.

Both the words, a paraphrase of Psalm 46, and the music of *A mighty fortress is our God* (or in the original German, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*) are by the Christian theologian Martin Luther whose teachings led to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Often referred to as *The Battle Hymn of the Reformation*, its words have been translated into many languages, there being some seventy different versions in English.

It is Psalm 90 that it being paraphrased by Isaac Watts in his hymn *O God, our help in ages past*. Watts was a prolific hymn-writer and has been described as 'The father of hymnody'. Born in 1674, he was a non-conformist theologian and teacher who spent most of his life in and around Stoke Newington, then a village just outside London. The tune to which this hymn is sung is by William Croft and is called *St Anne* after the church in Soho at which he was the organist in the early years of the eighteenth century.

It was the miraculous healing of his wounded leg that inspired Samuel Medley to write the words of the hymn *I know that my redeemer lives*. Born in Hertfordshire in 1738, he joined the British Navy in 1755 but was wounded four years later during the Battle of Lagos which took

place during the Seven Year's War. He was told by the ship's doctor that his leg would have to be amputated but, after a night spent in prayer, Medley found that, by morning, it had completely healed. Thereafter he became a Baptist Minister and a writer of hymns. The words of this hymn appeared in the first LDS hymn book, compiled by Emma Smith in 1835. The tune to which it is nowadays sung is by Lewis D. Edwards who, himself, was a member of the Latter Day Saints.

William Billings was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1746 and was to become known as the first American choral composer. A contemporary report describes him as 'a singular man, of moderate size, short of one leg, with one eye, without any address and with an uncommon negligence of person' However it was also said that 'he spake and sung and thought as a man above the common abilities'. For his hymns, Billings would often set texts by Isaac Watts but, for *David's Lamentation* he went to the Second Book of Samuel.

It was Isaac Watts who also wrote the words of *My shepherd will supply my need* basing them on Psalm 23. They have been associated with several tunes over the years but the one favoured by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir is by William Batchelder Bradbury, an American organist and composer born in 1816. In 1854, with his brother, Edward, he founded the Bradbury Piano Company in New York City.

Come, come ye saints is said to be the best-known of all Mormon hymns and has found its way into the hymnbooks of many other Christian denominations. It is based on an earlier American hymn called *All is well* whose melody was composed, or at least arranged, by J.T. White. The words are by William Clayton, a Mormon convert from Lancashire who worked for a time as secretary to Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. It was while trekking across the Great Plains that Clayton wrote *Come, come ye saints* after his wife had given birth to a healthy child.

As legend has it, when RMS Titanic was about to sink early in the morning of 15 April 1912, the band was playing *Nearer, my God, to Thee*. However, those survivors who claimed to have heard it cannot agree on which of the several tunes associated with it was being played. The one usually sung in America is called *Bethany* and was composed in 1856 by Lowell Mason, who is also credited with introducing music to American schools. The words, which are based on the

story of Jacob's ladder, as told in the Book of Genesis, were written by Sarah Flower Adams in 1839, at her home in Loughton, Essex, and first set to music by her sister, Eliza.

It is said that the inspiration to write the verses which were to become the hymn *Rock of ages*, came to their author, Augustus Montague Toplady, when, in the early 1760s, he found himself having to shelter from a thunderstorm in the cleft of a rock in the Mendip Hills in Somerset. Like so many other hymns this one has been set to many tunes but the one chosen by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir is by Thomas Hastings and is named after the author of the text. It is said that the Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart asked for it to be sung to him on his deathbed. This tune was published in 1831 in a hymn book entitled *Spiritual Songs* which Hastings had compiled with Lowell Mason.

It was in 1833, while the boat in which he was travelling from Italy back to England was caught in fog for a week, that John Henry Newman wrote, in his distress and loneliness, the words of the hymn *Lead, kindly light*. Newman was later, in 1856, to write the poem *The Dream of Gerontius* some of which Elgar was to set to music, and in 1879 he was made a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. The tune to which Newman's hymn is usually sung is by another prolific composer of hymn tunes, John Bacchus Dykes and is called *Lux Benigna*.

William Henry Draper was born in the Warwickshire town of Kenilworth in 1855. He was ordained in 1880 and, by 1889, was Rector at the parish church at Adel, near Leeds. He remained in that post for twenty years and it was during that time that he made a translation of a poem that St Francis of Assisi had written in 1225 for inclusion in his *Canticle of the Sun*. These words were based on Psalm 148 and Draper set his version of them to a tune, known as *Lasst uns erfreuen*, written by Friedrich Spee and first published in 1623. The resulting hymn – *All creatures of our God and King* – first appeared in print in 1919.

As a boy, Alfred Hay Malotte was a member of the first Boy Scout troop of Philadelphia. Later he was to work in Hollywood on the music staff of the Walt Disney Studios where he composed the music for various films including *Ferdinand the Bull*. Apart from his music for the cinema, Malotte composed many pieces of a religious nature including settings of *The Lord's Prayer* and of Psalm 23. His version of *The Lord's Prayer* was published in October 1935 and sales of

the sheet music were soon breaking all records. Singers of all kinds - including Gracie Fields - took it up and made it ever more popular on both sides of the Atlantic. Malotte died in Los Angeles in 1964.

The translation from the Welsh of the hymn *Guide us, O Thou great Jehovah* used on this recording, and printed in the 1835 LDS hymn book, differs considerably from that which appears in similar British publications. For a start, the first two words of the first verse are usually given as 'Guide me' in the UK, rather than 'Guide us'. The original Welsh version was written by William Williams in about 1762. It would seem that Williams was one day preaching in the open air and was being heckled by a member of the congregation. Having found himself using, in his response, words such as 'guide' and 'Jehovah' and phrases such as 'barren land', 'bread of heaven', 'verge of Jordan' and 'Canaan's happy shore', Williams later incorporated them into a three-verse hymn. The tune, *Cwm Rhondda*, is the work of John Hughes who spent most of his life working for the Great Western Colliery in Pontypridd.

It would seem that it was the words 'Abide with me, Lord, abide with me' uttered by a sick friend, that gave the Scottish clergyman, Henry Francis Lyte the idea for his famous hymn *Abide with me*. It was not, however, until he himself was at death's door, that Lyte finished writing the verses that are now known throughout the world. Having long been suffering from consumption, Lyte preached his final sermon at the church in the Devon town of Brixham, at which he had been the vicar since 1823. Soon after that, and having seen in a mirror his emaciated features - 'change and decay in all around I see' - he completed the hymn he had started some years before. Picking up a word from its first verse, the tune to which this hymn is usually sung is called *Eventide*. It is by William Henry Monk, a London-born organist who in 1857 was to become the musical editor of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

© Peter Avis, September 2015