

19TH CENTURY AUSTRALIAN HYMN PUBLICATIONS AS A SOURCE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL HISTORY

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The hymns of colonial Australia have been largely neglected by scholars.¹ Yet hymns are, and for many centuries have been an important, if not essential part of the Christian life. This was no less true of colonial Australia than of any other time or place. Indeed, hymns were published in this country in remarkable quantities from 1808 onwards in order to fulfil a variety of purposes: in the church, for official occasions, in schools, at social gatherings and in the home. An important premise of this paper, which seeks to give no more than an introductory overview of colonial hymnals cited in major libraries,² is that hymns in fact provide interesting and often significant historical source material. For the present purpose, "hymn" is taken to mean a song of praise and thus incorporates the genre of "psalm". It usually embraces both poetry and music, but on occasions may not involve music at all. The hymn is generally, although not always, associated with religion. Only hymns intended to be sung and contained in hymn books will be considered.

In line with European practice, published colonial hymn books assumed three basic forms:

1. Text editions

Frequently these books were of minute proportions (12 x 7 cm) and with print that would only have been useful in broad daylight to the most keenly sighted!). They were published extensively throughout the century and embrace the entire range of hymn types.

2. Music editions or tune books

Having no texts at all, these books were for the use of musicians and

contained four-part harmonised settings of commonly used tunes (a lot of mixing and matching of texts and tunes took place). To date, only four Australian tune books have been located in libraries. The earliest known is *A Collection of thirty standard Psalm Tunes in Vocal Score* selected by George L. Allan.³ In 1854, W.J. Johnson, organist and musical director of Christ Church St Lawrence in Sydney, compiled *A Collection of Psalm Tunes*, comprising the best compositions in general use, harmonized for four voices, with an arrangement for the organ or pianoforte.⁴ Another is the 1865 edition *The Psalmody of the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales*, being a collection of the standard tunes, for the use of the Union Churches of Sydney and the Colony.⁵ The last known tune book of the period, which was compiled by R. Bentley Young and published in 1891 as *Seventy-eight Australian hymn tunes*,⁶ appears to be the first known volume of Australian composed hymn settings. In the Preface Young asserts that "a number of these tunes being already largely in use in Australian Churches and Sunday Schools, I have thought it desirable to publish them, together with others which have been specially composed for this book." Among the composers listed are Sir W.C.F. Robinson, Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over the Province of Western Australia and Rev. G.W. Torrance, resident in Melbourne 1869-1907. Tune names such as "Ballarat", "Lydiard Street" and "Brisbane" have a pleasing Australian ring.

3. Text and music editions

Such publications appear to date from 1869 only. Generally they contain evangelical and temperance hymns not necessarily for church use.

Physically, colonial hymn books range from humble booklets to handsome leather-bound volumes. Typical of the most modest is a small soft-covered volume printed in 1860 in Geelong. Entitled *The Union Prayer meeting Hymn Book: a Selection of these Psalms and Hymns best Known and most commonly Sung by the different Evangelical Denominations*,⁷ it has been crudely side stitched by hand. Many books are hard-covered with a French joint and are also covered with cloth. It is not uncommon for titles, decorative panels and motives to be blind or gold-tooled into the front cover and sometimes also on the spine and back covers. This was the form taken by most books

published from the 1820's. However, it was possible for purchasers to order custom-made bindings, which were generally of leather and could feature gold-tooled titles and adornments and gilt page edges. A number of very elegant books of this type survive, including *A Selection of Hymns*, published in 1865.⁸

No less than nine denominations are represented in colonial hymnals. As one would expect, the Church of England features most prominently. As early as 1828, Howe of Sydney printed *Select Portions of the Psalms of David, according to the Version of Dr. Brady and Mr. Tate: to which are added Hymns for the Celebration of Church Holy-days and Festivals*.⁹ These psalm versions are late 17th-century translations which had enjoyed fairly widespread popularity in Britain and had been considered by many as superior alternatives to the Sternhold and Hopkins translations. The Brady and Tate psalm versions found acceptance also in Sydney and Hobart, where further editions were printed in 1830, 1833, 1837, 1844 and 1853. A letter to the Church of England Chronicle, reprinted by Benjamin Isaacs of Sydney in 1865, states that the psalms of Brady and Tate have been "in constant use in our colonial churches since the foundation of the colony".

The earliest known Anglican hymnal to be published in Melbourne was *A Selection of Psalms and Hymns for Public Worship*, a text edition which was dedicated in 1849 to "The Right Reverend Charles [Perry], Lord Bishop of Melbourne". Again, the psalms are metrical. This hymnal was re-printed two years later and a smaller second, cheaper edition appeared in 1854. Such was local demand that in the following year there was published (in London) *Psalms and hymns selected for public worship, in the Diocese of Melbourne*, again dedicated to Bishop Perry. Local editions followed in 1863, 1864 and 1866. In the Preface to the second edition (published by Samuel Mullen and printed by H. Roulston), the compilers note with satisfaction the "the reception of the book has been so extensive as to require a second edition within the short space of six months" and (unlike most colonial hymnal editors) they acknowledge thirteen English and American hymn sources, together with the above-mentioned Melbourne Psalms and hymns.¹⁰

A further hymn book for the Melbourne Diocese was compiled by an appointed committee between 1871 and 1872. Although a copy of this book has not been located, it is known from a report issued by the

committee in October, 1873 that it was a substantial volume containing 625 hymn texts, which are meticulously indexed with details of authors and sources (including the earlier Diocesan Psalms and Hymns). Other Church of England hymnals published in Melbourne include *A Selection of Hymns and Psalms*, pointed for chanting, arranged for choirs and congregations, one of the few pointed versions to issue from the colonies, and a hymn collection for use in Sunday Schools.

Following the Brady and Tate publications of the 1830's and 40's, little was published in Sydney for the Church of England. However, hymnals appeared in Adelaide (1838, 1853 and 1869), Launceston (1860) and Ballarat (1863). As with the Melbourne publications, these were specifically designed for local use. It may also be noted that the titles do not necessarily refer to the Church of England (which was evidently assumed) but this association is generally confirmed by references in the books to particular parishes or persons.

The hymn publications of other churches, although not as plentiful as those of the Church of England, are not without significance or interest. The Church Act of 1836 recognised all denominations, which were also encouraged by government grants for buildings, stipends and the like.¹¹

The first full hymnal to be printed in this country was of Wesleyan association.¹² The Preface refers to a serious scarcity of hymn books and to the price of available (presumably imported) books, which "would place them beyond the reach of many sincere Christians". Both problems were to be alleviated by the given book. Only two further hymnals published in 1862 and 1883 for Sunday School use have been cited.¹³ The suggestion is, then, that Wesleyans relied heavily on English hymnals.

The Catholic Church is represented by four cited hymnals, the first of which was published in Sydney in 1851, when it was already in its third edition. Included are 315 hymns for Vespers and Compline and a Preface which recommends a recently published tune book containing "38 of the airs, well selected, and admirably adapted for country missions" and which indicates that congregational hymn singing was a well established practice in New South Wales. In a letter of July 1856 published in *The Catholic Almanac* Archbishop Polding vigorously commended the hymn book to the faithful:

A collection of admirable hymns, which many of you already know and possess, has been made with the express design of furthering amongst us this most useful devotional practise ...

Get the books, (Mr. Doman the publisher, or the Clerk of the Cathedral will supply you) read carefully, and study the Hymns; they are well worth it ... You will be sure to have all that is most desirable - the sympathies of christian faith and life; and the rest the music of art, will soon follow. Do it simply and earnestly - do it, because your Archbishop, and Clergy desire it - do it, because it has ever been a favourite practice of the saints ...¹⁴

A similar, but more comprehensive book was published in Melbourne in 1891 with the aim of promoting a "more intelligent interest" in the services (hence the inclusion of English translations of Latin hymns). Also cited in the Preface are recent Papal indulgences to allow for greater familiarity with a small number of psalms. *The Australian Catholic Hymn Book* (Sydney, 1884) contains, in addition to evening hymns, many for children's services and school use. Two tune books (not cited) to be used with this hymnal are mentioned: *Popular hymn & tune book* and *Crown of Jewels*.

Other denominations to produce hymnals during the 19th century were the Presbyterian (1840 and 1865), Lutheran (1866), Church of Christ (1874), Baptist (1886), Unitarian, Salvation Army (1896, 1897) and the Australian Church (1892). The last named was a short-lived branch of the church, formed by Rev. Charles Strong (formerly of Scots Church, Melbourne) as a "free, progressive, and unsectarian Religious Brotherhood ... untrammelled by a final dogmatic theological creed".

In addition to hymnals prepared for congregational use in the colonies were a great number for mission endeavours. Dating from the earliest years of settlement, these encompass an amazing range of languages: Maori, Tongan, and the tongues of New Guinea, the New Hebrides and the Loyalty, Tahitian, Gilbert and Duke of York Islands are examples. An early book (not actually a hymnal) was *First lessons in the language of Tongataboo*, one of the friendly islands; to which are added a prayer and several hymns, by Nathaniel Turner.

The latter half of the colonial period saw the publication of a great number of hymn books which had no denominational attachment and which were frequently designed for use outside the church. Many of these, such as *Colonial Singer: Designed for Prayer and Revival Meetings, Young Men's Christian Associations, Sunday schools, Religious Meetings, Family Worship, Praise Meetings, etc.* contained evangelical hymns and choruses (Melbourne and Adelaide, 1875). In

line with other such books, this one contains much American material, with texts and music presented together. Of a similar style are the contents of the many temperance hymn books, as may be seen by the following example from *The Australian Temperance Minstrel containing entirely New & Original Music, Songs, Duets etc (Series 1) for the use of Choirs and Temperance Gatherings*, by David Parry.

Non-denominational hymn books shed some fascinating insights into some of the alternative religious movements that flourished in the latter part of the century. During the 1870's residents of Melbourne could belong to the Spiritualistic and Free Thought Propagandist Society. Its hymn book, a text edition compiled by J. Tyerman, was first published in 1873. The rather intriguing selection of hymns is explained in an equally intriguing Preface:

Only such hymns have been introduced as breathe the spirit and teach the principles of Spiritualism and Freeistic and progressive tendency of the times. Too long have been sung those doleful ditties which traduce human nature, degrade the character of God, invest the future state with terror, dwarf man's immortal spirit, and keep millions of the race in intellectual bondage. Many of the hymns sung in orthodox places of worship are utterly unworthy of this enlightened age, and exercise a most pernicious influence on those believe them. "Depravity" and "blood", "grace" and "faith", "hell" and the "devil", find no place in these hymns; and it is hoped that no one will consider their absence a loss.

A second edition arrived within nine months. According to the editor, "the original edition ... has been found very useful for family gatherings and seances as well as public meetings". A representative example of a hymn follows:

Ministering Spirits

Oh! there are spirits bright,
 Who come to earth
 In silence with the shades of night,
 To watch the mirth

Of men, the smile, the tear,
The struggling hope, the timorous fear.

They come from that bright clime-
Their summer land-
And wander on the shore of time,
A viewless band,
Who here are oft inclined
To bless the home they left behind.

They came from Heaven above
With noiseless feet-
Those messengers of light and love;
They come and greet
Each other here below
On earth, and on their mission go.

Even further from mainstream religion and perhaps not strictly deserving of the assignation "hymn book" is *The Lyceum Tutor*, compiled by the well-known Australian poet Bernard O'Dowd for use at meetings of secularist societies or Lyceums. A feature of Lyceum meetings, which incorporated marching, callisthenics, lectures, discussions and meditations, was the singing of "freethought" songs. As contained in *The Lyceum Tutor*, these were metrical poems by the likes of Longfellow, Whitman, Shelley and possibly O'Dowd himself, and in both form, content and presentation, they could be considered hymns in the broad sense of the term. As with regular hymnals, this one lists suitable tunes, and as shown in the following example of text, it takes on in places something of the nature of a Catechism:

Freethought

Conductor - What is Freethought?

Lyceum - The form of thought with maintains that all have the right to think for themselves.

Cond. - What is the great principle of Freethought?

Lyceum - That all have an equal right to be free to think as they choose, and to do as they choose, provided they do not infringe the equal rights of others.

Cond. - What is the test of the true Freethinker?

Lyceum - Freedom from bigotry and intolerance.

Cond. - What is the duty of every Freethinker?

Lyceum - To live a good life, and to advance the interests of his race.

What Might Be Done

What might be done if men were wise?
 What glorious deeds, my suffering brother?
 Would they unite
 In love and right,
 And cease their scorn of one another.

All slavery, warfare, lies, and wrongs,
 All vice and crimes might die together,
 And fruit and corn,
 To each man born,
 Be free as warmth in summer weather.

The meanest wretch that ever trod,
 The deepest sunk in guilt and sorrow,
 Might stand erect,
 In self-respect,
 And share the teeming world tomorrow.

What might be done? This might be done,
 And more than this, my suffering brother:
 More than the tongue
 E'er said or sung,
 If men were wise and loved each other.
 (Charles Mackay).

A secular song

Air: "The wearing of the green"

O noble sons of Freethought, who in Australasia live,

To all things good and noble your allegiance freely give,
But all degrading things and base, spurn from your minds with
scorn,
And prove, by purity of heart, you bask in Freedom's morn.

O daughters of fair Freethought, be ye noble in your lives,
And struggle to release your sex from all the chains and gyves
That tyranny and priestcraft have imposed in every age;
And so infuse success into the battles we shall wage.

(Anon)

In this brief introductory overview of colonial hymnody, there has been seen evidence of considerable initiative taken by settlers in order to overcome the problems experienced in isolated communities and congregations and to ease the scarcity of hymnal supply. There was evidence also of an unwillingness, in some places, to simply make do with what was available in English hymnals. Increasingly, American material was incorporated into Australian hymnals alongside or in place of English hymns and there was also an emergence of Australian texts and music. The survey is necessarily incomplete: it does not take into account the many hymns not intended for singing (many of them of Australian authorship) nor those that appeared in non-hymnal publications, as for example pamphlets or as sheet music. Australian colonial hymnody is a rich and extensive repertory awaiting further investigation.

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