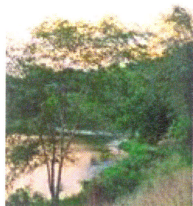


Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words

September 2012 - Hymn of the Month



The Hymn



Although this lovely work is not in the classic hymn form, which J. Spencer Cornwall described succinctly as "Praise to the Lord" text and one-beat tones in the music," its message is directly in keeping with the Biblical

second great commandment, "...Love thy neighbor as thyself," and is entirely appropriate for inclusion in any hymnal. It is very instructive for personal study, particularly at this time of year when vacations are over and schools resume.

Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words – Text

Let us oft speak kind words to each other
At home or where'er we may be;
Like the warblings of birds on the heather,
The tones will be welcome and free.
They'll gladden the heart that's repining,
Give courage and hope from above,
And where the dark clouds hide the shining,
Let in the bright sunlight of love.

Chorus

Oh, the kind words we give shall in memory live
And sunshine forever impart.
Let us oft speak kind words to each other;
Kind words are sweet tones of the heart.

Like the sunbeams of morn on the mountains,
The soul they awake to good cheer;
Like the murmur of cool pleasant fountains,
They fall in sweet cadences near.
Let's oft, then, in kindly toned voices,
Our mutual friendship renew,
Till heart meets with heart and rejoices
In friendship that ever is true.

Chorus

Oh, the kind words we give shall in memory live
And sunshine forever impart.
Let us oft speak kind words to each other;
Kind words are sweet tones of the heart.

The Composer



Ebenezer Beesley was born in 1840 at Bicester, Oxfordshire, England, about sixty miles northwest of London. It is reported that he showed a tendency to great musical

talent even at the age of two years and as a child his gift was aided by the meeting of the Wesleyan Choir in the home of his parents.

An only living child at the age of six, his parents declined an offer by some influential ladies for his training as a choir boy at St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, founded in 1348 by Edward III. This would have been a great honor; however, it turned out to be a crucial decision.

His family joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a short time later and Ebenezer was baptized in 1849. The family immigrated to Utah in 1859 shortly after Ebenezer married Sarah Hancock.

Leaving England in April, they crossed the Atlantic on the 'William Tapscott' ship, and then traveled by train and steamboat to the edge of the frontier. They then traveled west in the George Rowley Handcart Company. They departed from Florence, Nebraska (near Omaha) in June of 1859 with 233 others, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley in September.

Ebenezer's musical skills were a great boon to the company as he loved to sing and sang along the way when the going allowed and played the flute (or fife) and violin around the campfire at night. Although both Ebenezer and his new bride were not yet twenty, the journey was very difficult as, with two others, they pushed and pulled the handcart with their belongings across the plains through the heat and dust of summer, sleeping on the ground in the open, with scarce food supplies. A company sent out from Salt Lake City saved their lives at Green River, 300 miles east, where they were about to perish from starvation.

The Author



Joseph Longking Townsend was born in 1849 at, or near, Canton, Bradford County, Pennsylvania; a small northern Pennsylvania town in the Appalachian

Mountain region. It is believed that his father was Captain Herman Townsend, a deeply religious businessman who also served as a Protestant Clergyman. Is it said that Herman started a foundry after moving to Canton from New York and with his foundry workers served with distinction in the Civil War.

Is it believed that Joseph's boyhood was spent on a farm, he then traveled three hundred miles west where he attended High School at the West Side High School of Cleveland, Ohio. His education included study of Latin, Greek, rhetoric (speaking and writing), physics, drawing, architectural and mechanical drawing, and landscape gardening. It is said that he was the initial student at the University of Missouri College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, which was established in 1870, at Columbia, Missouri, and that he was offered a professorship there.

Joseph declined the offer due to illness, and a change in circumstances sent him west for his health (presumably for the drier climate), arriving in Salt Lake City in 1872. The transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, so it is likely that he made the journey by train.

Living in Utah among the Latter-day Saints and having been raised in a religious Christian home it is not surprising that he joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1873 and later served as a missionary in the Southern States.

Joseph used his education to good effect, spending much of his life in teaching. He began teaching penmanship at Morgan's Commercial College, then became principal of the high school of Payson. He met his

An entirely Latter-day Saint work, the author and composer of *Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words* were both members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The hymn has also been titled *Kind Words are Sweet Tones of the Heart* and it stems from the early Utah era of Church history. Written by Joseph L. Townsend, it was first published in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1879 in the Sunday School magazine, *Juvenile Instructor*.

The *Juvenile Instructor* was begun by the Apostle George Q. Cannon in 1866 and is believed to be the first children's magazine published between the Mississippi River and the west coast. For over one hundred years the magazine was an integral part of Sunday School instruction for all ages in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Kind Words are Sweet Tones of the Heart* (*Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words*) was later included in the 1909 collection *Deseret Sunday School Songs* and then in the 1948 and subsequent Hymnals. The lovely musical setting was written for the text by Ebenezer Beesley, who caught the spirit of the song and fitted an emotionally moving melody to it.

In the 1948 LDS hymnal the two verses of the hymn in common time were written to be sung in unison, each flowing verse followed by the stronger chorus in four part harmony, with dotted rhythms. The contrast between the verse and the chorus adds emphasis to the text. In the 1985 hymnal the accompaniment was simplified and a duet part added to the verses. Unlike most hymns the accompaniment to the verses was never intended to be sung as harmony.

The imagery of the text draws parallels between the influence of nature and the influence of the human voice on our souls. The author must have had personal experience with the beneficial effects of nature from his time spent in rural environments and brings this alive for all. One instance of the author's skill is demonstrated in his use of the word "Cadence(s)" which effectively aligns two of the meanings of the word: "the modulated and rhythmic recurrence of a sound especially in nature," and, "a rhythmic sequence or flow of sounds in language," in simile.

His phrase "tones of the heart," brings to mind "heartstrings" as a metaphor. If our

Upon their arrival at Emigration Canyon, a few miles directly east of Salt Lake City, they were met by a band and thousands gathered to escort them into the city, with a brass band preceding and a martial band behind. They made their last encampment on the public square that night and then were taken into a home until they were established in a home of their own.

Ebenezer first lived for a short time in the town of Tooele, about 35 miles southwest of Salt Lake City, where it is said that he conducted the ward (congregation) choir at Sunday services. He then settled in Salt Lake City where he again led the choir and conducted the singing for Sunday School. It is believed that he copied music for the choir by hand as was the custom for the choir leader, until the *Juvenile Instructor* began printing music for the choir conductors.

He became involved in organizing and preparing music for the *Juvenile Instructor*, which circumstance most likely led to his composing the music for *Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words*. Assisted by notable LDS musicians George Careless, Evan Stephens and others, he directed the compilation and publication of both the *Deseret Sunday School Song Book* and the *Latter-day Saint's Psalmody*, which was the first LDS hymnal to include both the text and the music.

It is reported that Ebenezer studied violin under Professors C. J. Thomas and George Careless, and joined the Salt Lake Theater Orchestra directed by Professor Careless, assisting as a substitute director.

In 1880 he succeeded his mentor, George Careless, as director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, which position he held until 1889. It is said that he initiated programs to increase the musical ability of the choir during his time there. After his time with the Tabernacle Choir he taught music in Tooele and Lehi before returning to Salt Lake City.

Ebenezer Beesley passed away in 1906, leaving a large musical family posterity and a large collection of remarkable musical works. Eleven hymns in the current 1985 English Language LDS Hymnbook were composed by him.

It is instructive to note that this man, who could have been associated with the rich and famous in the courts of England, was instead led by the hand of God through great trial and poverty to contribute greatly to the building up of a musical people in a desert land. In this work he gained abilities he would probably not otherwise have known and because of this

wife, Alta Hancock in Payson, and they were blessed with eleven children. The city of Payson, Utah, approximately sixty miles south of Salt Lake City, was first settled in 1850, the Payson High School was established in 1873, reportedly the first high school south of Salt Lake City at the time. It closed for a time when Brigham Young Academy began classes in 1876 at Provo, sixteen miles northeast of Payson.

Joseph Townsend conducted a mercantile and drug business in Payson for fifteen years, then taught penmanship at Brigham Young Academy, the predecessor of Brigham Young University, for two years, and later accepted a position at the Salt Lake City High School.

During his lifetime Joseph wrote many poems, songs and hymns. Many of his works were published in Church magazines and in the *Deseret Sunday School Songbook*. Ten of his well-loved hymns are included in the current 1985 LDS Hymnal, including such favorites as "Choose the Right," "The Iron Rod," and "Oh, What Songs of the Heart."

When George D. Pyper was compiling his book "Stories of Latter-Day Saint Hymns, Their Authors and Composers," published in 1939, he contacted Joseph Townsend who was then about 90 years of age and living with family in California, and he kindly provided information about his motive for writing a few of his songs.

Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words he said was written while he was laboring (as a lay leader) in the superintendency of a very large Sunday School. He heard among the people a number of fault-finding remarks, and thought how much finer it would be to hear kind words spoken more often. This thought led him to write the song which some have called his best sermon. It was reported to have been effective in stopping the gossiping and producing a kindlier feeling in the town where he lived.



heartstrings, or our true, deepest, inner feelings, were an audible instrument, what tones would be heard from them?

He reminds us with the line, "the tones will be welcome and free," that it is not only the words we say that are important but also how they sound when we say them, and that there should be no ulterior motive for saying kind words, only friendship and love. Also, with the phrase, "Give courage and hope from above..." he reminds us that when our kind words help someone who is repining, or feeling dejection, discontent or longing, we may be the answer to someone's prayers, and the words will long be remembered.

service his name will always be remembered by the people of his faith.

Joseph Longking Townsend left a legacy of enduring gospel messages when he passed away in 1942 at Payson, Utah. One could conjecture that *Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words* was a favorite work as the phrase "Kind Words are Sweet Tones of the Heart" is engraved on his headstone at the Payson City Cemetery.



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