

There Is Sunshine in My Soul Today

March 2012 - Hymn of the Month



It is significant that this bright, cheerful hymn, that came to us more than 120 years ago, was written and composed by individuals whose lives saw sorrow and suffering. The author, limited by disability, found gladness in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and in the fourth verse looks forward to joys "laid up" (or stored away) above, perhaps some she was denied in this life. In the second verse the reference to "the songs I cannot sing" may also be a metaphor for other limitations of disability, where the heart is willing but the flesh is not able. What comfort she provides by her confidence that Jesus knows the desires of the heart. The composer, who must have witnessed terrible scenes of war, could still draw from inspiration to craft a melody with sprightly energy. Our challenges may be different from theirs, but they set a great example to follow.



The author of this joyful hymn, Eliza Edmunds Hewitt, was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1851. After graduating as valedictorian of the Girls' Normal School in Philadelphia, Eliza began teaching at the Northern Home for Friendless Children, but her career was cut short by a serious spinal injury. It is believed that she was struck by an unruly student with a slate, and after six months in a cast she was finally able to take a short walk in nearby Fairmont Park. The joy she felt at being able to walk again prompted the lyrics of the hymn. She partially recovered but it is believed she remained somewhat an invalid. She turned to writing and wrote a number of hymns along with Sunday school material and children's poems. Eliza was a close friend of blind hymnist Fanny J. Crosby, author of "Behold! A Royal Army," and wrote a tribute for her. Eliza was also known by the pseudonym Lidie H. Edmunds, and lived all her life in Philadelphia. She served as Sunday school superintendent at the Northern Home for Friendless Children, and later at the Calvin Presbyterian Church.



Eliza Hewitt teamed with John Robson Sweney who composed the music for "Sunshine in My Soul" and it was published in Philadelphia in an 1887 collection titled "Glad Hallelujahs." John Sweney was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania in 1837. His musical gift was evident at an early age and while still a boy he began to teach music in the public schools and lead Sunday school performances. At age 19 he began a serious study of music under the celebrated German teacher, Professor Bauer. John studied violin and piano and became a choir leader. He began teaching in Dover, Delaware at age 22. When the American Civil War broke out, he led the band of the Third Delaware Regiment. After the war John became Professor of Music at the Pennsylvania Military Academy and received his Bachelor and Doctor of Music degrees. He also served as music director of the Bethany Presbyterian Church for several years and was much in demand as a song leader. During his lifetime, John composed music for more than 1,000 Gospel songs, including the familiar tune for "The Lord Is My Light," and collaborated on approximately sixty collections. Nearly all the leading songwriters of the day were represented in those collections and John Sweney is credited with discovering several of them. He originally composed secular songs, but it is believed that in 1871 a spiritual crisis occurred and after that his music was primarily written for sacred texts.

The beloved hymn "There is Sunshine In My Soul" can influence an attitude of gratitude on the gloomiest days, and bring us closer to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

There is sunshine in my soul today,
More glorious and bright
Than glows in any earthly sky,
For Jesus is my light.

Refrain

*There is sunshine, blessed sunshine
When the peaceful happy moments roll.
When Jesus shows His smiling face,
There is sunshine in the soul.*

There is music in my soul today,
A carol to my King,
And Jesus listening can hear
The songs I cannot sing.

Refrain

*There is sunshine, blessed sunshine
When the peaceful happy moments roll.
When Jesus shows His smiling face,
There is sunshine in the soul.*

There is springtime in my soul today,
For when the Lord is near,
The dove of peace sings in my heart,
The flowers of grace appear.

Refrain

*There is sunshine, blessed sunshine
When the peaceful happy moments roll.
When Jesus shows His smiling face,
There is sunshine in the soul.*

There is gladness in my soul today,
And hope and praise and love,
For blessings which he gives me now,
For joys "laid up" above.

Refrain

*There is sunshine, blessed sunshine
When the peaceful happy moments roll.
When Jesus shows His smiling face,
There is sunshine in the soul.*



Information for this article came from the following websites:

http://www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/s/w/e/sweney_jr.htm

http://www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/h/e/w/hewitt_ees.htm

<http://www.hymnpod.com/2009/08/03/sunshine-in-my-soul/>

<http://conjoyubilant.blogspot.com/2009/12/john-robson-sweney-day-seven.html>

http://biblestudycharts.com/HH_More_About_Jesus.html