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### PRESIDENT DAVIES AS A HYMN WRITER.

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It is the purpose of this paper to make some record of the work of the Reverend Samuel Davies as a writer of hymns. Of Davies, as man and missionary, preacher and president, it may be said that ample memorials are already at hand.

The impression made upon his friends by his strong personality drew forth, soon after his death (on February 4th, 1761), several memorial tributes, of which the sermons by Dr. Gibbons and President Finley and the biographical sketch by Mr. Bostwick have been repeatedly printed in editions of Davies's sermons.

As time passed on, and the estimate of Davies and his work increased rather than diminished, these early obituary discourses were supplemented by more deliberate estimates of the man and his relation to the times in which he lived.

The recognition of Davies's work in Virginia called forth a Memoir by the Rev. John H. Rice, D. D., running through the numbers of the second volume of his *Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine*, from March to December, 1819.<sup>1</sup> An extended study of Davies's career covers three chapters of Dr. William Henry Foote's *Sketches of Virginia* (First Series), Philadelphia,

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ashbel Green in the notes to his *Discourses delivered in the College of New Jersey* (Philadelphia, 1822) refers to these papers as "Dr. Rice's Memoir of Samuel Davies," which is perhaps the occasion of Allibone's citing them in his *Dictionary of Authors* as though a separate publication. But I can find no evidence of their republication in book form.

1850: one of the chapters containing a printing of the Journal kept by Davies while abroad on his mission in behalf of Nassau Hall.<sup>1</sup> There is also a memoir running through three numbers of *The Panoplist* (vol. ii) for 1807.

The appreciation of his work as a preacher called forth two memoirs prepared as introductions to American editions of Davies's Sermons: an *Introductory Essay on the Life and Times of the Author*, written by the Rev. Albert Barnes for the New York edition (Dayton & Sexton, 1841, 3 vols. 12mo); and a *Memoir of President Davies*, written by the Rev. William B. Sprague, D. D., for the Philadelphia edition (Presbyterian Board of Publication, n. d. [1864], 3 vols. 8vo).

The appreciation of his work as President of Princeton College drew forth a sketch of his administration prepared from the records by Dr. Ashbel Green, and printed in the notes to the *Discourses* already referred to; and a further account is contained in Dr. Maclean's *History of Princeton College* (Philadelphia, 1877).

To these may be added various reviews of Davies's career from the standpoint of the church historian, especially a painstaking sketch in Mr. Webster's *History of the Presbyterian Church* (1858), and one in Sprague's *Annals*, which attempts a bibliography (utterly inadequate) of the writings of Davies. A *Biographical Sketch of President Davies*, signed ALIQUIS, in *The Presbyterian Magazine* for December, 1853, is important for dates, confirming Dr. Foote's statement that Davies was born November 3d, 1723, not 1724, as hitherto believed. It is accompanied also by a reputed portrait of Davies in mezzotint.<sup>2</sup>

But, even from a biographical standpoint, the best, because the most revealing, memorial of the man was erected by his friend Dr. Gibbons in editing and publishing his *Sermons upon Useful and Important Subjects*. Written as these manifestly were for the ear rather than for the eye, they bring us so much the

<sup>1</sup>The two manuscript volumes of this Journal are still preserved, one of them by the Union Theological Seminary of Virginia, the other by Princeton University.

<sup>2</sup>In an editorial note, Dr. Van Rensselaer states that he is not satisfied with the authenticity of the portrait.

nearer to the living presence of the preacher. They not only reveal the working of his mind and heart, his theology and views of life, but even retain something of the quality of his speech, and pulsate with his abounding virility. They have served to maintain Davies in the position he gained in life as "probably the most brilliant pulpit orator produced in the colonial time, south of New-England."<sup>1</sup> Beside the sermons and the diary, we have also sundry letters printed in Foote's *Virginia*, Gillies's *Collections*, and elsewhere, to assist the self-revelation of Davies.

To these biographical memorials, ample and accessible as they are, there seems no special occasion to add anything, or even to recapitulate the facts they chronicle.

It is, however, true that of Davies as poet and hymn writer the existing memorials are both less accessible and less adequate. It might, indeed, be argued (or admitted) that of Davies as a poet there is no real occasion for any memorial. His poetical writings remain, apparently, uncollected. In a letter<sup>2</sup> dated March 2d, 1750-51, he writes to a friend:—

"I informed you in my last, that I had given but little heed to the importunity of some of my friends to publish some of my poems; but since that, they have told me, that if I should consent to send the copy to the press, they would bear the trouble and expense: and this, with their other arguments, has at length determined me to comply. My principal design is, the religious entertainment of ordinary capacities; for, however willing I am, I despair of ever pleasing the nice and judicious."

Davies goes on to say that he will transmit to his friend for criticism the manuscript of the volume of his poems before they are printed. Difficult as it may be to believe that a poet resisted the importunity of friends to print his poems at their "trouble and expense," we have at present no evidence to the contrary.<sup>3</sup> A group of Davies's poems, over the pseudonym of

<sup>1</sup> Moses Coit Tyler: *A History of American Literature*. New York, 1879, Vol. ii, p. 241.

<sup>2</sup> *The General Assembly's Missionary Magazine; or Evangelical Intelligencer: for 1805*: p. 539.

<sup>3</sup> I have seen loose references to a volume of "Miscellanies," said to contain his poems.

“*Virginianus Hanoverensis*” appeared in *The American Magazine*; and in that mausoleum of the efforts of amateur literateurs they have since slept undisturbed by the chroniclers of our colonial literature. More familiar are the three pieces often reprinted as an appendix to the *Sermons*, “here retained as a specimen of the Author’s Poetry.” The first of the three is *On the Birth of John Rogers Davies, the Author’s Third Son*, beginning:—

“Thou little wond’rous miniature of man,  
Form’d by unerring Wisdom’s perfect plan;”

and one need not read much beyond the confines of the couplet to know that Davies worked in a poetical atmosphere to which Pope gave the illumination and Young the warmth. His verse interests us not so much for its sake as for his. Put forth in a time and under circumstances so unpropitious to the cultivation of the muse, it adds to our knowledge of the inward man and to our respect for him as dwelling in an atmosphere of vision and of culture quite apart from the common day in which he took so strenuous a part. In hours of quiet meditation (as appears more than once in his journal and letters) he dropped into verse spontaneously as the natural expression of what he saw and felt. And we sympathize with him and like him the better for it. Or if not, and we are disposed to be more coldly critical, even then we may, perhaps, modify our severity by comparison of his work with that of his contemporaries, “the poets of colonial America.”

This, perhaps, is all that clamors to be said of Davies as a poet in the ordinary sense of that word. But with him as a writer of hymns the case is different. Considerations are not wanting that would seem to justify, possibly even to demand, a record of his work in this more restricted sphere as full as circumstances admit of.

(1) *He was the earliest hymn writer of Colonial Presbyterianism.* It is difficult to understand upon what grounds that position has been claimed for the Connecticut Indian, Samson Occum. Nor is the whole truth expressed in the remark of Dr. Robert

Ellis Thompson<sup>1</sup> that "he and President Davies were the two first hymn writers of the American Presbyterian Church." The priority belongs not to Occum, nor to him and Davies jointly, but to Davies singly. That Occum wrote hymns at all is a matter of inference rather than of exact knowledge.<sup>2</sup> But attributing to Occum all of the hymns claimed as his, the very earliest date to which any of them could be assigned is that of his hymn book, first published in 1774. Davies, on the other hand, published hymns as early as 1756—a priority of eighteen years.

This priority of Davies is of an import greater than belongs to a mere matter of dates. It entitles him to the credit of being the pioneer of our American Presbyterian hymnody.

If the distinction be observed (as historically it was, scrupulously) between metrical renderings of the Psalms and other passages of Scripture, such as were the *Bay Psalm Book* of 1640, Mather's *Psalterium Americanum* of 1718, and John Barnard's *Version of the Psalms* of 1752, on the one hand, and "hymns of mere human composure," on the other; then, with that understanding, Davies is entitled to the still greater renown of being the first hymn writer of any moment in America. And this honor is accorded him in a careful summary of the history of American hymnody by the Rev. Frederic M. Bird (himself an Episcopalian).<sup>3</sup>

He belongs to that generation of American Presbyterians who began the movement of revolt against the established ordinance of exclusive psalm-singing, who first tested and then welcomed the *Imitations* of Dr. Watts and, later, his *Hymns*. When Davies was born Watts's earliest hymns had been before the public for only sixteen years, and the date of Davies's death was but thirteen years later than that of Watts himself. And it was not until twenty-seven years after Davies's death that the singing of

<sup>1</sup> *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States*. New York, 1895, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> For the most favorable presentation of his claim see *Samson Occum and the Christian Indians of New England* by W. DeLoss Love, Ph. D. Boston, n. d. [1899], pp. 176-187.

<sup>3</sup> See *Supplement to Encyclopædia Britannica*. Philadelphia, 1886, Vol. iii, p. 372.

hymns was actually authorized by the Synod of the Church in which he ministered. These facts throw a color of originality, perhaps even of venturesomeness, around Davies's work as a writer of hymns, and invest it with a historical significance quite apart from any question of actual merit in the hymns themselves.

(2) *He was a hymn writer of decided mark and influence.* His hymns were successful in making their way into hymn books and attained wide circulation and use. One of them has been found by the Rev. Mr. Bird,<sup>1</sup> in more than one hundred hymn books, in England alone. Some of them have continued in use up to the present time.

In considering the intrinsic merits of Davies's hymns it must be remembered that they are to be estimated in the light of the time when written. They were formed upon the model of Watts's hymns (the only model available), and they followed the lines laid down by him. But this is not more true of the hymns of Davies than of those of Doddridge and of many other esteemed writers. It means merely that Davies was not an original genius as Watts was; but it does not imply that he was a servile imitator.

Judged by our present lyrical standards, Davies's hymns as a whole would be thought somewhat heavy. And yet one of them was, so lately as 1898, inserted in *The Church Hymnary*, a joint production of the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland and Ireland, containing in all but 626 hymns. Of this hymn ("Great God of Wonders, all Thy ways") the Rev. John Brownlie, the most eminent of the younger hymn writers of Scotland, has spoken<sup>2</sup> as "an excellent hymn on the pardoning grace of God." Josiah Miller<sup>3</sup> says of it: "This is a hymn admirable for its unity, comprehensiveness, simplicity, and force." And, alluding to another hymn more familiar in this country ("Lord, I am Thine, entirely Thine"), the Rev. Samuel W. Duf-

<sup>1</sup> See Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*. London, 1892, p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> *The Hymns and Hymn Writers of the Church Hymnary*. London, n. d. [1899], p. 290.

<sup>3</sup> *Singers and Songs of the Church*. Second edition, London, 1869, p. 236.

field, himself pastor, hymnologist and hymn writer, has said :<sup>1</sup> "There are few hymns of consecration which are finer than the one before us."

In view of these facts it would be difficult to deny that Davies's work as a hymn writer has an importance for the sake of the hymns themselves. It is not necessary to claim that they constitute his greatest distinction ; it is not even necessary to weigh the relative importance of sermon and hymn ; but it is also impossible to question the fact that it is through his hymns that Davies retains what hold he has upon the living world of to-day. There would be no exaggeration in the statement that thousands of living voices join in singing his hymn last mentioned where a single pair of human eyes reads one of his sermons.

From a Presbyterian standpoint Davies's distinction as a hymn writer is further emphasized by the very limited number of other hymn writers from that branch of the American Church who have since arisen to places of influence beside him. Even now, a century and a half after his death, his hymns still remain a very appreciable part of the entire contribution his Church has been permitted to make to hymnody.

With these considerations in mind, seeming to justify a proper recognition of Davies as a hymn writer, one would naturally turn to the biographical materials cited at the beginning of this paper with expectation of finding there some account of the hymns. All that he does find there will be of as much interest to the student of the hymns as to the student of the sermons. But he will find nothing concerning the hymns beyond an allusion appended to Dr. Sprague's bibliographical note, as follows :<sup>2</sup> "He was also the author of . . . various Hymns and other pieces of poetry of no small degree of merit."

In the case of the earliest group of eulogists their silence is explained by their lack of information, at the date of writing, concerning his hymns. The silence of the later biographers must be imputed to their lack of interest. One group of them

<sup>1</sup> *English Hymns : their Authors and History*. Second edition, New York, 1886, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> *The Annals*, vol. iii, p. 144.

had their eyes on Virginia, the other had theirs on the sermons, and neither discerned any significance in the hymns.

For a notice of Davies's hymn writing we must turn to the hymnologies. The systematic study of hymns is modern, but from its beginnings he has been recognized and accorded his proper place. In Dr. Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* the biographical data are briefly recorded, and seven of Davies's hymns are annotated. In addition we have there the statement that the hymns appeared in Dr. Thomas Gibbons's London hymn-book of 1769. This is true of the hymns as a body, but it should be understood that several of them had been already printed during Davies's lifetime in connection with one or another of the pamphlet sermons published by him. And we should like to know also under what circumstances the hymns came to be printed in 1769.

This information is supplied in the preface by Dr. Gibbons to the earlier series of Davies's *Sermons*, edited and published by him. The sermons as we know them really include three series: one published by Dr. Gibbons in 1766 in three volumes, a second published by him in two volumes in 1771, from both of which the occasional sermons were excluded; and a third collection, of occasional sermons, first published in London in 1806 and in this country in 1810. The original preface, dated November 14th, 1765, with which this first series was introduced, was not included by Dr. Gibbons in the numerous reprints of the *Sermons* as edited by him, but another preface, dated October 21st, 1770, was substituted for it. The earlier preface contains an account of the manner and form in which Davies's papers came into his hands and of his purposed dealing with the hymns, as follows:

"An epistolary correspondence commenced between the Rev. Mr *Samuel Davies* and myself in the year 1752, and was continued till the time of his decease.

"When I began the intercourse with him I could not entertain any very probable hopes that we should ever have an interview in our world, but Mr *Davies's* visit to *Great Britain* in the year 1753, with that venerable man the Rev. Mr *Gilbert Tennent* of *Philadelphia*, to solicit benefactions for the college of *New-Jersey*, gave me a pleasure beyond all reasonable expectation; and the friendship which was kindled at the distance

of several thousand miles from each other was increased by free and frequent converses during the time, almost a year, of Mr *Davies's* residence on this side the *Atlantic*.

"After his departure from our country to *America* I received several letters from Mr *Davies*, and had the honor of being numbered among his particular friends to whom he communicated the very secrets of his bosom.

"In a letter dated *September 12, 1757*, Mr *Davies* (at that juncture scarce recovered from a violent and dangerous fever) thus writes to me: 'I want to live after I am dead, not in name, but in public usefulness: I was therefore about to order in my will that all my notes, which are tolerably full, might be sent to you to correct and publish such of them as you might judge conducive to the public good. Pray, what do you think of the project, if the like occasion should return while you are among mortals?'

"What answer I gave to my friend's proposal I cannot exactly recollect, but I am persuaded that my affection to him would not permit me to put a negative upon his request.

"On the 4th of *February, 1761*, this excellent man was by a violent fever removed from our world: . . . A very considerable number of his SERMONS has been transmitted to me, and thence I have selected what were sufficient to compose the ensuing volumes.

. . . "Mr *Davies* annexed to some of his Sermons HYMNS of his own composition. Had this been uniformly the case they might have accompanied his Discourses to the press, but as it is not, I have omitted them; but, if death or incapacity prevent not my design, I intend hereafter to collect what HYMNS of his have fallen into my hands, and publish them together with some of my own on the like occasions."

This purpose Dr. Gibbons fulfilled. In 1769 he published the first of his collections of hymns: *Hymns adapted to Divine Worship: in two books. Book I. Derived from select Passages of the Holy Scriptures. Book II. Written on sacred Subjects, and particular Occasions. Partly collected from various Authors, but principally composed by Thomas Gibbons, D. D.* [Quotation.] London: Printed for J. Buckland, J. Johnson, and J. Payne in Paternoster-Row. M DCC LXIX. 16mo, pp. vii, (24), 254, (4).

In this book appeared sixteen hymns "By the Reverend SAMUEL DAVIES, A. M.," which in the preface are thus referred to:

"The Pieces in the following Miscellany ascribed to the Rev. Mr DAVIES, were found in his Manuscripts intrusted with the Editor, from

which, if he may be allowed the Digression, he has already printed Three Volumes of Discourses, and has proposed to the Public to publish Two more Volumes for the Benefit of Mr. DAVIES's family."

It is presumable that these sixteen are all the original hymns that came into Dr. Gibbons's hands, though some of Davies's sermons, earlier printed, had annexed "an hymn by the author of the sermon foregoing varied from" some other writer.

In regard to the state of the text nothing certain can be known. In the case of the sermons, Dr. Gibbons found himself "under the necessity of making some occasional alterations and amendments as to the language, and especially of adjusting the pointing." Whether he found himself under the same necessity as regards the hymns can only be surmised. There are variances in the text of those which had been earlier printed, but it is possible that Davies himself had indicated the changes in the papers he left behind him. In any case the text of 1769 is the standard text of all the hymns, and of a number of them the only authorized text.

Dr. Gibbons's hymn-book does not seem to have been widely used, but it became a source for other compilers to draw from. Three of the hymns of Davies were included in the Baptist *Collection* of Drs. Ash and Evans, published at Bristol the same year as Gibbons's. But the hymns of Davies, which obtained wide recognition and use, were the seven which were included by Dr. Rippon in his *Selection* of 1787. This became the great Baptist hymn book in Great Britain and also in this country, where it was frequently reprinted. And in both countries it became a source of supply from which compilers of many denominations freely drew. None of Davies's hymns which was not in *Rippon* has come into any extended use; so that it may be said of the hymns that if they owe their publication to the loyal friendship of Dr. Gibbons, they owe their circulation to Dr. Rippon.

*The Saviour when to heav'n he rose  
In splendid triumph o'er his foes,  
His gifts on rebel men bestow'd,  
And wide his royal bounties flow'd.*

*Hence sprung th' apostles' honour'd name,  
More glorious than the hero's fame ;  
Evangelists and prophets hence  
Derive the blessings they dispense.*

*In humbler forms, to bless our eyes,  
Pastors from hence and teachers rise ;  
Who, though with feebler rays they shine,  
Still gild a long-extended line.*

*From Christ their various gifts derive,  
And fed by Christ their graces live :  
While, guarded by his mighty hand,  
'Midst all the rage of hell they stand.*

*Thus teachers, teachers shall succeed  
When we lie silent with the dead !  
And unborn churches, by their care,  
Shall rise and flourish large and fair.*

*Pastors and people, join and sing,  
This constant, inexhausted spring,  
Whence through all ages richly flow  
The streams that cheer the church below.*

NOTE.—The above hymn was printed at the end of Sermon LXXVIII in the 1806 volume of Davies's *Sermons*. The sermon, on "The Office of a Bishop a Good Work," was preached at the ordination of the Rev. John Martin at Hanover, June 9, 1757, and looks as though it had been printed at the time. The hymn is a recast of Doddridge's "Father of Mercies, in Thy House," (No. CCLXXXIX in Orton's 1755 edition of Doddridge's *Hymns Founded on various Texts in the Holy Scriptures*). The words of the original retained by Davies are here indicated by italic type. Dr. Gibbons did not print this among Davies's hymns in his hymn book.

18.

## An HYMN

*From Dr. DODDRIDGE, varied.*

A hymn with the above title is printed at the end of a sermon preached by Davies at Hanover, May 8, 1757, and printed in London in 1758, with the title, "Little Children Invited to Jesus Christ." The sermon is in 24mo, of 36 pages, including "A Short Account of the late remarkable Religious Impressions among the Students in the College of New Jersey," and has apparently never been reprinted.

The hymn is that printed as No. 198 in Orton's edition of Doddridge's hymns, beginning, "See Israel's gentle Shepherd stand." The first four verses are unaltered, and in place of Doddridge's fifth verse the following original verse makes the fifth as here printed :—

"Ye feeble Lambs, fly to His Arms,  
That open wide for you ;  
He'll save you from the Lion's Rage,  
And all th' infernal Crew."



COMMUNION TOKEN OF THE REVEREND SAMUEL DAVIES.

Found beneath the slip-cover of one of the volumes of his manuscript Journal.