

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LIFE OF GEORGE MANWARING

Prepared by a brother, John H. Manwaring

George Manwaring, son of Henry and Sarah Barber Manwaring, was born in Cheshire, England, March 19, 1854. Died July 7, 1889 at the age of thirty-five (I have in his original handwriting some of his hymns).

He joined the church when nine years of age and immigrated to Utah with his Father's family in 1871, at the age of seventeen.

Before coming to Utah he was employed as an errand boy in a country store near Cheshire, England. He did not have the privilege of attending school more than a few weeks, but when he died at the age of thirty-five he was a well educated man. While working in this store he took advantage of every opportunity to read good books, borrowing from his employer and others, books of every kind. He became very much interested in the study of stenography, mathematics, and literature, and when he came to Utah at the age of seventeen, was able to report sermons delivered in the tabernacle. He became very proficient in mathematics and was a splendid penman. He started a magazine known as the *Home Circle*, of which he was the editor and manager, but this venture failed for lack of financial support. He was a music teacher of rare ability. Never having had a music lesson in his life, he was able to play piano or organ and to teach, all of which he did by ear. He traveled extensively over the state and in practically every ward in the state taught the children music in Sunday School where he visited. He was a gifted poet, and many of his poems were published in the newspapers and the magazines in the early eighties. He wrote some of the most beautiful and inspiring songs, many of which are printed in the *Sunday School Union Song Book*, and some are sung Sabbath after Sabbath in practically every ward in the church. Some of the best known are, "Closing Hymn", "Parting Hymn", "Beautiful Day of Rest", "Gladly Meeting", "We Shall Meet Again", "Beautiful Mountain Home", "Welcome to our Union Meeting", "Sacrament Hymn", "'Tis Sweet to Sing the Matchless Love", and "Joseph Smith's First Prayer".

The name of George Manwaring will never die as long as the last named song is in print. The inspiration for this song came while gazing upon a painting entitled *The Vision* by C.C.A. Christiansen, of Ephraim, Utah. This painting showed the Father and Son appearing to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

It would be interesting to know what inspired each of his songs mentioned above, but this brief history will not permit going into detail. He was naturally gifted as a poet and wrote hundreds of poems and songs which have never been in print. One in particular was a poem written at the end of a letter to his mother, entitled:

'Tis Good to Pray.

'Tis good to approach the Lord by prayer,
And humbly kneel before his throne,
To call on him who loves to hear,

And make our heartfelt wishes known.

'Tis good to lay our burdens down,
Relieve our hearts of every care;
And seek for strength from him above,
Who hath the power to answer prayer.

'Tis good to ask forgiveness, too,
For every evil thought and deed;
To Him for mercy humbly sue,
Who doth the contrite sinner heed.

'Tis good to know that one will hear,
And not in vain our prayers ascend,
When to the Father we draw near
Through Jesus Christ, our truest Friend.

This poem, like so many others of a similar nature, seemed to come through inspiration from the Father and one cannot help but be impressed with the thought that he was a very devout Christian and possessed of a very religious nature.

George Manwaring was employed for a number of years as manager of the retail grocery department of the ZCMI and while so employed decorated the first Christmas window of this department of the ZCMI. Later he entered the retail grocery business in Salt Lake City for himself but disposed of his business to enter the employ of the D.O. Calder Music Palace as traveling salesman. It was while so employed that his opportunity came to teach the children in the Sunday Schools of the various wards in the Church where he visited each Sabbath Day. He was a great lover of nature and this love found expression in painting, in poetry and in song.

****Note:** This brief history was prepared by John H. Manwaring, a brother, and was used in talks delivered in Relief Society meetings a number of years ago when the history of our composers was part of the prepared course of study. These histories were printed in *The Improvement Era*, the one on George Manwaring being written by Mrs. Bertha Stevenson and George D. Pyper of the Sunday School Union.

A.C. Smyth appears as the composer of the music for "Joseph Smith's First Prayer." This is misleading because it leaves the impression that George Manwaring was the composer of the words only, and this is an error. He composed both words and music but A.C. Smyth was responsible for the arrangement of the music for printing. This is also true of other songs in the S. S. Songbook where musicians appear as joint authors. In several instances George Manwaring was deprived of credit as composer because of carelessness on the part of printers or those who prepared or arranged the song books. E. Stephens appears as the sole composer of "Gladly Meeting, Kindly Greeting" in the 1918 edition of the *Songs of Zion*, then there was an actual and deliberate misappropriation of one song by the Rev. R. Lowry who had the song copyrighted in his own name. The song was composed--words and music--by George Manwaring. The Rev. Mr. Lowry arranging the music only for publication.

Mention is made of C.C.A. Christiansen of Ephraim, Utah, whose painting The Vision was the inspiration for "Joseph Smith's First Prayer." It was on one of his sales trips for the D. O. Calder Music Palace that he first saw this painting. He was the guest of artist Christiansen who took him into his studio and showed him The Vision which he had just finished. It was a painting of the Father and Son appearing to Joseph Smith in the sacred grove in answer to prayer. It made such an impression on the mind of George Manwaring, then about 24 years of age, that he was inspired to compose the song. As John points out, as long as the song remains in print, the name of George Manwaring will never die. The leaders and the preachers of the L.D.S. Church had been telling the story of the vision for years and years, but it was left to an English emigrant boy to put the story before the members of the church in music and in song. For 48 years the church had been content to tell the story from the pulpit but not one musician--and there were many talented poets and musicians in the Church--had attempted to tell the story in music and in song. Surely, this song came through the inspiration of the Spirit of God, and it will stand as a monument to the Church and to the author as long as time shall last.

-George Ernest Manwaring, June 27, 1902 (son of George the songwriter)

***Note

This was my son's and dad's half-brother George who put this memo to dad.

May 6, 1952

Lorus: You may remember that some years ago that the Improvement Era published a brief history of a number of the song writers of the Church. George Manwaring was included in this list, and his history was written by Bertha Stevenson, the wife of Dr. Lester A. Stevenson, brother of Electa Stevenson Manwaring. She was assisted by John H. Manwaring and George E. Manwaring who furnished part of the information. This particular number of the Era I turned over to Tracy Y. Cannon and never received it back. I mentioned this to you the other day. About that same time, the relief societies of the Church were discussing these song writers in their meetings. I was called upon to talk to quite a number of them – second ward, third ward, Sugar House, Waterloom Liberty and others I have forgotten and to many others I furnished this short history which was taken from Uncle John's contribution which is enclosed. I value this highly and ask that you return it after you are through with it. Suggest that you make several copies of it "just as is" for the benefit of members of your family. I notice at this late date that Uncle John did not date this history. I will probably locate copies of my letters to Uncle John on the subject. However, it isn't important. We have the history in his handwriting and that is important.