

Lyman Foster Brackett

(Nearly all that follows is from a talk by Peter J. Hodgson in 2003 at the Longyear Foundation entitled, "Lyman Brackett: Memorable Man of Music." DVD and VHS versions of this talk are still available from Longyear.)

Lyman Brackett was born in 1852 (and passed on in 1937), and he was an established composer by the time he became associated with the Christian Science movement. That was around 1887 when he and Mrs. Eddy met. There is no definitive account of the circumstances of their meeting, but Brackett was teaching music in the same building, a facility called Chickering Hall, where the Christian Science Church was also headquartered. Mrs. Eddy apparently had some exposure to his music, and she asked him to set her poem, "Feed My Sheep" to music. He did so, and she was pleased with it. Thus he was the first composer of Mrs. Eddy's words. I'm not sure that this was that first setting of "Feed My Sheep," but let's sing his best-loved tune from our Hymnal.

Hymn 304 (all verses)

After Brackett's first meeting with Mrs. Eddy in 1887, by the next year they were talking about compiling a Christian Science hymnal. Up to that time Christian Science churches were mostly using the Unitarian Hymn and Tune book -- and a few other hymnals. In 1889 the Christian Science Association decided a denomination-specific hymnal was needed. This was no small task because most existing hymns, including much-loved ones, were not consistent with Christian Science doctrine. Mrs. Eddy asked Brackett to compile that first hymnal, and his appointment as chair of the hymnal committee was formalized by the Christian Science Publishing Society. Let's sing another of Brackett's tunes from our Hymnal.

Hymn 154 (all)

In a letter to the Christian Science Board of Directors in the 1930s Brackett reported that he had many private interviews with Mrs. Eddy during the time the first Hymnal was being produced -- very unusual, but understandable, considering the importance of hymns. Brackett selected texts, edited them for consistency with Christian Science doctrine, and composed most of the tunes. Then when the Hymnal was published in 1892, people loved his work. Let's sing another of Brackett's settings of Mrs. Eddy's poems.

Hymn 298 (1st & 4th verses)

In that first Hymnal Brackett innovated the idea of putting a hymn text on one page and then several alternate tunes on a facing page. This was satisfactory for a choir. Yes, Christian Science churches had choirs in those days, even though they may have consisted of only a quartet. By 1897 choirs had faded out because Mrs. Eddy felt they had become a distraction. A choir would consist of experienced singers and be rehearsed and could deal with the separation of text and words, but it was awfully inconvenient for congregational singing when words and music were not well known. So the 1898 edition of the Hymnal instituted our current format of hymn texts close to the notes being sung. Let's sing another of Brackett's hymns and appreciate the current format.

Hymn 197 (all)

In that first 1892 Hymnal Brackett contributed 99 of his own tunes. In the 1898 edition (which I found on Google Books), his presence was still strong: of the 191 hymns, 62 of the tunes were

his. In the 1909 edition with 241 hymns, 43 were by Brackett. Would you like to experience one of those lost hymn tunes?

Everlasting Arms of Love

During the early years of the 20th century, the German composer Richard Wagner was immensely popular. William Lyman Johnson was an early student of Mrs. Eddy, served the movement in a variety of capacities, and was a poet and composer. He admired Wagner and his compositions emulated Wagner's style, in contrast to the simplicity of Brackett's compositions. In 1897 Mrs. Eddy asked Johnson to set her poem, "Communion Hymn," to music. In 1899 Johnson composed a solo setting of "Mother's Evening Prayer" that was sung at The Mother Church and took 17 minutes to perform. In 1905 Mrs. Eddy asked Johnson to set "Feed My Sheep" and "Christ My Refuge" to music. Both she and others in the movement felt that Johnson's style of music represented the future of music, so instructions were sent to the field to cut Brackett's settings of her poems out of the Hymnals and replace them with Johnson's. Four years later, though, there were reports that people were not singing Mrs. Eddy's hymns because they were too difficult. So the word went out to restore Brackett's versions. Currently there are 2 of Johnson's hymns in our Hymnal, and 5 of Brackett's, so I guess Brackett won in the long run. Let's close with a little fun. We'll sing one verse of Johnson's setting of "Christ My Refuge" and one verse of Brackett's. Then you can decide whose style you prefer.

Hymn 253 (first verse)

Hymn 254 (first verse)

Finally, if you want to know more about Brackett, the best source would be Peter Hodgson's 93-page book, *A Most Agreeable Man: Lyman Foster Brackett*. The price is \$20 and you can get it from the Longyear Foundation (www.longyear.org).