

“Alas and Did My Saviour Bleed and Did My Sovereign Die”

~ John Fawcett

In November, 1850, thirty year old Fanny Crosby had been attending numerous revival meetings and had answered the altar call, hoping to find peace for her soul. But on the 20th of the month, the audience began to sing “**Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed,**” a hymn written by Isaac Watts in 1707. It was when they sang the words, “Here, Lord I give myself away - 'tis all that I can do,” that Fanny realized that all she needed was to yield herself. She said: “I surrendered myself to the Saviour, and my very soul flooded with celestial light. I sprang to my feet, shouting ‘Hallelujah.’”

Watts' father was Nonconformist imprisoned twice for his religious views. Isaac learned Greek, Latin, and Hebrew under Mr. Pinhorn, Rector of All Saints, and headmaster of the Grammar School in Southampton. Isaac's taste for verse showed itself in early childhood, and his promise caused a local doctor and other friends to offer him a university education, assuming he would be ordained in the Church of England. However, Watts declined and instead entered a Nonconformist Academy at Stoke Newington in 1690, under the care of Thomas Rowe, pastor of the Independent congregation at Girdlers' Hall; Isaac joined this congregation in 1693.

Watts left the Academy at age 20 and spent two years at home; it was during this period that he wrote the bulk of his Hymns and Spiritual Songs. They were sung from manuscripts in the Southampton Chapel, and published 1707-1709.

The next six years of his life were again spent at Stoke Newington, working as tutor to the son of eminent Puritan John Hartopp. The intense study of these years is reflected in the theological and philosophical material he subsequently published.

Watts preached his first sermon at age 24. In the next three years, he preached frequently, and in 1702 was ordained as pastor of the Independent congregation in Mark Lane. At that time he moved into the house of a Mr. Hollis in the Minories. His health began to fail the next year, and Samuel Price was appointed as his assistant in the ministry. In 1712, a fever shattered his constitution, and Price became co-pastor of the congregation, which had moved to a new chapel in Bury Street. It was at this time that Isaac became the guest of Sir Thomas Abney. He

lived with Abney (and later Abney's widow) the rest of his life, mainly at Theobalds in Hertfordshire, then for 13 years at Stoke Newington.

Isaac Watts said of his hymn writing, "I have made no pretence to be a poet. But to the Lamb that was slain, and now lives, I have addressed many a song, to be sung by the penitent and believing heart.

*Alas! and did my Saviour bleed, and did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?*

*Was it for crimes that I had done He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown! and love beyond degree!*

*Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut His glories in,
When Christ, the Mighty maker, died for man, the creature's sins.*

*Thy body slain, sweet Jesus, Thine - and bathed in its own blood -
While the firm mark of Wrath Divine His soul in anguish stood.*

*Thus might I hide my blushing face while his dear Cross appears;
Dissolved my heart in thankfulness, and melt mine eyes to tears.*

*But drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I woe;
Here, Lord, I give myself away- 'til all that I can do.*