

The Fanny Crosby of Sweden

Carolina Sandell Berg (1832-1903)

As will be noted in a subsequent chapter, the Nineteenth century witnessed the phenomenon of gifted Christian women assuming a place of primary importance among the foremost hymn-writers of the Church. Just as England had its Charlotte Elliott and Frances Havergal, and America had its Fanny Crosby, so Sweden had its Lina Sandell.

The rise of women hymn-writers came simultaneously with the great spiritual revival which swept over America and evangelical Europe in successive tidal waves from 1800 to 1875. In Sweden the religious renaissance received its first impulse, no doubt, from Lutheran Germany. However, the Wesleyan movement in England and America also began to make its influence felt in wider circles, and the coming to Stockholm of such a man as George Scott, an English Methodist, gave added impetus to the evangelical movement which was already under way.

Carl Olof Rosenius, Sweden's greatest lay preacher and the most prominent leader in the Pietistic movement in that country, was one of Scott's disciples, although he remained faithful to the Lutheran doctrine and a member of the Established Church to the close of his life.

It was in the midst of the Rosenius movement that Lina Sandell became known to her countrymen as a great song-writer. She was born October 3, 1832, at Froederyd, her father being the parish pastor at that place. She was a frail child who preferred to spend her hours in her father's study rather than join her comrades in play. When she was twenty-six years old, she accompanied him on a journey to Gothenburg, but they never reached their destination. At Haestholmen the vessel on which they sailed gave a sudden lurch and the father fell overboard, drowning before the eyes of his devoted daughter.

This tragedy proved a turning point in Lina Sandell's life. In the midst of her grief she sought comfort in writing hymns. Her songs seemed to pour forth in a steady stream from the depths of a broken heart. Fourteen of her hymns were published anonymously the same year (1858) in a Christian periodical, *Budbaeraren*. Although she lived to write 650 hymns in all, these fourteen from the pen of the grief-stricken 26-year-old girl have retained a stronger hold on the hearts of her countrymen than most of her later productions. Among these "first-fruits" born in sorrow are such hymns as: "Saviour, O hide not Thy loving face from me", "Others He hath succored" and "Children of the heavenly Father".

Children of the heavenly Father
Safely in His bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven
Such a refuge e'er was given.

The remarkable popularity which Lina Sandell's hymns attained within a comparatively short time was due to a large extent to the music written for them by Oscar Ahnfelt, a "spiritual troubadour" of his day. Ahnfelt not only possessed the gift of composing pleasing melodies that caught the fancy of the Swedish people, but he traveled from place to place throughout the Scandinavian countries and sang them to the accompaniment of a guitar. Miss Sandell once said: "Ahnfelt has sung my songs into the hearts of the people."

The inspiration for her songs came to Miss Sandell at sundry times and places. Sometimes in the midst of the noise and confusion of the city's streets, she would hear the words of a new song. Sometimes she would awake in the still hours of the night with the verses of a hymn ringing in her ears. By her bedside she always kept a slate on which she might instantly record these heaven-born thoughts.

In 1867 Miss Sandell was married to a Stockholm merchant, C. O. Berg, but she continued to sign her hymns with the initials, "L. S." by which she was familiarly known throughout Sweden. She died on July 27, 1903.

Not only Ahnfelt, but also Jenny Lind helped to make Lina Sandell's hymns known. The "Swedish nightingale" was herself a Pietist and found great delight in listening to the preaching of Rosenius and the singing of Ahnfelt. At these conventicles the marvelous singer who had gained the homage of two continents sat with common workingmen on crude benches and joined with her sweet voice in singing the Pietist hymns. Ahnfelt, in visiting the home of the great singer, spoke of his ambition to publish these hymns. When Jenny Lind learned that financial difficulties stood in the way, she quickly provided the necessary funds, and so the first edition of "Ahnfelt's Songs," which in reality were mostly the hymns of Lina Sandell and Rosenius, was made possible.

Rosenius and Ahnfelt encountered much persecution in their evangelical efforts. King Karl XV was petitioned to forbid Ahnfelt's preaching and singing. The monarch refused until he had had an opportunity to hear the "spiritual troubadour." Ahnfelt was commanded to appear at the royal palace. Being considerably perturbed in mind as to what he should sing to the king, he besought Lina Sandell to write a hymn for the occasion. She was equal to the task and within a few days the song was ready. With his guitar under his arm and the hymn in his pocket, Ahnfelt repaired to the palace and sang:

Who is it that knocketh upon your heart's door
In peaceful eve?

Who is it that brings to the wounded and sore
The balm that can heal and relieve?

Your heart is still restless, it findeth no peace
In earth's pleasures;

Your soul is still yearning, it seeketh release
To rise to the heavenly treasures.

The king listened with tears in his eyes. When Ahnfelt had finished, the monarch gripped him by the hand and exclaimed: "You may sing as much as you like in both of my kingdoms!"

Mention has already been made of the hymns of Rosenius. These, like the songs of Lina Sandell, were likewise a powerful factor in the spread of the evangelical movement in Sweden.

— Excerpt from *The Story of Our Hymns* by Ernest Edwin Ryden, 1930

Day by day

Blott en dag

Day by day They mercies, Lord, attend me,
O what comfort in this hope to rest!
All that Thou in love divine dost send me,
Draws me, Savior, closer to Thy breast.
Thou dost love more tenderly than ever
Earthly father careth for his own;
Sorrow's heavy burden Thou wilt never
Suffer me to carry all alone.

Thro' life's devious paths Thou e'er wilt guide me,
For each need wilt give me plenteous grace;
In temptation's storms wilt safely hide me,
Till in glory I behold Thy face.
Thou hast promised for each day and hour
Grace to trust, and strength to do Thy will:
"As thy day is, so shall be thy power,"
This the gracious word Thou speakest still.

O what joy beneath Thy heav'nly favor,
Trustingly to rest my soul in Thee;
Help me, Lord, that I may never waver,
Nor forget Thy loving care for me;
For I know, no matter what betide me,
Thou wilt ever hold me by the hand;
With thy presence, Savior, here to guide me,
I shall reach at last the goodly land.

Lina Sandell
Translated by Ernest Edwin Ryden

Thy holy wings, dear Savior

Bred dina vida vingar

Thy holy wings, dear Savior, spread gently over me;
and through the long night watches I'll rest secure in thee.

Whatever may betide me, be thou my hiding place,
and let me live and labor each day, Lord, by thy grace.

Thy pardon, Savior, grant me, and cleanse me in thy blood;
give me a willing spirit, a heart both clean and good.
O take into thy keeping thy children great and small,
and while we sweetly slumber enfold us one and all.

Lina Sandell

Translated by Ernest Edwin Ryden