

## KINGO, THE POET OF EASTER-TIDE

### *Kingo's Sunrise Hymn*

*The sun arises now  
In light and glory,  
And gilds the rugged brow  
Of mountains hoary;  
Be glad, my soul, and lift  
Thy voice in singing  
To God from earth below,  
Thy heart with joy aglow  
And praises ringing.*

*Like countless grains of sand.  
Beyond all measure,  
And wide as sea and land  
Is heaven's treasure  
Of grace which God anew  
Each day bestoweth,  
And which, like pouring rain,  
Into my soul again  
Each morning floweth.*

*Keep Thou my soul today  
From sin and blindness;  
Surround me on my way  
With loving-kindness,  
And fill my heart, O God,  
With joy from heaven;  
I then shall ask no more  
Than what Thou hast of yore  
In wisdom given.*

*Thou knowest best my needs,  
My sighs Thou heedest;  
Thy hand Thy children feeds,  
Thine own Thou ledest;  
What should I more desire,  
With Thee deciding  
The course that I must take  
Than follow in the wake  
Where Thou art guiding?*

THOMAS KINGO (1634-1703).

Denmark's first great hymnist, Thomas Kingo, hailed from the land of Robert Burns. His grandfather, who also bore the name of Thomas, emigrated from Scotland to Denmark near the end of the 17th century to become a tapestry weaver for Christian IV.

The boy who was destined to become one of Denmark's most famous spiritual bards was born in Slangerup, December 15, 1634. At the age of six years he entered the Latin school of his native city, and ten years later became a student of the school in Frederiksborg. The principal of this institution, Albert Bartholin, discovered unusual gifts in the lad and took him into his own home. After completing theological studies at the university, he returned in 1668 to his native city of Slangerup as Lutheran parish pastor.

About this time he began to attract attention as a writer of secular poetry. It was not until 1673, however, that his first collection of hymns appeared under the title, "Spiritual Songs, First Part." The profound impression created by this production is evidenced by the fact that in 1677 he was elevated from an obscure parish to the bishopric of the diocese of Fyen.

Kingo had dedicated his "Spiritual Songs" to Christian V, and thus had attracted the attention of the Danish monarch. In his "address" to the king, Kingo deplored the fact that the Danish people in their worship had depended so largely upon hymns of foreign origin.

"The soul of the Danes," he added significantly, "is not so bound and impoverished but that it can soar as high toward heaven as that of other peoples, even if it be not upborne by strange and foreign wings."

The Second Part of his "Spiritual Songs" appeared in 1681, this collection being dedicated to the Danish queen. Many of Kingo's hymns were written to be sung to popular folk melodies. In justification of this practice the poet wrote:

"If a pleasing melody set to a song of Sodom delights your ear, how much more, if you are a true child of God, should not that same melody delight your soul when sung to a song of Zion!"

In his dedicatory address to Queen Charlotte, the poet of Scotch forebears gave expression to his great love for the Danish language, praised her for her heroic efforts to master the language before coming to Denmark as its queen, and ironically flayed certain foreign courtiers who for "thirty years had eaten the bread of the Fatherland in the service of the king without making an effort to learn thirty Danish words."

By this time the Danish people had come to a full realization that a poet of the first magnitude had risen in their midst. In June, 1679, Kingo was created a member of the nobility, and in 1682 he received the honorary degree of doctor of theology. The following year came the royal appointment to prepare a hymn-book for the Church of Denmark. The king's decree specifically stated that Kingo should include a number of his own hymns, but he was directed

to make few changes in the old, traditional hymns, and "under no circumstances to alter the meaning of Lu ther's hymns."

The first part of Kingo's new book appeared in 1689. It met with a storm of disapproval that was not altogether unmerited. Of the 267 hymns in this book, 136 were by Kingo himself. Members of the Danish court who had been objects of Kingo's merciless satire now found an opportunity to secure revenge. Kingo's book, which had been published at his own expense, was rejected, and Soren Jonassen, dean of Roskilde, was appointed to take over the task. His work, which was completed in 1693, did not contain a single one of Kingo's hymns! It too was promptly disapproved. A commission was then appointed by the king to supervise the work, and again Kingo came into favor. The new hymn-book, which was officially approved in 1699, was based largely on Kingo's work, and contained 85 of his original hymns.

Although Kingo lived to see his life-work crowned with success, he never recovered from the indignity and humiliation he had suffered. His death occurred on October 14, 1703. The day before his death, he exclaimed: "Tomor row, Lord, we shall hear glorious music."

Kingo has been called "the poet of Easter-tide." A bi ographer declares that Kingo was "in love with the sun," and that he regarded light as the "true element." This is reflected in his morning hymns, which are among the finest songs of praise ever written. It may also be seen in his Easter hymns, one of which begins with the words, "Like the golden sun ascending."

However, Kingo could also dwell on the theme of Christ's passion with gripping pathos:

Such a night was ne'er before,  
Even heaven has shut its door;  
Jesus, Thou our Sun and Light,  
Now must bear the shame of night.

And in this:

See how, in that hour of darkness,  
    Battling with the evil power,  
Agonies untold assail Him,  
    On His soul the arrows shower;  
And the gardens flowers are wet  
With the drops of bloody sweat  
From His anguished frame distilling –  
Our redemption thus fulfilling.

When the commission appointed by the Danish king was revising his hymn-book, Kingo pleaded that his Lenten hymns might be retained. Among the most soul-stirring of these in the famous hymn, "Over Kedron Jesus treadeth." In its original form it contained fourteen stanzas. Although objective in character, Kingo's hymns never fail to make a strong personal appeal.

Witness, for example, the following from his Good Friday hymn:

On my heart imprint Thine image,  
Blessed Jesus, King of grace,  
That life's riches, cares, and pleasures  
Never may Thyself efface;  
This the superscription be:  
Jesus, crucified for me,  
Is my life, my hope's foundation,  
And my glory and salvation.

Other hymns of Kingo that have been translated into English include "Praise to Thee and adoration," "Dearest Jesus, draw Thou near me," "He that believes and is baptized," "O dearest Lord, receive from me," "I come, invited by Thy Word," "Softly now the day is ending," and "The sun arises now."

Grundtvig, a later Danish hymn-writer, pays Kingo this tribute: "He effected a combination of sublimity and simplicity, a union of splendor and fervent devotion, a powerful and musical play of words and imagery that reminds one of Shakespeare."