

El Nathan

By ROBERT D. KALIS

EL NATHAN — this pen name appeared at the top of many gospel songs until in recent years it was replaced by the real name of the author: D. W. Whittle. There were at least two reasons for the pen name: First, the author wanted to use his own hymns in the evangelistic services he conducted without attracting attention to himself. Second, the choice of that particular pen name indicates that Whittle believed that the poems were given him from above, for the words El Nathan mean, "God has given." Therefore, he gave all the credit to the Lord by the use of his pen name.

Major Whittle greatly admired the old church hymns, and felt that they set the standard for all hymn writers. Since he did not possess a spontaneous poetic gift, like his coworker, P. P. Bliss, Major Whittle studied all the rules of meter and rhythm so that his gospel hymns would have substance and dignity. "I hope that I will never write a hymn that does not contain a message," he once commented. "There are too many hymns that are just a meaningless jingle of words: to do good a hymn must be founded on God's Word and carry the message of God's love."

In all, D. W. Whittle wrote almost two hundred gospel songs. In the very popular *Gospel Hymns Nos. 1-6 Complete*, which attained to a circulation second only to *Hymns Ancient and Modern* of England, forty-two of its 739 pages are attributed to El Nathan. Today, eight or ten of Whittle's hymns re-



main in popular use: *Showers of Blessing; But I Know Whom I Have Believed; There's a Royal Banner; Why Not Now?; Christ Liveth in Me; Beloved, Now Are We the Sons of God*; and, by far the best of them all, *Moment by Moment*. It is for this hymn that D. W. Whittle is most remembered today.

Moment by Moment was written in 1892 or 1893. Whittle had recently returned from an evangelistic trip to England, Scotland, and Ireland. The Chicago World's Fair was on, and Moody and Sankey were conducting meetings there. Whittle also was a coworker in the endeavor. One day, a lay preacher from London, Henry Varley, chanced to

remark to Whittle that he did not like the hymn, *I Need Thee Every Hour*, because he felt his need every moment of the day. Shortly thereafter, probably at Northfield, Mass., Whittle wrote his beautiful hymn, *Moment by Moment*. He gave the poem to his daughter, May, and asked her to write the music for it. May had gone with her father to England and studied at the Royal Academy of Music. Now, that training was put to practical use. In a week or two, May had the music completed just as we sing it today. It was the first of many tunes which she wrote for her father's poems.

Whittle gave the completed song to Ira Sankey and offered the copyright to him in exchange for "500 copies on fine paper." Sankey had the song copyrighted in England and America on the same day. In England, the hymn had instant success. The well-known preacher, Andrew Murray, adopted it as his favorite hymn. For years, Dr. Murray had his wife sing it in nearly all his meetings.

A year or so after the hymn was published, Andrew Murray was invited to Northfield, Mass., where Moody and Whittle both had their homes. While speaking there, he mentioned a hymn he had found in London which embraced his entire creed. Sankey was anxious to know the hymn. When Dr. Murray recited it, the astonished Sankey exclaimed, "Doctor, that hymn was written within five hundred yards of where we are standing."

Today, *Moment by Moment* is one of the best known gospel hymns

Moment by Moment. 11 Cor. IV. 17

*Dying with Jesus, by death reckoned mine;
LIVING with Jesus, a new life divine;
Looking to Jesus till glory both shine,
Moment by moment, O Lord I am Thine.*

*Chorus: Moment by moment I'm kept in His love,
Moment by moment I've life from above
Looking to Jesus till glory both shine,
Moment by moment, O Lord I am Thine.*

D. W. Whittle's Autograph Facsimile of "Moment by Moment"

and appears in almost every evangelical hymnal. It brings blessing, comfort, and inspiration wherever it is sung.

The author of this hymn, Daniel Webster Whittle, was born in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, on November 22, 1840, not far from the place where D. L. Moody was born three years earlier. He was named for the statesman and orator who was then making his mark in America, Daniel Webster. His mother was a true Christian, and Daniel's first steps on the straight and narrow path were due to her influence. His father was a very stern man. Daniel found it hard to imagine that his father loved him until in time of great sickness the father's love and tenderness were manifested towards him.

The family moved to Chicago shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War. There, Daniel obtained employment at the Wells Fargo Bank. One night he served as watchman, and there alone with his thoughts God's Spirit dealt with him and finally led him to a definite commitment to God: "I went into the vault, and in the dead silence of that quietest of places I gave my life to my Heavenly Father to use as He would."

Whittle's best friend in Chicago was a young fellow about his own age named Hanson. The Hanson family had also come to Chicago from New England. All were active

at the Tabernacle Sunday School. Whittle often visited at his friend's home. When the Civil War broke out, D.W. Whittle was swept by a sudden wave of patriotism to join the Union Army and enlisted in Company B of the 72nd Illinois Infantry as a second lieutenant.

After he had joined, and before he was inducted, to Whittle's astonishment, his friend told him, "My sister Abbie is very distressed about your leaving for the war. She has felt that your visits in our house were because of your interest in her." Whittle was dumbfounded. Abbie Hanson was two years older than he, and such a relationship had never occurred to him. After due consideration, in that era of "chivalry and honor," he felt he must do the honorable thing and propose marriage to her. On August 22, 1862, the day before the young lieutenant was shipped south to the battlefield, they were married. The groom did not see his bride for over a year.

Four children were born to D.W. and Abbie: Charles E. in 1866, who later accompanied his father on an evangelistic trip to England and Ireland, before being tragically killed in 1894 at the age of 28; Mary, always called May in her early life, was born March 20, 1870. She, too, travelled with her father whom she loved dearly, then married the son of D.L. Moody and became Mrs. William Revell Moody.

She wrote most of the music for her father's later hymns, as well as much other church music, and also helped her husband in the administration of the Moody schools, continuing after his death, until at the age of 93, on August 20, 1963, she, too, went to be with the Lord. Webster Wait was born in 1875 and died at the age of ten of typhoid fever in 1885. Ruth, the last of the Whittle children, was born in 1885 and later became the wife of Norman J. McGaffin and died about 1931.

In the Civil War, D.W. Whittle distinguished himself. He served with Gen. O.O. Howard and was with Gen. Sherman on his march to the sea. Whittle was present when Sherman sent the signal from Kenesaw Mountain to the surrounded garrison at Altoona Pass, Ga., "Hold the fort, I am coming."

When Whittle told this story after the war, it inspired P.P. Bliss to write the popular gospel song, "Hold the Fort." When Whittle was wounded at Vicksburg, Mississippi, he was sent back from the front. Before he fully recovered, the war ended and he was discharged with the rank of major. From that time on, he was always known as Major D.W. Whittle.

While still recovering from his wounds and with his arm in a sling, he was called upon to "say a word" at a meeting in Chicago. Embarrassed, he stumbled to the platform not knowing what to do or say. Suddenly, Moody, who was in the audience, cried out, "Give him three cheers." Moody stood to his feet, and, waving his hat in the air, led the cheers. The two became good friends from that time on.

Soon Whittle became the superintendent of one of the largest mission Sunday schools in Chicago. The boys and girls all loved him. Rev. H. Clay Trumbull, a prominent Sunday school leader for many years and the editor of *The Sunday School Times*, attended Whittle's west side Sunday school and later described it in his tribute to the Major after his death:

"Entering the large room on a

pleasant summer Sunday, half an hour before the time for beginning, as the doors were just opened, I found Major Whittle and his singing leader already there. They began the singing of familiar hymns, those of P.P. Bliss being the favorites. . . . As teachers and scholars came in that afternoon, and took their places, they were in an atmosphere of love and song from the beginning. The singing kept on, the volume increasing as the numbers swelled.

"Meanwhile the superintendent moved among them all, with sunny face and loving look, and quiet, kindly words of greeting and inquiry, making a deeper and more winsome impress of himself upon every heart. When the moment for beginning came, there was no bell-tap, no call to order, no word of announcement; the superintendent simply took his place on the platform, and was felt through all the currents of love having their centre in him, and filling the room, as he stood there looking love out of his heart into theirs. Lifting both hands in the air, he gently, gradually brought them down to a level, and the music softened down as he did so, until it had died away into a sacred silence. Then, in a low, sweet voice, dear Major Whittle said, in tones that could reach every hushed and love-quickened ear: —

"What a lovely summer Sunday this is! As we listen, we can almost hear the rustling of the leaves on God's trees about our chapel, as they move in God's breeze and sunlight. Let us thank God for his good gifts to us, and ask Him for a Father's blessing on us as His dear children."

"And all hearts were together then as they were thus led in prayer by one who loved to pray and to lead in prayer. I have never felt or witnessed a greater manifestation than that of the power over others of a gentle and strong and intensely loving heart, and this impression I can never lose."

After Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, his widow and their son



President Lincoln and his Son Tad

This is a copy of the picture given by Tad to his Sunday school teacher, D. W. Whittle, about 1866.

Tad moved to Chicago. The president's son was among the scholars in that west side Sunday school of which Major Whittle was the superintendent.

Whittle also became a successful businessman and in 1869 obtained a position with the famous Elgin National Watch Company. He made an excellent salary and so was comfortably situated to raise his family. But D.L. Moody had other plans for Whittle. He put him to work for the Lord as much as possible.

One night, the two were walking home after a meeting and speaking of the work. Suddenly, Moody stopped under a lamppost, whipped out his Testament, and, putting his finger on II Timothy 4: 1 and 2, he said, "See here, Whittle, this is what God wants us to do — **PREACH THE WORD.**" Whittle regarded this moment as his ordination and the ordaining bishop, D.L. Moody, who never had been formally ordained himself.

Whittle worked with P.P. Bliss in several Sunday school conventions and felt knit to him as a coworker. Moody urged them both to step out into full-time evangelistic work. From Scotland, where he was campaigning with Sankey, Moody wrote both Bliss and Whittle to "launch out into the deep." "If you have

not the faith of your own in this matter, start out on my faith," he urged.

Mrs. Bliss was willing for her husband to go, but she wanted him to be sure that the Lord was sending him forth and not Mr. Moody. Mrs. Whittle had more misgivings. It was hard for her to think of giving up the security of a steady, large salary. She had two little ones at the time and dreaded the uncertainty of bringing them up as the wife of a travelling evangelist without a guaranteed income.

Major Whittle had a very definite method of finding out the will of the Lord in puzzling situations:

"First, pray. Second, search the Word of God and think. Third, talk to wise people, but without regarding their judgment as final. Fourth, beware of the objections of your own will, but do not be too afraid of it. God never unnecessarily thwarts a man's nature and likings — it is a mistake to think His will is always in a line of the disagreeable. Fifth, meanwhile, do the next thing, for doing God's will in small things is the best preparation for doing it in great things. Sixth, when decision and action are necessary, go ahead one step at a time. Seventh, you probably will not find out till afterwards, perhaps long afterwards, that you have been led at all."

The coworkers finally agreed to conduct a three-day trial campaign at Waukegan, Illinois. The result would determine whether they would launch out into full-time evangelistic work or give up the idea entirely.

The meetings were held in the First Congregational Church of Waukegan, March 24-26, 1874 (just one hundred years ago). Whittle's messages and the ministry of song by P.P. Bliss met with excellent results. At an afternoon prayer meeting, Bliss consecrated himself to the work.

Now, there was no turning back for Whittle. He notified the Elgin Watch Company of his intentions. They offered to double his salary if he would stay on. But Whittle had put his hand to the plow, and he



The First Congregational Church, Waukegan, Illinois
*D. W. Whittle conducted his first evangelistic campaign in this church,
 • March 24-26, 1874.*

would not look back. Although Whittle had served the Watch Company only five years, they presented him with a gold watch for his service. It was inscribed: "Presented to *D. W. Whittle* by vote of the stockholders of *Elgin National Watch Company* at their annual meeting, June 10, 1874, as a token of the approbation of his services as general agent."

Over the next three years, Whittle and Bliss held twenty-five campaigns in the midwest and south. One of the earliest was at Detroit, Michigan, where A.T. Pierson was pastor. The two evangelists stayed in Pierson's home and left a lasting mark upon the young pastor. Later, Pierson himself campaigned with Whittle in Ireland. After Whittle's death, Dr. Pierson described the outstanding characteristics of the evangelist:

"First of all, he was *honest*. In dealings with him, one felt that he had to do with a man who desired truth in the inward parts. There were no affectations or airs, but he was as simple and straightforward as a child. Again, he was *evangelical*. He loved the gospel and did

not depart from it. He was also *sympathetic*. His heart as well as his head was in the Lord's work, and his patience with individual inquirers was inexhaustible. Then again, he was *unselfish*. He loved the souls of men and deliberately gave himself for them, losing self-interest in the profit of others, that they might be saved. And once more, he was *spiritual*. Few men have kept the body under as he did, or have so mortified the carnal for the sake of the spiritual."

In December of 1876, Bliss told Whittle of a friend from Rome, Pennsylvania, named James Mc Granahan. He asked Whittle if he knew of any evangelist with whom this young musician could work. Whittle remarked that, if he was consecrated, God would raise someone up.

After spending Christmas with their loved ones in Rome, Pennsylvania, Bliss and his wife started out by train to rejoin Whittle in Chicago for a great New Year's Eve meeting. The train met with a horrible disaster when the bridge at Ashtabula, Ohio, collapsed. Bliss and his wife perished.

When the news reached Chicago, the stunned Whittle rushed to the scene to search the rubble for some trace of his beloved coworker. While searching disconsolately, a young man introduced himself to Whittle and offered to help in any way possible. The young man was Mc Granahan. "Here stands the man that Mr. Bliss has chosen as his own successor," thought Whittle. They went on to Chicago and spoke of the possibility of working together. Mc Granahan felt that this was God's call to him and responded wholeheartedly.

When Bliss's trunk arrived in Chicago, several poems without music were found in it. Mc Granahan wrote music for some of them, most notably for *I Will Sing of My Redeemer*. It was about this time that Whittle began to write his own hymns under the pen name, El Nathan. Mc Granahan supplied most of the music for these hymns. The two worked together for about eleven years. Twice they went to the British Isles where they had good results from their campaigns.

In 1887, poor health forced Mc Granahan to leave Major Whittle. Several years later, George C. Stebbins travelled with Whittle in the same capacity.

Whittle made four trips to Europe. He had his most unusual results among the Irish Catholics. Dr. A.T. Pierson gave the following report of the endeavor:

"Somehow he won the very Papists, disarming them without any disloyalty to gospel truth, and many of them found Christ in his meetings. When I was in Cork in 1896, they told me that he would always be welcomed even by the adherents of the Pope. On one occasion in a south-of-Ireland town, almost half the congregation were Roman Catholics, and in one of the groups of inquirers, who lingered for a second meeting, were fifty or sixty young men—all Romanists. With them he had a long and earnest talk over the Douay Testament. His conciliatory and friendly attitude made the

warm-hearted Irish love him."

There were also good results in Scotland where the well-known Dr. Alexander Whyte told his congregation: "I do not know if any of you have been to hear Major Whittle; you have missed a great deal if you have not. Last week I was present. It was a grand meeting. I never got my heart as warmed in my life as I did at that meeting of young men."

Major Whittle was also involved in the work at Northfield, Massachusetts. There Moody had started great conventions and invited famous visitors from all over the world. Whittle was closely connected with this work and made his home there.

Whittle also ministered to the convicts in the jails. In many of the cities where he held campaigns, he would visit the penal institutions and present the gospel to the inmates and had many outstanding results from this ministry.

In 1898, the United States Battleship *Maine* exploded at Havana, Cuba, and the country became involved in a war with Spain. The old Major enlisted once more, not to fight the Spaniards, but to resist the works of darkness in the military camps of our servicemen.

He got a team together and ministered to the boys stationed at Montauk Point, New York; Chickamauga, Tennessee; and at Tampa, Florida. Many of these young men were won to the Lord by the efforts of Whittle and his team. Reuben Archer Torrey, who later carried on Moody's work in Chicago, was a member of this team.

At Chickamauga, Whittle found a regiment of Mississippi troops and spoke to them. "How many of you

had fathers in the Confederate Army?" he asked. Most of them raised their hands.

"I suppose thirty-three years ago about this time, one of your fathers shot me, down at Vicksburg," Major Whittle continued. It was very still as they looked up to the gray-haired man that was talking. "Well," he said, "your fathers did what they thought was their duty, and I never had any feeling against the man who shot me. If I had met him, I would have loved him, and I have never had any other feeling since."

The men came closer, and he talked to them about Jesus. "You Mississippians come from homes where there are mothers and grandmothers that pray for you; and now it is one thing or the other with you. You must make up your mind which way you are to go; and if you have recognized the claims of this Bible and the claims of Jesus, be men. Confess it, accept it, and act up to your convictions."

About one hundred men pressed forward and knelt under the trees. There, with the team, they cried out that God would reveal His Son,

Jesus Christ, to them.

While ministering to the servicemen, Major Whittle contracted malarial rheumatism. After a brief rest, he attempted to return to his work but soon found that he must leave the work to others.

For more than two years, the old soldier fought a good fight. His labors in prayer were very effectual during this time. In a remarkable way, all who had contact with him testified that his ministry of intercession was most effective. He did not complain in the midst of his suffering, but, as he grew weaker, praise and glory filled his soul.

The "good Major," as he was affectionately called by many, passed into glory on the inauguration day of President McKinley, March 4, 1901. Abbie, his wife, survived him until May 19, 1906.

We of today owe Major Whittle a debt of gratitude, not only for his poems and gospel songs, but also for the important work he accomplished in editing the *Memoirs of P.P. Bliss*. Whittle's life and work were a gift of God to His people—*El Nathan*.



Home of Major D. W. Whittle, Northfield, Mass.