

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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GEORGE C. STEBBINS

1846 - 1945

"Music is to me an ethereal rain, an ever-soft distillation, fragrant and liquid and wholesome to the soul, as dew to flowers; an incomprehensible delight, a joy, a voice of mystery, that seems to stand on the boundary between the sphere of the senses and the soul, and plead with pure, unrefined human nature to ascend into regions of seraphic uncontained life."

George Coles Stebbins, the son of William and Teresa Stebbins was born on February 26, 1846 in the Town of Carlton. His parents came by canal boat from Albany County, N.Y. shortly before his birth and settled near the red brick school on the Kent Road south of Kent.

The beginning of his musical career was at the age of twelve, when he attended singing school led by Dexter Manly in the school house, which he describes as "one of the outstanding experiences of my early life, revealing to me my inborn love of music."

He attended the old Albion Academy, where he received an allowance on his tuition for leading singing at the morning exercises.

At the age of twenty-one he began to study in Rochester, and became tenor in a choir led by Herve D. Wilkins, for years the most prominent musician in Western New York.

At the age of 23 he married Elma, daughter of Moses Miller of Carlton, and the same year moved to Chicago, where he pursued music as a profession. Through his ability as leader, as well as a singer, he received the position as director of music in the first Baptist church of that city, one of the largest and wealthiest churches in the west, which position he held four years. During this time he became intimately acquainted with P.P. Bliss and Ira D. Sankey, who subsequently became the famous leaders of Gospel Song, also with D.L. Moody, who afterwards was recognized as one of the greatest evangelists of his time. In the spring of 1872 he assisted in drilling the chorus of singers that went from Chicago to Boston to take part in the great choir of 17,000 voices and 3,000 musicians that made up the festival chorus of the Peace Jubilee, organized to celebrate the peace that had come to our country, so recently severed by the great civil conflict. He was one of those selected from the solo voices to make up the male choir, chosen to render some of the selections of the festival. In 1874 he moved to Boston with a view of pursuing the study of the voice under one of the celebrated teachers in that city. He accepted a position as director of music in the Clarendon Street Baptist church, which he held for fourteen months, when he took a like position in Tremont Temple. While visiting Mr. Moody in Northfield, Mass., in the summer of 1876, he was induced by the former to give up his work in Boston and become associated with him and Mr. Sankey in their evangelistic work. He was sent to Chicago to organize a choir of 800 voices for the meetings they were to hold that autumn. From that time until Mr. Moody's death nearly twenty-five years afterwards, Mr. Stebbins continued his



association with them, visiting Great Britain several times, as well as assisting in the work in the principal cities of our own country. During these years he was associated at different times with Dr. George F. Pentecost and Major D.W. Whittle. In the autumn of 1890, with his wife and son, G. Waring Stebbins, who was coming to the front as a vocalist and musician, Mr. Stebbins went with Dr. Pentecost to spend the winter in India in evangelistic work. Before returning to America they gave services of song in many of the larger cities of that country, also in Egypt and Palestine, and in Naples, Rome, Paris, and London. In addition to his evangelistic work he conducted singing in many state and national religious conventions, notably, some of the National Christian Endeavor Conventions, on one occasion there being 30,000 and on another 50,000 delegates in attendance. In the 1900 he conducted the music in the Ecumenical Missionary Conference, held in New York City, which up to that time was the largest and most representative body of the kind ever held, there being delegates from many of the European countries, as well as the great missionary fields of the world. As much as his voice has been heard and appreciated throughout the world, he is the best known by the music he has written. He early manifested a talent for composition and at the time he became associated with Moody and Sankey he began writing for the books known as "Gospel Hymns," of which he became associate editor with Ira D. Sankey and James McGranahan. He was also associate editor of various other hymn books that followed this series.

Songs which attained great popularity, for instance are: "Evening Prayer", "The Green Hill", "In the Secret of His Presence", "The Homeland" and the "Saved By Grace".

He lived in Brooklyn, N.Y. for fifty years beginning in 1881. As age crept upon him following his wife's death, he moved to the home of his widowed sister in Catskill, N.Y. where he died in 1945.