

Joseph Manton Smith – a Victorian cornetist & evangelist

Gavin Holman, 18 February 2022

Joseph Manton Smith was born on 29 February 1844, in Northampton. By the time of the 1861 census, Joseph, aged 17, was working as a carpenter and living with his widowed mother, Sarah, who was a provision dealer, at 44 Kingswell Street, Northampton.

During his youth, Joseph had learned to play the cornet, which was to prove a unique skill to have in his future endeavours.

He married Mary Jane Allen (1845-1923) on 17 April 1864, in Northampton, with whom he had ten children - Lilian Alice (1867), George (1867), Emily (1869), Joseph Manton (1870), Alfred William (1871), Frederick (1873), Harry William (1876), Alfred C. (1878), Florence Annie (1879), and Stanley Vernon (1888).



After his marriage, Joseph and Mary moved to London, where he began his career as a musician, playing in the music halls of London's East End. He soon became torn between his secular musical career and his increasing belief that he should be concentrating on his religious calling. He was educated at the Pastors' College run by the Reverend Charles Haddon Spurgeon, England's best-known Baptist preacher, and he soon showed a great liking and adaptability for mission work. He was ordained as a Baptist minister, and he dedicated himself to his ministry and improving the lives of the poor and disadvantaged. He became a personal friend of Reverend Spurgeon, and helped him to establish the Stockwell Orphanage, in Clapham Road, London, in 1867. He also assisted Spurgeon in his evangelical work. Joseph later became one of Spurgeon's best-known biographers.

His day job, in 1871, was that of a gas inspector, and he was living at 133 High Street, Shadwell, London, with wife Mary (a milliner) and his first four children. Also boarding there were William James a 22-year old schoolmaster, and Maud Bosanquet, a monthly nurse (for their youngest child).

At some time in the early 1870s, Joseph was presented with a new silver cornet, by Rev. Spurgeon, which was to become one of the main features of his future preaching.



Stockwell Orphanage

Joseph Smith was associated with several religious institutions in Northampton, and with the Rev. Archibald Brown, in 1876, conducted a mission in an old riding circus on a site of ground near Abington Square, which subsequently led to the creation and building of the Mission Hall in that place.

He spent some time, during 1877, touring with Alfred Clarke, preaching and playing his cornet in Dublin and surrounding towns, in July; and criss-crossing England throughout the rest of the year. Clarke would preach, and Joseph would typically sing solos and lead the mass singing with his cornet, in addition to performing solo instrumental items. Funds were raised en route for the Stockwell Orphanage.



Joseph Manton Smith and Alfred J. Clarke, 1877

The Orphanage boys, who were described as 'fatherless', were occasionally taken on trips, partly for their own entertainment and edification, but also to show off the good work of the institution, and to help the fund-raising efforts. On one instance, a party from the Orphanage travelled to Portsmouth where, amongst other activities, the boys' choir sang, led by Joseph Smith with his voice and his cornet. A similar excursion took place in February, to Cambridge.

These outings continued in 1878, with the boys being greeted at each location by representatives of the local churches and put up in their houses overnight. The combined efforts of the Stockwell preachers, the boys' singing, and Joseph Smith's musical talents, were always effective in gaining great respect for the institution and more funds for their coffers. Further excursions of this type took place through the 1880s.

For several years, during the Whitsun weeks, Joseph would form a small brass band, which he led to play at different places for the various club feasts. After parading round the parish, there would be a service, followed by another parade. Each farmhouse would receive a visit, and beer would freely flow to all who wished to drink the farmer's health. The musicians were generally very thirsty on those occasions. Joseph, as the leader, would generally drink milk, for fear that he would need someone to lead him.

STOCKWELL ORPHANAGE.
(C. H. SPURGEON'S.)

A SERVICE OF
SACRED SONG
WILL BE GIVEN
ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4,
By **J MANTON SMITH**
And a Choir of Orphan Boys,
IN THE
GUILDHALL, CAMBRIDGE,
IN AID OF THE ABOVE INSTITUTION.
To commence at half-past Seven.
The REV. VERNON J CHARLESWORTH
will preside and give some account of the WORK
OF THE ORPHANAGE.
Admission 6d. Reserved Seats 1s.



Joseph playing his cornet to a gathering of picnickers on the boat "The Grace" on the Thames – arranged as a favour for his landlady at the time.

In the 1881 census, Joseph Smith was visiting John Bateman, another minister, in Belgrave, Leicestershire, with his son George, who often accompanied him on his travels, and sang duets with him from time to time.



Joseph with his silver 'echo' cornet

A little later he became based at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, in London, and associated with the Rev. W.T. Fullerton in his work and raising funds for the poor and the Ragged Schools of London.

In most cases reports of Joseph's preaching and concerts are light on the details, stating, usually, that hymns were sung, and sermons were preached. One exception was when Messrs. Higgs and Hill, builders of Crown Works, South Lambeth, held their annual tea and entertainment, in March 1887, for the workmen and their wives, at the Crown Baths, Lambeth. Joseph Manton Smith, and a detachment of the Stockwell orphan boys, gave various contributions to the musical entertainment of the evening: anthem "*Cry Out and Shout*" (orphan boys), handbells "*Scipio*" (orphan

boys), part-song with whistling chorus (orphan boys), bells “*Chimes and Changes*” (orphan boys), recitation “*The Blind Boy*” (orphan boy), duet “*Waiting at the Well*” (J. Manton Smith and George Smith), bells “*The Harmonious Blacksmith*” (orphan boys), part-song “*The Burlesque Band*” (orphan boys), bells “*Let the Hills Resound*” (orphan boys), bells “*Scotch Airs*” (orphan boys), song “*Englishmen*” (J. Manton Smith).¹



Joseph Manton Smith, being an accomplished musician, made the services and events very attractive and unique by his vocal and cornet solos, which served to

¹ South London Press, 5 March 1887

entertain and attract the audiences. He left much of the talking to Rev. Fullerton. The two men worked together in this fashion for sixteen years. In later years Joseph conducted the work on his own initiative, and his popular and common-sense manner of dealing with the masses, together with his virtuoso cornet playing, made him such a favourite that his services were in request all over the country.



Joseph – with a copy of his “Flowers and Fruits” book

During a visit to Runcorn, in 1894, the team of Fullerton and Smith were praised in the local press:

“As recently as 1891 Mr. Spurgeon said ‘Among the great preachers of the present day, Fullerton deserves one of the front seats.’ Manton Smith is his very worthy helper. The part he usually takes is the service of praise and prayer, and accompanies the reading of the Scriptures with racy exposition and illustration, and thus prepares the way for the address of Mr. Fullerton. Mr. Smith is a typical

Englishman. He is so good all round—genuine, devoted, earnest, versatile - and so successful, that it is quite impossible to say in what respect you would like him to be different to what he is. He has a voice of rare quality. His silver cornet with which he leads the service of praise, is an additional charm to most. As a speaker to young people he is probably unsurpassed, and his 'children's services' are usually remembered for many years.”²

He visited the United States in September 1898. and during his stay was presented to the President of the USA, and had the honour to open a session of the Senate and House of Representatives with prayers.



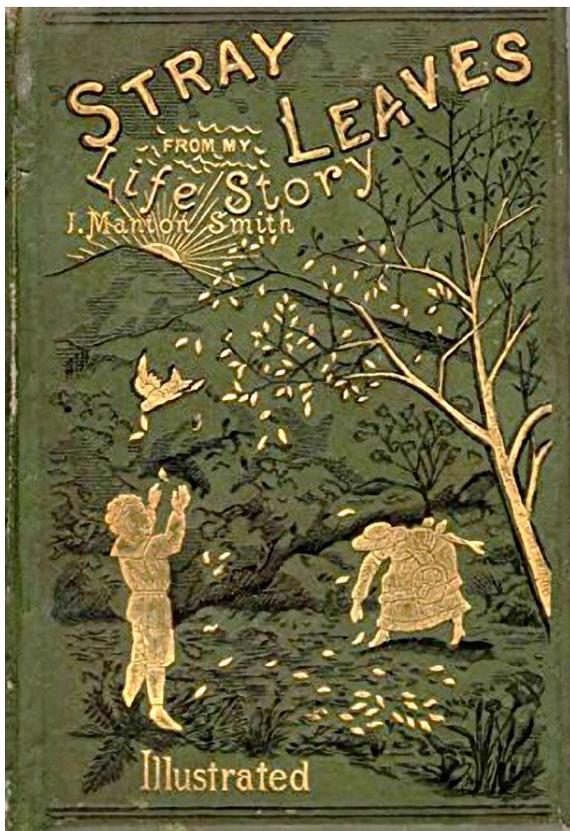
Joseph Smith, c. 1898

² Runcorn Examiner, 31 March 1894

Joseph Manton Smith wrote about his life-long friendship with Spurgeon and the founding of the orphanage school in two books, called *Stray Leaves* and *More Stray Leaves*. His written works were:

- *Flowers and Fruits of Sacred Song and Evangelistic Hymns*, with Vernon Charlesworth - Passmore & Alabaster, London, 1877
- *Stray Leaves from My Life Story* - Passmore & Alabaster, London, 1885 (an autobiography)
- *The Essex Lad Who Became England's Greatest Preacher* – 1892 (a biography of Charles Spurgeon)
- *Striking Stories from Real Life* - Passmore & Alabaster, London, 1894
- *More Stray Leaves from My Life Story* - Passmore & Alabaster, London, 1896

At the time of his death, on 17 July 1900, he was scheduled to go to Ireland for a month-long visit to conduct services and play his cornet.



Joseph's book – "Stray Leaves"



Joseph's mother – Sarah Manton



Joseph – illustration from “Stray Leaves”

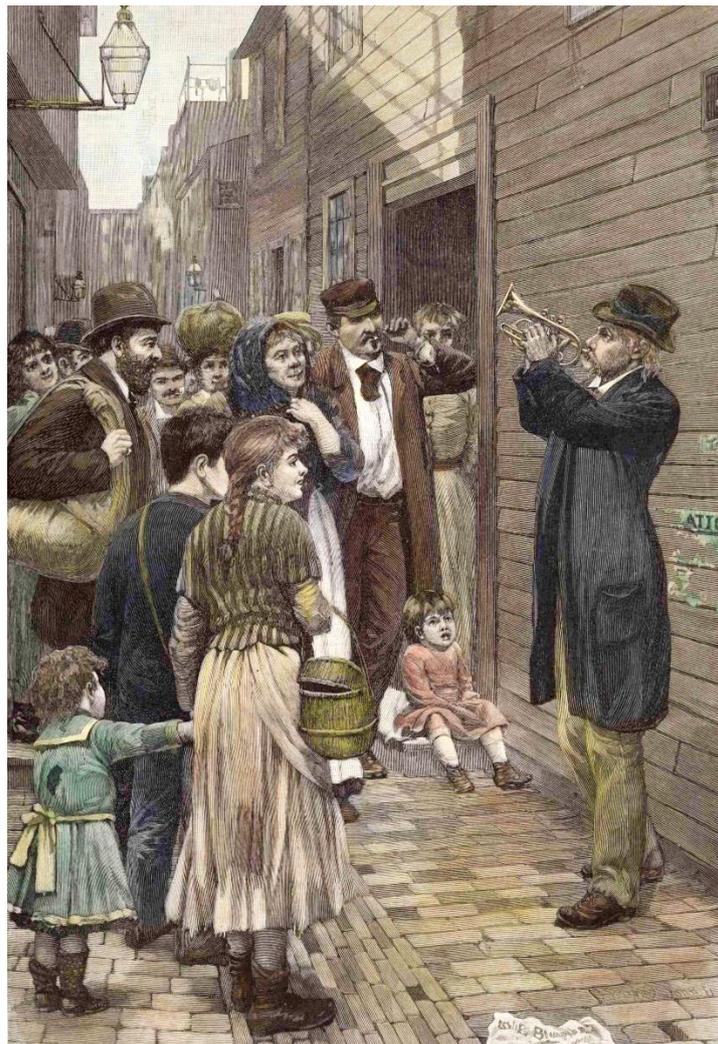


Illustration of a cornet-playing evangelist in London