J. A. Hultman

HULTMAN, JOHN ALFRED (b. Hjärtlanda, Småland, Sweden, July 6, 1861; d. Glendale, California, August 7, 1942), the second of the triumvirate of Covenant Swedish-American hymnists, was born on a small farm. Very early in life he evidenced an interest in music, and on occasional visits to the parish church at Hultsjö, the boy enjoyed listening to the organ. The family immigrated to America in 1869 and settled on a farm near Essex, Iowa. Here the young emigrant and his brother worked as cowboys, singing gospel songs as they went about their duties. After much saving and sacrifice, Alfred was able to purchase an organ and his music education began. After his conversion, he was invited by the Rev. A. Hallner to teach school and direct the church choir in Fridhem, Nebraska. Later he succeeded Hallner as pastor of the church. In 1879, he represented that church at the conference of the Mission Synod in Chicago. He decided to remain in Chicago, so he resigned from his church and for two years studied at the Chicago Atheneum.

While in Chicago he served as choir director in the church which later became the Douglas Park Covenant Church. He also preached and sang in the Evanston church. After two years of study in Chicago Hultman became an itinerant preacher-singer. His travels brought him to Omaha, Nebraska, in the summer of 1881, where he helped organize a congregation and served as pastor for fourteen years. Before leaving Chicago, he had met Carolina Palmer, who became his wife and co-laborer in the church. Three daughters (one died as a child) and one son were born to the couple. Under Hultman’s ministry the church in Omaha became one of the leading Covenant churches in the west. When the Evangelical Mission Covenant Church was organized in 1885, Hultman was one of the charter members. In 1889, he was given a three-month leave of absence from his church in order to accompany P.P. Waldenström on a preaching tour of the United States. Hultman’s singing was a great addition to the services.

In 1896 and 1897, he was on the staff of the music school at North Park College, but he declined the offer of the position as director. Throughout his life, however, he maintained a warm interest in the school. He was ordained in May 1900, and accepted a call to the pastorate of the Salem Square Church in Worcester, Massachusetts. The church provided an assistant so that he was given more time for concert tours. After six years he resigned as pastor in order to give more time to concerts and his music business. His son Paul, now an accomplished pianist, often accompanied him.

The family moved to Sweden in 1909, and during the next four years Hultman gave hundreds of concerts. From this time he became known as "The Sunshine Singer," partly because of his songs and partly because of his personality. Upon returning to Worcester, the father and son opened the Hultman Conservatory of Music, which later was moved to Chicago. The Hultmans returned to Sweden in 1919, where Mrs. Hultman died. From now on he spent most of his time in the
land of his birth, returning to America to rest and give concerts. When he was seventy-five, he had crossed the Atlantic twenty-seven times. On one of his visits to the United States he married Margaret Jansson, who proved to be a most compatible companion.

In the earlier days of his concert activities in Sweden, Hultman had been criticized often in the press for his repertoire, his informality, and his manner of singing. At times he was refused entrance into certain churches. But wherever he went, the churches and auditoriums were packed and his critics soon ceased their attacks. Many institutions, causes, and individuals were given material aid through his concerts. He usually gave a third of the proceeds to the church he was visiting and a third to some good cause, and with the third he kept, he was unusually generous. Foreign missions, sick preachers and missionaries, soldiers' and sailors' missions, church building programs, organ funds, and many other causes were given assistance. North Park's Caroline Hall was made possible partly through proceeds from Hultman concerts. At the age of eighty-one "The Sunshine Singer" was still active. In fact, he died as he had lived — while singing a concert.

But Hultman was more than a singer; he was also a writer, composer, and publisher of hymns. His first collection, *Cymbalen*, came out in 1885. Ten years later, in partnership with A.L. Skoog, he published *Jubelklangen*, which was used widely in several Swedish denominations. While in Sweden he began the publication of *Solskenssanger*, which appeared in a series of pamphlets and later bound in one volume. Several other smaller collections were published from time to time. He helped to compile *Sions Basun*, the first official hymnal of the Covenant. Several of his texts and fifteen tunes were included.

*Twice-Born Hymns* by J. Irving Erickson, (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1976)
J. A. Hultman recording

“Låt det ljuva solsken in” (Let the sweet sunshine in) J. A. Hultman (1861-1942) sings accompanied by Hjalmar Meissner’s Orchestra. From HMV X-2914, recorded September 19, 1928 in Attik Hall, The Concert Hall, Stockholm. The record belongs to the National Archives of Recorded Sound and Moving Images (ALB), Stockholm.

Johannes Alfred Hultman (1861-1942) was known as "Solskenssångaren" (The Sunshine Singer). He began a career already at the age of 18 as a revivalist preacher in the Swedish-American areas of the U.S.A. His home was in the U.S.A., but he also came to be familiar to Swedes as a result of his many and extensive tours of Sweden - with his famous portable organ. His many singing recordings, and the fact that his "Sunshine Songs" became well-known to all, contributed also to his fame. With the possible exception of Einar Ekberg or Lapp-Lisa, Hultman was the most famous religious singer among the Swedish Americans. His memory is still vividly alive among people living in the Swedish-American areas. He made frequent trips across the Atlantic. During the Prohibition in the U.S.A. he was even suspected of smuggling whisky (moonshine) in his organ. On being asked if he carried "moonshine" he answered that he only smuggled "sunshine".

“Låt det ljuva solsken in” is included in the song collection "Solskenssånger" (Sunshine Songs) which J. A. Hultman issued in periodicals between 1910 and 1939. Hultman wrote the music and the initials A. T. F. indicate the author of the text.

From Sweden To America (Stockholm: Caprice Records, 1981)