



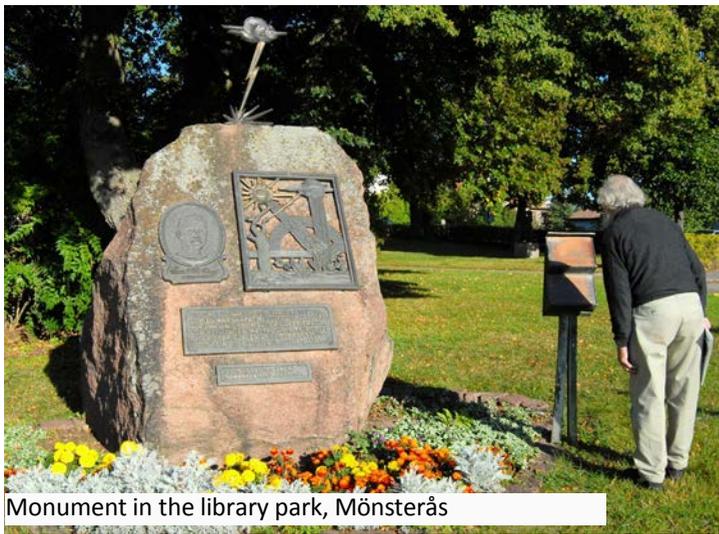
# Carl Boberg

The Story of *How Great Thou Art*



ÖS STORE GUD, NÅR JAG PÅ VÄGEN FÖRSTOD  
SOM DU HAR SKAPAT MEN ENTIG ALLMÄKTIG  
HUR DU DIN VESOVÄLLEK LÖST TRÄDDE  
DU RÄTT I SÄSEN VÄTTER DU DINA FÖR  
DIE KÖTTEN SVALEN DU LÖV SANGS JUB  
O STORE GUD O STORE GUD

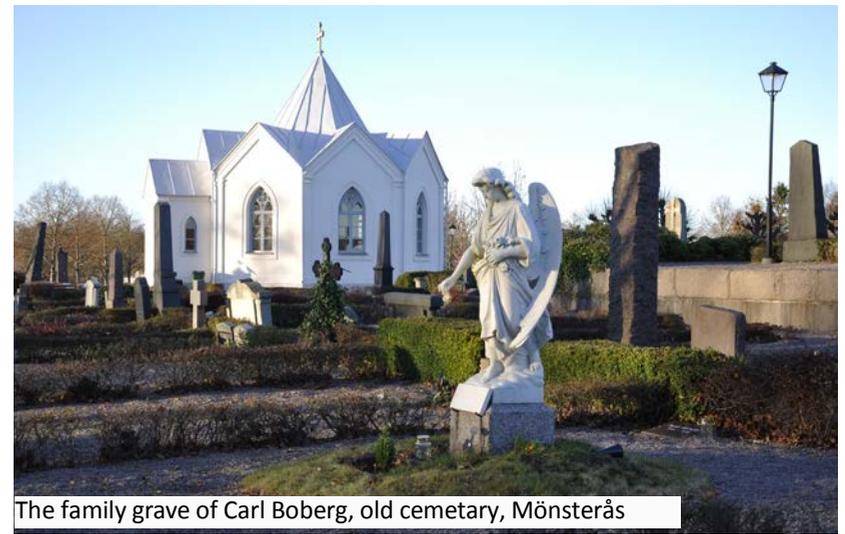
SÅNGEN AVILKON  
SOM RÄNDE BECKENSTÄDA



Monument in the library park, Mönsterås



Carl Boberg, 1859-1940



The family grave of Carl Boberg, old cemetery, Mönsterås

# A hymn travels around the world...

## Glimpses from the history of *How Great Thou Art*

*How Great Thou Art* is one of the most popular hymns ever written. All over the world people join together whenever it is being sung. It has been recorded by many singers, yet very few people have ever heard of Carl Boberg, the man who wrote the hymn.

Carl Boberg was born on August 16 1859, in the tiny township of Mönsterås in southeast of Sweden. He was a restless man who tried many professions. He was a great orator, and for many years he was a preacher in the local Nonconformist Church.

In his youth he had worked as a seaman, and later on as a woodwork teacher. He was also the editor of the town's only newspaper and in his spare time he wrote poetry, of which

some 200 were set to music. In his later years, he was elected a member of the Swedish Upper House, where his radical opinions on drinking, pacifism and church matters made him a controversial figure.

### How the hymn came to be

As a young preacher Carl Boberg had to visit nearby villages and it was after one of those meetings that he wrote his famous hymn. It was a hot, sultry summer day in 1885. On his way home from a meeting, a violent storm broke, lightning flashed and strong winds swept across the fields. Within an hour the storm was over and the wind had died away.

When he arrived home he opened his window and filled with awesome

wonder at what he saw. The inlet near his cottage lay like a mirror and from the woodlands he heard the melancholy song of a blackbird. In the far distance the church bells were tolling for one parishioner who had been buried that day. The sun broke through the clouds and the rainbow appeared.

Moved by the beauty of nature, his poetic inspiration flowed and later on that afternoon, he had written the poem, which we today know as *How Great Thou Art*.

### A hymn widely spread

*How Great Thou Art* was first published in the local newspaper on March 13 1886, and in 1894 it was included in the hymnbook of the Swedish Nonconformist Church. He did not write any music to his poem but suggested that the melody of an old Swedish folk song should be used.

In 1907, it was translated into German, and fifteen years later it was

published by members of the American Bible Society in New York.

It was later used in Ukraine by the English missionary Stuart K Hine, who translated three verses into English. At outbreak of World War II, Hine returned to England where, in 1948, he translated the fourth verse. By that time the hymn was being used by missionaries all over the world.

### Recorded by Elvis Presley

In 1954, Dr Billy Graham heard the hymn and was so impressed that he decided to make it his signature tune. He first introduced it during a crusade at Toronto, Canada in 1955.

Singers like Mahalia Jackson, Elvis Presley, Staple Singers and Gladys Knight have also helped to make it one of the most widely spread and beloved hymns ever written.

*From an article in the Australian magazine The Musician (July 2 1983). Written by its reporter John Walde.*

## Monument and museum

Unfortunately, its author was never to experience the worldwide popularity of his hymn. Carl Boberg died on January 7, 1940, aged 81. A memorial executed by the local artist Hugo Lundgren was unveiled in 1977. In 2013, the Museum of *How Great Thou Art* opened in the new public library in Mönsterås.

## More information

Information about the Museum of *How Great Thou Art* and the exhibition can be given by Mönsterås public library, phone number +46 0499-172 05 and the president of the *How Great Thou Art* society, Ulf Eriksson, phone number +46 0499-135 26.

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