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Mormonbasics.com is humbled to bring you a commentary on the hymns published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This commentary is presented in a two-column format. The original text, as presented in the hymnbook published by the LDS Church, is in the left column. The comments on the right are provided by mormonbasics.com. We have even changed the color of the text so there won't be any question as to who wrote what.

Personal note from the commentator:

The hymns of the Church are sacred text. The Lord has made it very clear to us through his prophets that the singing of hymns is a form of prayer, and as such is sacred communication. Much of the sacred Spirit and reverence we experience in our meetings, especially Sacrament Meeting, comes from the Spirit that accompanies the singing of the hymns.

The hymns are written in poetic form, and as such are able to take certain licenses and liberties with the English language that cannot normally be expressed in any other way. It is certainly not the aim of this commentary to improve on the beauty of the poetic expressions found in our sacred hymns. As a teacher of English to those who speak other languages, I have found that many of the hymns have expressions that are difficult for some people to understand.

Because hymns are written to fit a set rhythmic pattern or meter, often the expression has to be condensed to fit in a small space, but still convey its intended meaning. It is the combination of the rhythm, text, and music that create such a powerful Spiritual experience when singing the hymns. My attempts to explain some of the meaning behind the text should not detract from the original meaning, nor should it replace the original meaning. Hymns, like parables, take on different meanings as the circumstances of our lives change. My commentary is only a starting point for (hopefully) a better understanding of the overall meaning of the hymn in this work. Anyone else writing this same commentary would have different perspectives and points to make. That is the nature of a commentary. I pray that what I say will, in some way, help in your understanding of this hymn. Since this is a personal study of the hymns, I will sometimes use the first person when writing the commentary.

Kelly P. Merrill

They, the Builders of the Nation

1. They, the builders of the nation,
Blazing trails along the way;
Stepping-stones for generations
Were their deeds of ev'ry day.
Building new and firm foundations,
Pushing on the wild frontier,
Forging onward, ever onward,
Blessed, honored Pioneer!

2. Service ever was their watchcry;
Love became their guiding star;
Courage, their unfailing beacon,
Radiating near and far.
Ev'ry day some burden lifted,
Ev'ry day some heart to cheer,
Ev'ry day some hope the brighter,
Blessed, honored Pioneer!

3. As an ensign to the nation,
They unfurled the flag of truth,
Pillar, guide, and inspiration
To the hosts of waiting youth.
Honor, praise, and veneration
To the founders we revere!
List our song of adoration,
Blessed, honored Pioneer!

MUSIC

Alfred M. Durham, 1872-1957.

TEXT

Ida R. Alldredge, 1892-1943.

SCRIPTURES

Doctrine and Covenants 64:33-34

Those who built the United States of America were pioneers, in that they left their homes in the eastern states and went West through places unknown to those from the eastern States. They created new trails (blazing trails along the way) as they went. These trails they made were the same trails used by later generations to move across the country. In this way their trails were "stepping-stones" for each new generation. These brave deeds of the pioneers were common or every-day experiences for them.

The people who first moved across this continent built homes and cities as they went (new and firm foundations), yet they kept moving always further West across the wild unknown country (frontier). Blessed and honored are these pioneers!

A watchcry is a slogan or phrase someone uses to gather support for a cause. In this case, the word used to gather support was "service." The Saints' actions were guided by their Love for the Lord and each other, and for their love of the prophet. Their courage was like a light that never failed (beacon). You could always count on it being there. And that beacon of courage was visible both near and far away. No matter how difficult things were, they worked every day to lift someone else's burden, to gladden someone else's heart, and to help each person feel like that day shown brighter than the day before. Blessed, honored Pioneer!

Pronounced "En - Sign," an ensign is a flag or sign that shows the way. The old fashioned term for an ensign was "standard bearer." The standard bearer held the king's symbol on a flag for all to see in battle. As long as the standard bearer was alive and holding the king's flag high, everyone knew the king was still alive and directing the battle.

The pioneers acted as an ensign to the nation, showing them the truth of the gospel of Christ. As such they were a "pillar" (a support), a guide, and an inspiration to the young people looking for direction. We give honor, praise, and deep respect (veneration) to those who set up (founders) the Church for which we have such reverence. So post or put up (list) our song of adoration to our blessed and honored pioneers!