

THE COLLECTOR ON FOLK HYMNS AND TUNES (BEING NO. IX OF THE 'COLLECTOR' SERIES.)



The writer of the popular 'Collector' Articles.

THE Musician remarked: 'I have just finished reading the newly-published life of Coleridge Taylor, and have been greatly interested; I suppose you have seen it?'

'Yes,' answered the Collector; 'I once met him. He was modest and earnest; a sincere musician, with a poetic mind. He died all too young, and had too much routine work in his later days. He was tuneful, and had he lived might have become a power in English music.'

'A passage in the "Life,"' continued the Musician, 'says that he was greatly impressed with a performance of the Jubilee Singers, especially with one of their hymns, "Nobody knows the trouble I see." As you know, the Jubilee Singers were a group of coloured vocalists, who went on tour for the purpose of raising money for an institution for educating the released slaves and their children in America. They chiefly sang the hymns current among the religious negroes, and some of these hymns, let me tell you, are queer things: laughable, except for their sincerity.'

'I know,' said the Collector; 'they may be said to be folk-hymns. I have the book'; and the Collector reached down an octavo volume from a shelf. 'Here you are: *The Jubilee Singers and their Campaign for Twenty Thousand Dollars*, 1874. It does not give a very clear idea as to the source of the hymns and their tunes, but, what is better, it gives the melodies and words of fifty or more; and it is obvious that both words and music are genuine and unsophisticated examples of American negro productions. There is a good deal of rag-time, before rag-time was recognized by the modern composer.'

'Let's have "Nobody knows the trouble I see,"' asked the Musician.

The Collector handed him the book at an open page. 'There you are': -

(See No. I, Figure I.)

'I don't wonder Coleridge Taylor was impressed by the tune; it's a fine melody, certainly - very original, and reminds one of a Gaelic air - might be a "jorram," or Highland boatsong.'

'Yes, I think it has something of that characteristic,' agreed the Collector. 'It is simple and haunting by its peculiar rhythm. It has often struck me,' the Collector continued, 'that writers on national folk-music shed a great deal of unnecessary ink in attempting to prove that one nation's folk-melody has, by some means or another, got "influenced" by some other nation's melody, and writers attempt to find some circumstance by which this may have been accomplished.'

'I fancy they too frequently ignore the fact that the primitive music of every country has much in common. The modal influences, and the gapped scale, in which certain intervals are religiously banned, seem to belong to all folk-music, whether our own, or of another continent.'

'For example, one used to be told that the pentatonic scale - the black keys of the piano - was purely Scottish; and if somebody pointed out that Chinese melodies sometimes conformed to this scale, well, we had to believe that it was due to either a Chinese philosopher settling in Scotland at a remote age, or to a hardy Scot taking his bagpipes and his music to the Celestial Empire!'

'Since then, many authoritative books have been published of recent years. I think all such theories have been quashed,' said the Musician.

'Well, perhaps so; but, to turn to the subject of folk-hymns, we need not go to the American negro for them. We have many of our own; not quite so rude perhaps, but equally earnest, and many with fine tunes.'

'You allude, I suppose, to the traditional Christmas carols which have been recently gathered from country singers by Miss Lucy Broadwood, and others. There is a lot of these in the *Folk-Song Journal* and in Miss Broadwood's *Traditional Songs and Carols*, published a few years ago by Messrs. Boosey. They show a wealth of Christmas carol that few ever dreamed existed. We never thought anything of this kind existed outside Stainer's and Bramley's collections.'

'No, I don't mean those. They are, as you say, quite interesting, and many are founded on legends, or taken from the rejected books of the New Testament. Those I mean have been sung by primitive religious bodies, as the early Methodists; the tunes, perhaps, composed by some earnest member of the congregation. The same thing may also be said of the verses.'

'Sometimes these tunes got into print, sometimes they did not. Sometimes the composer got a little more than local fame, sometimes, he got sufficient subscribers to enable him to issue a modest volume of his tunes, set to words which were already familiar. One may recall Richard Boggett, of Kippax; James Ellis, of Horsforth; Benjamin Clifford, of Leeds; and other Yorkshiremen. Then there were Leach, of Rochdale; John Fawcett, of Kendal - these were better known - all were enabled, through a subscription list, to put forth modest volumes of hymn and psalm-tunes. These men, I take it, were composers of folk-hymn tunes. Of course, there were other musicians (who never claimed such a title, and who possibly could not have set down upon paper any of the tunes they invented) who composed airs for hymns or metrical psalms quite as tuneful and as great as any of the better-known hymn-composers.'

'Earnest work - work not done with any commercial incentive - is generally good. It has, at least, a quality which belongs solely to such, and these amateur composers frequently, to use an Americanism, "got there" when the professional failed.'

'Your idea is, I see,' said the Musician, 'that the professional is never in earnest; that he is merely a pot-boiler. As one of the professional class, I thank you for the compliment to our body.'

'When the professional is in earnest he becomes an amateur, and so does the excellent work that amateurs do; only there's nothing a professional objects to more than being called an amateur - really the highest compliment that can be paid him - the lover of his art;' explained the Collector.

The Musician sniffed and blew a tobacco ring, for he was, as usual, smoking, and liked to show off this particular accomplishment. 'You are getting too deep for me; leave metaphysics, and stick to hymn-tunes.'

'Well, as I was saying,' continued the Collector. 'The result is, we have got from amateur composers many a sterling and moving hymn-tune; just in the same way we have got many a fine secular folk-melody from a similar class of people.'

No. 1.

NOBODY KNOWS THE TROUBLE I SEE, LORD (Negro Hymn).

No - bo - dy knows the trou - ble I see, Lord; No - bo - dy knows the trou - ble I see. FINE.

No - bo - dy knows the trou - ble I see, Lord; No - bo - dy knows like Je - sus.

Bro - thers, will you pray for me? Bro - thers, will you pray for me? D.C.

Bro - thers, will you pray for me, And help me to drive Old Sa - tan a - way?

No. 2.

THE GOSPEL SHIP.

The Gos - pel Ship has long been sail - ing, Bound for Ca - naan's peace - ful shore;

All who wish to sail to glo - ry, Come, and wel - come, rich and poor.

Glo - ry, glo - ry, hal - le - lu - jah, All the sail - ors loud - ly cry,

While the bliss - ful hearts of Hea - ven Hail in wel - come to the sky.

No. 3.

CANAAN.

Ca - naan, bright Ca - naan, We're bound for the land of Ca - naan;

Ca - naan is a hap - py place, And we're bound for the land of Ca - naan.

No. 4.

JACOB'S WELL.

At Ja - cob's well a stran - ger sought, his droop - ing frame to cheer, his droop - ing

frame to cheer. Sa - ma - ria's daughter lit - tle thought That Ja - cob's God was

there; Sa - ma - ria's daughter lit - tle thought That Ja - cob's God was there.

Figure I

'Now, for example, how few of our beautiful hymn-tunes can we run to earth as regards the original composer.

'We can, in general, simply say such and such a tune originally appeared in such and such a tune-book.'

The Collector became reminiscent.

'I remember when I was a lad, bands of hymn-singers used to go about in the dusk of the evening, plant themselves under a lamp, and have what they called a 'joyful time.' One of their favourites was "The Gospel Ship," which went thus.' Here the Collector gave a vocal illustration:

(*See No. 2, Figure I.*)

'I have never seen the tune in print, though I have several copies on broadsides. "The Gospel Ship" gave place to a later production, "The Gospel Train," which is evidently an up-to-date American idea.

'This latter begins: -

*The gospel train is coming,
I hear it just at hand;
I hear the car wheels moving,
And rumbling through the land.*

CHORUS. *Get on board, children,
Get on board, children,
Get on board, children,
For there's room for many more.*

'The tune is different from "The Gospel Ship."

'I just now spoke of "The Gospel Ship" being on a broadside. Have you ever seen any of the old ranters' broadsides? They are rather scarce, but I have a fair collection.' The Collector lugged forth a volume filled with such ballad sheets as might have formed the stock-in-trade of Silas Wegg.

The Musician regarded the rude printing and the imperfect spelling, which here and there was apparent as he turned over the leaves, with a look of amused scorn.

'Is this professional work without emotion, having only the commercial end in view, or enthusiastic amateur work?'

'Well, I must confess the typography, and frequently the orthography, is decidedly crude; but that adds a picturesqueness to the whole which gives charm and interest.'

'Anybody can spell "first" or "forget," but it takes the genius of a ballad-printer to give these as "fiast" and "forflet." And the Collector pointed out the examples on a broadside. He turned over the broadsides rapidly.

'These are printed by Richard Barr, of Leeds; these by Walker, of Otley; and there are other Yorkshire presses represented - all humble printers, who worked from discarded type, printing in cellars or living-rooms. They did their best as regards the woodcuts with which they used to adorn their ballads and hymns, but the result is not very satisfactory.

'These are some of the broadside hymns "The Gospel Ship," "The Ranter's Ship," "On the Cross," "The Converted Sinner," "Compel Them to Come," "I love Jesus," "Jacob's Dream," and a host of others.'

'Quite an interesting collection,' said the Musician lazily.

The Collector put aside the volume and, settling in his chair, continued:

I remember being out one dusky Sunday evening and hearing a voice coming out of the darkness. I found the vocalist to be a feeble old negro singing "Canaan, bright Canaan," an old ranter's hymn. With official indifference

(See No. 3, Figure I.)

to the pathos of the thing, a policeman moved the old fellow on.

'Getting back home, I turned to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and there I found the hymn recorded as sung by Uncle Tom and his companions. There is another folk-hymn I remember,' continued the Collector: "At Jacob's Well." This is good,

(See No. 4, Figure I.)

and it used to be sung in Yorkshire at Christmas time. I had never seen the music in print until recently, when I got it on a half music sheet issued in Dublin by Mary McCalley, about 1800, or a few years later.*

'And who was Mary McCalley?' inquired the Musician with a yawn.

'Well, in the first place, her husband was John McCalley, who had a music shop at 33 Moore Street, Dublin. He was the recognized seller and publisher of music for the Irish Methodists. He published, for instance, James Peace's *Divine Harmony*, and some other things. His widow carried on the business with great vigour after his death. She published the music for the *Hymns of Thomas Kelly*, and many single sheets and half sheets of Methodist hymn-tunes, including "Jacob's Well." I have quite an interesting collection; I will show them to you -'

'Please spare me this time,' pleaded the Musician, rising from his chair and stretching himself.

FRANK KIDSON.

* Since the above was in type, the Collector has found another copy in print: in Edward Booth's *Selection of Psalm-tunes*, folio, published by Sykes, of Leeds, circa 1850-60.