

# 'HOME SWEET HOME'

## THE TRUE STORY

THE present year, being the centenary of the first appearance of 'Home, Sweet Home,' has seen a great deal of sentimental gush regarding the song. The song that has thrilled millions of souls, the product of a homeless wanderer, an exile, one who never knew the beauty of home life! and all the rest of it. This sort of thing is dear to the hearts of American journalists, and provides cheap copy to weekly and local newspapers. A good deal of this stuff emanated from the author of the song - John Howard Payne, an American citizen. He was in a cheap lodging in Paris, and the depressing influence of the sky and air were in harmony with the feeling of solitude and sadness which oppressed his soul as he sat in his room, diverting his thoughts with the sight of the happy crowds promenading the streets below him, the words came rushing into his mind, to lift, console and refresh his over-burdened heart.' So says an American newspaper. It continues:

Payne is reported to have said to James Rees, of Philadelphia, 'I first heard the air in Italy. One beautiful morning as I was strolling alone, amid some delightful scenery, my attention was arrested by the sweet voice of a peasant girl, who was carrying a basket laden with flowers and vegetables. This plaintive air she trilled out with so much sweetness and simplicity that the melody at once caught my fancy. I accosted her, and after a few moments' conversation I asked her for the name of the song, which she could not give me, but having a slight knowledge of music, myself, barely enough for the purpose, I requested her to repeat the air, which she did while I jotted down the notes as best I could. I sent it to Mr. Bishop at the time I was preparing the opera *Clari* for J. W. Kemble. Bishop happened to know the air perfectly well, and adapted the music to the words.'

Thus Howard Payne's account, but let us consider facts. In 1818, and for a period extending over ten years James Power, music seller of London, commissioned Thomas Moore to write words for a series of National melodies, published in numbers - it ultimately reached to six - which were to be harmonised by H. R. Bishop, and illustrated by Thomas Stothard. Moore's reputation as a song writer was high, by reason of his *Irish melodies*, and the work prospered. Bishop got about a dozen melodies for each number. 'Oft in the stilly night' is in the first book. He does not appear to have been very scrupulous as to the accuracy of the book's name. We get Scotch, French, German, Swedish, Italian, and cannot fail to suspect that Bishop has found it easier to manufacture an air than to find one. After the second number had seen the light in 1820, Messrs. Goulding and D'Almaine, rival music publishers, commenced a similar work:

MELODIES of VARIOUS NATIONS, with Symphonies and Accompaniments, by Henry R. Bishop, the words by Thomas Bayly, Esq., author of 'Rough Sketches of Bath.'

This publication extended to three volumes, the first being published in 1820. There are a dozen melodies: Portuguese, French, Tyrolese, etc., but the last page contains an air named 'Sicilian Air.' This tune is 'Home, Sweet Home,' and Bayly has written four verses to it. The first of these runs:

*To the home of my childhood in sorrow I came  
And I fondly expected to find it the same;  
Full of sunshine and joy as I thought it to be  
In the days when the world was all sunshine to me.  
Those scenes were unaltered by time, and I stood  
Looking down on the village, half hid by the wood;  
That happy abode where I used to possess  
A father's affection, a mother's caress.*

When the opera *Clari, Maid of Milan* was put into the hands of Bishop to provide the music, he took for one of the songs the air from *Melodies of Various Nations*, and, what is equally obvious, Howard Payne was inspired to write 'Home, Sweet Home' from the verses which Bayly had written.

The scene in which 'Home, Sweet Home' occurs is a splendid apartment, in which the peasant girl, Clari, is found. She sings Howard Payne's verses, and thus we get the rather absurd line 'Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam.' This, no doubt, is quite fitting for the opera, but the ordinary individual does not in general 'roam through palaces.' Miss Ann Maria Tree sang the song in the opera on May 8th, 1823, and from that day to our own 'Home, Sweet Home' has ever been a favourite. In the same year of its first performances it was sung at the Birmingham Musical Festival, and also at the first York Musical Festival (1823) - here Miss Stephens gave it.

As originally written it was of two verses but shortly afterward another was added, whether written by Howard Payne or not I am unable to say. The copyright appears to have belonged to Messrs. Goulding and D'Almaine, who published edition after edition. Whether Payne got any royalties or not is doubtful, but no doubt Bishop did, for Gouldings issued nearly everything that he wrote at this period. With regard to the air Bishop confessed to William Chappell that he had himself composed the tune.

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