

## SECULAR TUNES IN HYMNODY

### Part II.

IN my previous article I have shown how the early generations of worshippers employed secular tunes to religious words, and thought no shame. I have pointed out that this was most probably caused by the fact that there were no composers of hymn-tunes proper; then musicians were chiefly devoted to the production of more elaborate compositions for the Church which were far beyond the power of simple congregations to either perform or appreciate. As a consequence, the tunes used for the metrical psalms were generally fallen back upon, or such secular airs as the writers of hymns thought suited to their purpose. While the Wesleyan body favoured the production of hymn-tunes, they did not discountenance the use of secular tunes which already existed ready made, and many of these secular tunes have lost their original province, and become part of our national hymnology. Perhaps the most notable example is the tune 'Helmsley.' The popular idea is that it is taken from a hornpipe danced by Miss Anne Catley in *The Golden Pippin*, acted in 1773, or else adapted from a song sung by the lad, in the same opera, called 'Guardian Angels.' The fact that the tune appeared in Wesley's *Select Hymns with Tunes annexed*, 1765, disproves both these theories, though it is quite true that Miss Catley introduced 'Guardian Angels,' and also sung another song to the same tune in the above-named opera. Thomas Olivers, the reputed composer of the hymn-tune (first named 'Olivers,' and afterwards, in 1769, 'Helmsley'), according to Mr. Lightwood's *Hymn Tunes and Their Story*, had led a dissolute and wild life before turning Methodist.

It has been stated (Grove's *Dictionary*, new edition, vol. II., p. 756) that Olivers had heard the tune whistled in the street. Let me put upon record for the first time, that this statement is by no means improbable, for germs of the air are found at least in two places before the tune was associated with a hymn. In John Johnson's *Collection of 200 Country Dances*, vol. 5, 1750, page 18, is a dance tune called 'Splice the Main Brace,' as follows:-



It is evident that there is much of Olivers' tune in this. I may also refer to one of several 'Country Dances' used in Arne's opera, *Thomas and Sally*, appended to his published copy, with the date 1761. This is reproduced in Grove. Dr. Arne, strong Romanist as he was, contributed, unconsciously, many a tune to Protestant hymnody. His opera *Artaxerxes* has furnished at least three tunes which have had their popularity. 'In infancy our hopes and fears,' and the bear-leaders' (of 'She Stoops to Conquer') 'genteel tune' 'Water parted from the sea,' have been adopted as hymn-tunes. Also a minuet movement in the overture forms the tune much sung by Yorkshire carol singers to 'While Shepherds watched their flocks by night.' There are other tunes of Arne's, either 'adapted,' or boldly taken, and even 'Rule Britannia' was pressed into service. This was done by the Rev. Rowland Hill, of the Surrey Chapel, who wrote a more or less doggerel hymn to the tune, and published it with the air in the second volume of an expensive oblong folio work about 1823-4. 'Lovely Nancy,' an eighteenth-century song, which, like 'Guardian Angels,' was subject to sets of 'Variations' for the harpsichord, was also taken for a hymn-tune, and survived to quite recent years

to 'I love Jesus,' also to 'Daily, Daily.' Even the children's play-tunes have contributed. To-day you will hear little girls play and sing a ring game 'Queen Mary, Queen Mary, her age is sixteen,' etc. The composer (?) of 'Stella' heard such a party of little girls at the village of Stella, on Tyneside. He took the tune and named it after the village, and children still use the traditional tune. It may be mentioned that the tune originally belonged to a Scottish song, of which the refrain is 'And nae bonny laddie will tak' me awa'.'

We have been indebted to many a German secular song for our hymn-tunes, and one of Germany's wildest drinking songs, 'Crambambuli,' is an example in point. 'Crambambuli' is a cant name for some kind of drink imbibed by German students, and the tune is particularly lively. This, with many another German secular tune, has been seized upon by writers of Sunday-school hymns as an easy method of fitting a lively tune with some 'go' in it for their hymns. In looking through collections of this class of hymn, I find many popular airs employed. For example, 'I'd be a butterfly' does service for 'I'd be a missionary.' The Welsh tune, 'Ar hyd y nos,' or 'Poor Mary Anne,' figures sundry times. Even 'The Black Joke' is pressed into service for an 'Infant's Hymn.' Other tunes to be found adapted to more or less sacred words include 'Drink to me only,' 'British Grenadiers,' 'Auld Lang Syne,' 'Home, Sweet Home,' and 'Long, Long Ago.' An old song of the 'Ethiopian Serenaders,' 'Oh, Susanna, don't you cry for me' has also been turned into sacred usage.

Of sacred words being fitted to classic music, there are enough examples. Thomas Moore's well-known sacred song, 'Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark strand,' was written to one of Avison's concertos; and William Gardiner, in his *Sacred Melodies*, 1812, gives us compositions from Handel, Haydn, Mozart and others which he adapted to sacred words. Whether his two volumes of *Sacred Melodies* ever got into general use is doubtful in the extreme. One of our most popularly sung hymns is, 'There is a happy land, far, far away.' Alexander Young, who wrote the words of this, stated that he had heard the tune played, and was informed that it was an Indian air. He did not state, however, that for the suggestion of the phrase 'a happy land' he was indebted to the original song by William Kennedy - 'I have come from a happy land, where care is unknown.' This appeared in R. A. Smith's *Select Melodies*, published in Edinburgh in 1827. The title is 'Dancing Girl's Song,' and the air is stated to be 'Hindoo.' Where Smith got this and two other 'Hindoo airs,' I have not been able to ascertain.

The Salvation Army have strong convictions as to the right to use popular airs for their hymns. Miss Wakefield's 'No, sir!' was turned into 'Yes, Lord.' Then a popular music ditty called 'Ting-a-ling' - the theme of which tells of a guitar-playing lady who 'only answered ting-a-ling to all that I could say' - was put to use in the 'Army' as:-

*The bells of hell go ting a ling  
For you but not for me;  
For me the angels sing a ting ling,  
That's where I'm going to be.*

and so forth. Whole pages of THE CHOIR might be taken up by the mere mention of song-tunes turned to sacred use, but enough has been written to show how universal has been the practice. Nevertheless, we have to realize that a good deal of this usage has been more or less unofficial, and when such tunes have been incorporated in 'official' hymnals they have generally been added to sacred words before being incorporated into collections.

In that fine gathering *The English Hymnal*, 1906, the editors have introduced a number of traditional folk melodies, which the musical editor and others have recently collected from rustic singers. In most instances the tunes have been given the names of the villages from where they have been collected. In addition to these rustic melodies, some English ballad tunes have been included, as 'Little Musgrave' (186), and 'Chevy Chase' (638). The sixteenth-century air 'Fortune my foe,' figures under the title 'Fortunatus.'

As to the ethics of this method of introducing new blood into our hymnals, I offer no opinion; the matter is one of personal feeling. The preface is well worth reading, but it gives no explanation, and offers no excuse for the inclusion of the rustic traditional melodies, though each is headed as 'English traditional melody.'

Nobody yet has defined what constitutes 'sacredness' in a melody. I have heard so-called 'sacred' airs so utterly commonplace and bad that to an artistic mind such produce the reverse of reverential feeling.

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