

AMERICAN WAR-SONGS.

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OUR civil war's chief war-song survivors are—*Marching Through Georgia*, and *Dixie*. Those of our war with Spain are—*There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town To night*, and *'Rastus on Parade*.

Some thoroughly excellent and appropriate American national hymns were written, composed and offered to the American people for use during our civil war; but they were not adopted by the people at large. Similarly excellent hymns were prepared for our national use in Cuba and Manila, and likewise failed of attaining general public use.

These superior national hymns may be found in our hymnals and song-shops. They are highly meritorious in sentiment and singable in their music. Their non-success is not due to any lack of theirs in these regards: "the boys" did not like them,—that is the all of this matter; and success with "the boys" is proved to be—by their fate—the test of their merit; and yet, because of their non-success, many a person infers—unjustly—that no good national hymns were made during these wars. A truer, juster inference may be this: that slow-moving national hymns, or chorals, are too slow for our national use; in evidence of which are these meritorious, yet unpopular, chorals.

If public opinion, which "the boys" apparently echo, were not in this condition, it would never tolerate the setting of Julia Ward Howe's *Battle Hymn of the Republic* to "the boys" tune for *We'll hang Jeff. Davis to a sour apple tree*; it would pronounce against this wedding of such words as "Our God is marching on" to this tune, for being one that outdid in incongruousness any of the Salvation Army adaptations; as indeed it does outdo them. Compare it with the hymn beginning: "Come, ye sinners, poor and needy," set to the tune of *Yankee Doodle*,

Our Revolutionary fore-fathers piped, whistled, and sang this tune's lively strains ; yet to equally lively thoughts and words, and not to those of a serious import. Nevertheless they had use for, and used, the stately *Hail Columbia*, though it has a voice-range so great as to render it unsuitable for all the people's use ; because of which, and other musical features, it might be—and probably would be—shelved with the non-successful war-songs if offered the public nowadays.

The four songs cited above are characterised by a right robust, energetic rhythm ; one which slugs, pounds itself into the memory ; a square cut, trip-hammer pounding of the most self-assertive sort.

The tunes of *God Save the Queen* and of *The Star Spangled Banner* are not of this kind. A war-song candidate for present public favor hardly would succeed, though never so meritorious, if he cast his song in the $\frac{3}{4}$ rhythmic mould of these last-cited pieces.

Reasons for the rhythm of the English national hymn may be found in the poetic structure of the cry : "God save the queen !" which necessitates the use of its $\frac{3}{4}$ rhythm ; this hymn having been written and then adapted to its melody, which was composed long before in Germany ; and these reasons will apply equally well to *The Star Spangled Banner*.

Neither of these two songs is a marching-piece ; all of the other four, herein cited, are altogether march-like, therein showing that this rhythm, in war-songs, suits the present public taste.

To induce the people to use a war-song, of choral form, new words set to old music—as in the cases of *God Save The Queen* and *The Star Spangled Banner*, doubtless would be more operative than new words to new music.

No grander, fitter tune could be selected for this purpose than that of *Old Hundred* ; its perfect choral form, giving but one tone to each syllable, rendering it superior, in this regard, to the Austrian and Russian national airs. What American poet will immortalise himself by setting patriotic words to it ? If there be no American poet who is equal to this task, then let our poets try to set lively, patriotic words—not hymn-words—to the music of *There'll be a hot time in the old town to night*, with the encouragement that, which ever one of them makes the best poetic adaptation to it, will be rewarded with an immediate and great national success ; a success for which he might toil a life-time, along other poetic lines to attain, or, perhaps, never realise otherwise. The offer of a cash-prize for it, by some wealthy patriot, might arouse and stimulate poetic competition.

Quarrelling with the people, for liking such tunes as this, would be as profitless as for their liking the syncopative nibbles of rag time. Giving the people words for them, which glow with love for country, is far better.

“The boys” of the army, navy; of the grocer-cart, butcher-wagon, news-stand, machine-shop, corn-field, and cattle-ranch, now sing of “a hot time.”

Giving them a song of country, liberty, union, set to the “hot time” tune, would grandly help in teaching them those patriotic lessons which tend to fit them for American citizenship. If musical critics object to separating this tune from its original word-mate, let them consider the tonal expansion of the song entitled *America*, through the setting of the melody of the British national hymn to its words; an expansion which felicitously insinuates into English thought purely American ideas.

Such song-adaptations as these illustrate man’s common spirit of fraternity, as do the declarations of the Golden Rule by Buddha and Confucius; and they suggest that the religious parliament idea may be universally fostered and practicalised through song-interchange, song-expansion; a song-interchange unhampered by song-critics; one of and for the common people of the whole world.

Emigrants, of different nationalities, sing together, on their passage to America, hymns, in their respective languages, which are set to the same tunes, fellowshipping in song though unable to talk to each other; and this song-union influences the singers in their subsequent American experiences.

In the war-song survivals there is a key to the conscience of the present common man,—under man; he who rejects the national chorals, though never so stately and effective, and coerces to his song-use the vocal favorites of “the boys.” The truly human and humane philosopher (not a Nietzsche) will find it potent for unlocking, reaching and effecting man’s edification from man’s humble foundations—not downwards, from the Nietzschean spire and aspirations. The truly human, philanthropic philosopher will not hesitate to make a Salvation Army use of such music as this, in this edifying of the common man, by adapting to it sentiments of universal brotherhood; sentiments of world-wide reach and good will; sentiments which the world’s religious parliament in all its wealth of theologic lore, must approve; because of its universally familiar and popular character; and, because, through singing, the world may be unified in heart and aim.