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ISBN 978-1-56792-559-3

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BOSTON

AMERICAN HARMONY

Compiled, Edited, and Introduced by Nym Cooke

COMPILED, EDITED, and with extensive historical and performance information by Nym Cooke, this anthology seeks to present the very best pieces in the shape-note tradition, from 1770 to the present day. In making his selections, Cooke—a leading scholar of this music and a seasoned conductor of it as well—examined every one of the ca. 5,000 pieces printed in American tunebooks through 1810, and thousands of additional tunes printed in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. He has selected 176 tunes and anthems, the cream of a rich crop, for this book.

The music is printed in shape notation, with many verses of text underlaid, and is followed by a detailed critical commentary, over 100 pages of information on the composers and arrangers (the most comprehensive collection of biographical information on these men yet published), suggestions for performance, and six indices. Over 100 beautiful illustrations—gravestone details, tunebook pages, composer portraits—grace the book's 439 pages. Given the compiler's scholarly credentials, the huge amount of information on the pieces and their composers, and the unparalleled richness of the illustrative material, *American Harmony* will be the classic source for this wonderful vernacular music, equally indispensable to shape-note singers, chorus and choir directors, professional singing groups, and scholars. The two volumes are sewn and designed to be opened easily to fit on a music stand or be held in the hand.

Nym Cooke received his B.A. magna cum laude from Harvard College and the M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, where he studied with Richard Crawford. Cooke has a number of publications to his credit, including an edition of the complete music of Timothy Swan for the national series Music of the United States of America, the chapter on sacred music to 1800 in the *Cambridge History of American Music*, and two volumes of carols and part-songs, *Awake to Joy!* An experienced choral conductor and accomplished arranger, he has taught at the College of the Holy Cross and Brandeis University, and currently teaches music, history, writing, meditation, and social justice at Eagle Hill School in Hardwick, Massachusetts. His chorus Quinebaug Valley Singers has released two CDs, and his small choral ensemble American Harmony recorded a disc of sacred pieces that accompany the book *American Harmony*.

The uniquely American language of early psalmody has never been so powerfully represented as in this splendid anthology. Nym Cooke not only draws on his unrivalled knowledge of early New England music, but shows how its special character has survived until today through all the vicissitudes of Western musical culture.

NICHOLAS TEMPERLEY, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Nym Cooke's American Harmony, clearly a lifetime labor of learning and love, is an anthology aimed especially at people who relish choral singing in the psalmody vein. A New England-based scholar and choral director steeped in a homegrown tradition of sacred composing from pre-Revolutionary days to the present, Cooke offers authoritative scores of 176 of his favorite pieces, plus advice on how you might sing them and what you should know about the lives of the psalmologists who wrote them.

RICHARD CRAWFORD, author of *America's Musical Life: A History*

This is fine music, rigorously and faithfully edited, with suggestions for performance and detailed sketches of the composers, often including portraits or facsimiles of their work. The selections from the New England repertory are unusually varied, based on Cooke's unparalleled knowledge of the five thousand surviving pieces from that era. American Harmony is the culmination of a lifetime of study, and represents the compiler's favorite examples of the genre; many singers will find new favorites here as well.

DAVID WARREN STEEL, University of Mississippi

Nym Cooke has assembled a collection of early American choral gems with an eye for both singers and scholars. Of particular note is the inclusion of an assortment of folk hymns from the early 19th century, culled from the shape-note books of Wyeth and Davison. Tunes from Walker's Southern Harmony and from The Sacred Harp—some classic favorites and some not so well known—are here as well. Many of the book's pieces have multiple verses underlaid, and appear in their original harmonizations, taken from earliest printings. In short, this collection presents a welcome and firmly grounded jumping-off point for ongoing study and performance of this important body of American musical literature.

THOMAS B. MALONE

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VOLUME I

BOSTON: DAVID R. GODINE, 2018

Introduction

THIS BOOK grew out of my love for the choral music written in New England between 1770 and 1810. In those years some 230 American composers crafted about 5,000 musical settings of religious texts — both poetry and prose — and had these pieces published in some 350 printed collections, called tunebooks.¹ The original texts for this tradition were verifications of the biblical psalms, so the music is referred to as psalmody.

I became enamored of early American psalmody in 1973. I remember the exact moment when my interest ignited. At the Harvard Music Library, I was reading Wilfrid Mellers's *Music in a New Found Land*² in an attempt to discover whether there was such a thing as "New England music" and what that might be like. I turned a page . . . and came to Mellers's example 1, the melody of Timothy Swan's LEGHORN (see page 158 here). I was captivated by the tune's eloquence — its adventurous reach, its aptness to the words it sets.

Over the next few years I made it my business to familiarize myself with every composition by Swan's New England contemporaries. Haunting a wide range of libraries and historical societies in eastern Massachusetts, I sang my way through just about all of these pieces — "plain tunes," setting single stanzas of versified psalms or hymn texts; "fuging tunes," setting one or more lines of a verse text in loosely imitative polyphony; "set pieces," setting two or more verses of text; anthems, usually setting biblical prose; and elegies, odes, carols, patriotic songs, and other works written for specific purposes or occasions. As I surreptitiously hummed melody after tenor melody in the stacks and reading rooms of these libraries, I took note of the pieces with strong, original melodies and had them photocopied; later, I made my own transcriptions.

Many before me have responded to the peculiar charms of this music — its simple strength, its boniness and angularity, its stark presentation of religious

texts in choral settings noted for the tunefulness of all their vocal lines, the vitality of their rhythms, the hard-edged openness and occasional wrenching pungency of their harmonies. For me, the appeal of early New England music was linked to the appeal of other key aspects of the region's physical and cultural landscape through the centuries. I found echoes of the music's strong linearity in New England's stone fences, connected farm architecture ("front house, back house, little house, barn"), and, most of all, gravestone carving. I also recognized the clear connection between eighteenth-century psalm and hymn texts and the poetry of Emily Dickinson, who found (as had Isaac Watts 150 years earlier) that simple, concrete images could give eloquent expression to complex or subtle spiritual truths. And I marveled at the ability of such tiny forms and such a modest idiom to transcend their limitations utterly. The experience of singing through dozens of mediocre tunes in a small, well-worn singing book and then suddenly coming across a melody of great beauty and moving expressiveness was a minor miracle that I experienced again and again. For years I lived and breathed this music; I tried my own hand at composing psalm settings; twice I even dreamed of meeting psalmody composers (I can still see old Justin Morgan's mouth quivering as he sang me the beginning of his lament "Despair").

By 1975 I was hard at work on an anthology of early American choral music. The book was originally to be titled *Lexington Harmony*, after my Massachusetts home town; over time, the title expanded to *New England Harmony*. I received a National Endowment for the Humanities Youthgrant to work on the anthology amid the fabulous collections of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. Sometime in 1975 I took a sample chapter to publisher David Godine in Boston. To my amazement,

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Amanda

Isaac Watts

Justin Morgan

The musical score consists of four staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The piano accompaniment is represented by a single staff at the bottom. The music is in common time, with measures numbered 1 through 9. The vocal parts sing in unison, while the piano part provides harmonic support.

Section 1 (Measures 1-8):

Soprano (S):
1. Death, like an o - ver - flow - ing stream, Sweeps us a - way; our life's a
2. Teach us, O Lord, how frail is man, And kind - ly leng - then out our

Alto (A):
1. Death, like an o - ver - flow - ing stream, Sweeps us a - way; our life's a
2. Teach us, O Lord, bow frail is man, And kind - ly leng - then out our
[melody:]

Tenor (T):
1. Death, like an o - ver - flow - ing stream, Sweeps us a - way; our life's a
2. Teach us, O Lord, bow frail is man, And kind - ly leng - then out our

Bass (B):
1. Death, like an o - ver - flow - ing stream, Sweeps us a - way; our life's a
2. Teach us, O Lord, bow frail is man, And kind - ly leng - then out our

Section 2 (Measures 9-16):

Piano accompaniment:
dream, An emp - ty tale, a morn - ing flow'r, Cut down and with - ered in an hour.
span, Till a wise care of pi - e - ty Fit us to die, and dwell with thee.

Detailed description: The score features a mix of vocal and piano parts. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) sing in unison throughout the piece. The piano part provides harmonic support, with specific melodic lines appearing in the alto and bass staves. Measure numbers are placed above the staves. The music includes various dynamics and performance instructions, such as 'melody:' in measure 3. The vocal parts sing in a mix of short and long notes, with some notes having stems pointing in different directions. The piano part uses a variety of note values and rests to provide harmonic context.

VOLUME ONE

ADVENT

Source. Belcher 1794 (1st printing).

Text. Sternhold & Hopkins, Ps. 18, C.M., verses 9–10.

Differences in the source. M. 6, bass, note 2 is quarter note; m. 17, begin repeat sign is not present (end repeat sign :S: is present at end of piece, between dotted half note and whole note endings, labeled 1 and 2, respectively); mm. 24–25, all voices have articulation marks called by Belcher “marks of distinction” (“Such notes as have Marks of Distinction placed over or under them, should be sounded very distinct, and with some emphasis”—Belcher 1794, p. 10); m. 30, soprano and tenor, note 5 is sixteenth note (double-beamed in each voice to note 4).

Performance suggestions. M. 9, tenor, change note 3 to B (A is perhaps an unnoticed typo); mm. 11–15, “The darkness of the sky,” soft; mm. 26–33, crescendo.

General. While Billings has bass cherubim in his MAJESTY, Belcher’s are perhaps more appropriately sopranis (mm. 16–21), although the ride Billings’s cherubim provide is more royal. A delightful variety of text painting is present throughout Belcher’s piece, depicting in sound the advent of the all-powerful Jehovah.

AMANDA

Source. Benham 1790 (1st printing).

Text. Watts, Ps. 90, L.M., verse 5. Verse 8 added here as verse 2.

General. Betty Bandel (Bandel 1981, pp. 157–58) has shown that “Despair,” not this piece, was likely an elegy for the composer’s wife Martha Morgan, who died on 20 March 1791 (see commentary for “Despair”). Morgan’s switch from triple to duple time at m. 5 intensifies the declamation, aptly bringing the “Sweeps” of “Sweeps us away” a half note beat sooner than one might expect it.

The American Hero, A Sapphic Ode

Source. Stone “Country” MS, pp. 40–41. Dated 2 August 1786.

Text. Broadside ?1775, II.II.II.5, verses 1–2 and 15, given here as verses 1–3. See commentary for “Bunker Hill” for more on the text.

Performance note. The initial measure of rest comes into its own as a pause between reiterations of the tune to successive verses of text.

Performance suggestions. Verses 1 and 3, *f*; verse 2, *pp*; consider pairing this piece in performance with Abraham Wood’s “Warren,” in this anthology, an elegy for patriot Joseph Warren, killed at the battle of Bunker Hill (Breed’s Hill). Compare this fuging-tune setting of Niles’s poem with the anonymous “Bunker Hill, A Sapphic Ode” in this anthology, a homophonic setting of the same text.

AN ANTHEM FOR EASTER

Source. French 1802.

Text. Luke 24:34, 1 Cor. 15:20; Young: Night the Fourth, “The Christian Triumph,” lines 271–73, 288–93, 298–300.

Differences in the source. M. 68, “Full” (surely meaning “full sound”) appears over beat 2 (moved to m. 67 here); m. 101, “Recessitavō.” [sic] follows “Pia.,” so is positioned over beat 2; m. 103, text is “[tri]-Jumphant past the”; m. 115, text is “hail heavn’ all.”

Performance suggestions. Mm. 46–47, *marcato* and slower; mm. 57, 59, 61, all voices, strongly accent “burst”; mm. 75–81, all voices, articulate repeated notes for emphasis and excitement; mm. 91–98, start *p* and crescendo; mm. 101–5, dwell on “Then” (m. 101), then slow tempo and deliberate articulation for “first hu-man-i-ty,” and a gradual accelerando and crescendo.

General. This is the expanded version of the anthem that Billings published in 1795 (that first printing of the expanded version has not survived); the original version, introduced by Billings in 1787, did not contain mm. 66–89 here. Billings’s 1787 version contained only one indication of dynamics, a *Forte* at m. 46; all other dynamics are from French 1802. These may indicate how the anthem was customarily

performed in Billings’s and French’s time, or they may even be Billings’s own later additions, present in the no-longer-extant 1795 printing of his expanded version. Billings’s awareness of English musical currents and of Handel’s music in particular is evident here, for example in the final measures’ debt to “Hail the Conquering Hero” from *Judas Maccabeus*.

AN ANTHEM: PSALM 42

Source. Billings [1770] (1st printing).

Text. Ps. 42:1–7, with changes, omissions, and additions by Billings.

Differences in the source. All tempo, dynamics, and expressive indications are Billings’s; much of Billings’s barring has been changed to accommodate textual stresses more gracefully (Karl Kroeger’s rebarring in *The Complete Works of William Billings*, vol. 1, is followed to m. 175, after which point the barring here follows neither Billings nor Kroeger completely); m. 111, bass, note 3 in upper line is A; mm. 141–42, alto, text is “land of Jordan”; expressive indication “Vigoroso” appears over mm. 162–64, moved back to end of m. 160; mm. 204–6, soprano, text is “[a-]men, amen, amen”; m. 206, repeat sign not present (although the beginning of a repeated section was indicated with repeat sign at m. 176), repeat signs added at this point to parallel final repeated section, immediately following.

Performance note. There are indeed two “choosing notes,” B and G, for the bass on “His” in m. 118.

Performance suggestions. M. 1: Billings defines “Affetuoso” (Billings [1770], p. 20) as “very Tender and Affectionate”; Billings changes the time signature from C with a line through it to reverse C with a line through it at m. 22, so the tempo should increase here (half note = 45 to half note = 60, if Billings’s recommendations in chapter 6 of his “Introduction to the Rules of Musick” in *The New-England Psalm-Singer* are to be followed); mm. 31–54 might be sung by solo voices (Billings labels the bass entry at m. 31 “Dux,” the alto entry at m. 37 “Trio,” and the soprano entry at m. 40 “Quarta”); mm. 61–66, consider varied dynamics in the repeat; mm. 80–96, consider varied dynamics in the repeat; m. 97: Billings defines “Gravasonus” (Billings [1770], p. 21)

Composers and Arrangers

Sources cited parenthetically within a biographical sketch are not cited again below the sketch, although citations may be amplified in the following "Notes." "Sources" or "Additional sources" listed below a sketch were consulted but are not cited in the text, or are provided as signposts to further information on the subject of the sketch.

Aikin, Burwell Stephen

The arranger of Leonard P. Breedlove's *SHEPHERDS REJOICE* was born in Orchard Hill, Pike County (later Spalding County), Georgia, in 1849 and died in Zebulon, Georgia, in 1918. At the age of twenty-one he was still in Pike County, where in 1870 he married for the first time; his second marriage took place in 1918, six weeks before his death. He was father to at least seven children, all boys. His profession is not recorded, but it's known that he served as a county commissioner and tax equalizer. Aikin, a Primitive Baptist, was a member of the United Sacred Harp Musical Association and served on the revision committees for two tunebooks compiled by Joseph S. James: *Union Harp and History of Songs* (Atlanta, 1909) and *Original Sacred Harp* (Atlanta, 1911).

Source: Steel & Hulan 2010, p. 83.

Baird, [Thomas?]

Four tunes, including HATFIELD, are attributed to "Baird" in Daniel Belknap's *The Evangelical Harmony* (Boston, 1800), and the list of subscribers for that tunebook includes a "Lieut. Thomas Baird" of Ward (now Auburn), Massachusetts, down for five copies. Joseph

Stone and Abraham Wood's *The Columbian Harmony* (n.p., 1793), the second edition of Belknap's *The Village Compilation of Sacred Musick* (Boston, 1806), and the second edition of Abraham Maxim's *The Northern Harmony* (Exeter, New Hampshire, 1808) contain additional tunes (one each) attributed to "Baird." Stone also lived in Ward and was listed in 1778 along with a "Thomas Baird" as a pew-holder in the Ward church. An inscription by Stone on a leaf bound between his copies of *The Christian Almanac* for 1829 and 1830 reads: "Died in Ward, Decr. 3d. 1829. / Capt. Thomas Baird, Aged, 63 years on / ... Feb. 1. 1830" (Stone Papers II). This identifies Capt. Baird's birth year as 1767; the Vital Records of Auburn include a Thomas Baird, son of Thomas and Mehitable, born on 7 January 1767. This Thomas Baird would have been too young to be listed as a pew-holder in 1778 (his father Thomas was likely the pew-holder); but he was twenty-six in 1793, when the first tune attributed to Baird was published, in Stone and Wood's tunebook. This same Thomas Baird likely fathered six children born in Ward between 1790 and 1806. The Bairds were evidently one of the prominent families of the South Precinct or Parish of Worcester, which eventually became the town of Ward.

Additional sources: Auburn VR, pp. [vii], xi, 18; *Historical Sketch* 1937, pp. 27–28.

Belcher, Supply

Supply Belcher was born in that part of Stoughton, Massachusetts, that is now Sharon in 1751 and died in Farmington, Maine, in 1836. He evidently worked in Boston

as a merchant in the early 1770s. In 1778 he returned to Stoughton, purchasing a large farm, where he lived until 1785. He was a member of the Stoughton Musical Society, and his tavern in that town was apparently "a favorite resort for the musical fraternity" (Butler 1885, p. 379). An association with William Billings during these years is likely but not documented.

Belcher moved to Hallowell, District of Maine, in 1785, where he was captain of a militia company, then he settled in what would become Farmington in 1791. In addition to publishing a tunebook, *The Harmony of Maine* (Boston, 1794; sixty-three compositions, all original with Belcher), he worked as a schoolteacher and amateur physician, taught singing schools and led the Farmington church choir, and served his town as clerk, selectman, tax assessor, representative to the General Court in Boston, and justice of the peace. He played the violin, fathered ten children, and sat for a portrait now in the collection of the Farmington Historical Society (see p. 184 in this anthology). "Mr. Belcher's superior education and knowledge of men and affairs, at once enabled him to take the foremost rank among the early settlers [of Farmington]. When the incorporation of the town was under consideration in 1793, Capt. Belcher was appointed the agent of the township, and as such proceeded to Boston, where he successfully accomplished his mission in securing the necessary act of incorporation" (Butler 1885, p. 378). William Allen, writing the history of a town near Farmington, remembered: "We often took long jaunts on moon-light nights in the winter six or

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