

American Folk Hymns in Three Nineteenth-Century United Brethren Hymnals*

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At age 19, Edmund Simon Lorenz was called to Dayton, Ohio, to compile the first formal hymnal of the United Brethren in Christ church. So far, the church had had only small collections of hymns with tunes. "Immediately on my arrival," wrote Lorenz in his book *The Lorenz Family*,¹ "I was appointed musical editor and asked to write some new tunes for the forthcoming hymnal.... So I began my career in which I have continued for over 58 years."

In his long career he wrote many gospel songs (some with his original texts), and six books about hymns and church music in general, which were widely used in seminaries. He served several United Brethren churches as pastor and was president of Lebanon Valley College in Pennsylvania.

During all this time, he was producing hymnals and songbooks for the United Brethren Church. His varied experiences in church music led to his successful founding of Lorenz Publishing Company in 1890; it is, in greatly expanded form, now one of the largest in its field.

An examination of Lorenz's three major early hymnals reveals a unique and important feature: his interest in the preservation of the revival folk hymns of the early half of the nineteenth century, which were being replaced elsewhere by the newer gospel songs.

The campmeeting spiritual grew out of a particular situation and need which I have described in my book *Glory, Hallelujah*.² Campmeetings arose in the early nineteenth century and hymnals were not readily available. Hymns from Eu-

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rope were known and American hymns were created. But the desire for participation led to the development of folk hymns which featured a refrain or an interrupting refrain which all could know and sing. Some of these refrains attached to particular mother hymns while others floated free to join a variety of hymns.

That Lorenz was impressed by the beauty of the folk hymn is evident in the account of the first one he heard, as recorded in his book *Practical Church Music*.³ "Less than 30 years ago I heard the following spiritual still sung spontaneously in southern Ohio. It has the genuine pentatonic characteristics which mark aboriginal music.... The effect was very powerful; it had great dignity as well as force." The tune is given on the facing page; the present author has never found it elsewhere in this form. Lorenz was among the few early compilers of denominational hymnals to recognize the beauty and appeal of folk hymns, and was consulted by George Pullen Jackson for help in the field of revival melodies.

*Hymns for the Sanctuary and Social Worship, with Tunes*⁴

Few denominational hymnals of the last quarter of the nineteenth century contained revival spirituals. There are 20 in *Hymns for the Sanctuary*. The General Conference of the church had ordered "a book of hymns with music, adapted to congregational, revival, and social meetings.... Special thanks are due E.S. Lorenz for original contributions, and for important assistance in the preparation of this work." The preface states the objectives of the compilation, which include: 1) The promotion of spiritual worship in the use of sacred song; 2) The cultivation of a hopeful and happy type of religion; and 3) Adaptation to the wants of the people. "The worthiness of these objectives, and the extent of their accomplishment in this book, are respectfully submitted to the favor of an intelligent public."

In a century when credits for tunes and words were often absent, *Hymns for the Sanctuary* gives many, some with dates. In contrast to the earlier *southern* tunebooks, with their wealth of folk hymns, there are no shape notes, the melody is always in the soprano, the four-part harmony is conventional, the range of the voices is moderate. But as in the southern tunebooks, there is only one line of text between the staves; succeeding stanzas are placed below the music. Also below the music are the words of hymns that also fit that tune (a really practical ideal!).

Many of the tunes are reprinted from *The American Tune Book*, some folk tunes among them. Some tunes are credited as "Western Melody" (the "West" at the time the tunes first appeared being Kentucky and Ohio frontiers) or "American Melody," usually indicating the Appalachian region. A few secular ballads are given

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sacred words (a common practice in the campmeetings, where no hymnals were available).

Favorites among such were *Home, Sweet Home* and some of the Stephen Foster melodies. Prominent in *Hymns for the Sanctuary* are the tunes by Lowell Mason and William Bradbury. Mason paid little attention to the American folk hymn. His ties were to European models. Bradbury not only included folk hymns in his Sunday school song books but copied their format in his own hymn tunes, notably "Jesus Loves Me," with its repetitive chorus.

Songs of Grace⁵

Lorenz's small hymnal of 1879 shows a great increase in his inclusion of folk hymns, of which there are 44. The full title of the book is *Songs of Grace, for Revival Meetings, Prayer Meetings, Camp Meetings, Praise Meetings, Missionary Meetings, etc., For Sanctuary and Home*. The editors (Isaiah Baltzell was co-editor) express confidence that "a smaller, cheaper, and more convenient book than *Hymns for the Sanctuary* will be welcomed, to contain all the popular standard hymns and tunes, revival songs and choruses and others used for social meetings." (In those days, "social meetings" meant any kind of informal church meetings.)

The first 84 hymns are in conventional layout, followed by over 100 hymns arranged in quite a different way: the left page contains several tunes and their accompanying texts; on the right page are a large number of hymn texts, most of which may be sung to a tune on the left page. Credits for music and words are consistently given, and the notation is more modern than in *Hymns for the Sanctuary*.

The Otterbein Hymnal⁶

Lorenz's third and most important hymnal was *The Otterbein Hymnal*, in which there are 23 folk hymns. It was first authorized in 1898 and had a long and successful life. In the preface the senior bishop writes, "Rev. E.S. Lorenz, well and favorably known throughout the church, has accomplished his task" and declares that he has found nothing to criticize. "It is pre-eminently a United Brethren hymn book, providing as it does for every phase of our characteristic church life. It contains the solidity and stateliness of the standard hymns of the ages, with the life and sprightliness of the modern gospel song.

"The most recent songs are here for the young people, while the older members of the church will hail with delight the re-appearance of old songs dear to the hearts of many of us because our mothers sang them."

E. S. Lorenz added that "to be useful, hymns must express the peculiar type of Christian life

characterizing the denomination it is to serve." He holds that the United Brethren emphasize "the necessity of Christian experience and the recognition of revival effort." To meet these needs, "hymns and tunes of the highest artistic merit stand side by side with songs whose practical and spiritual purpose must atone for lack of literary and musical grace."

Charting of the folk hymns appearing in these three nineteenth-century hymnals shows that not only the largest number appeared, as one would expect, in *Songs of Grace* but also persisted into *The Otterbein Hymnal*.

The hymns or tunes which appeared in all three are "Cleansing Fountain" ("There is a fountain filled with blood," which persisted into the most recent *United Methodist Hymnal*), "Come to Jesus" ("Come to Jesus, Come to Jesus just now" with 17 verses saying "He will save you," "He is able," etc.), "Come, ye sinners," "Drooping souls," "Dunbar" (a tune name), "I Do Believe," "Loving Kindness," "My Days are Gliding By," "Nettleton" (a tune to which "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" is sung, and which persists into the new *United Methodist Hymnal*), "O How I Love Jesus" ("There is a name I love to hear"), and "Oh, Think of the Home Over There."

The preservation of the folk hymns, often designated as "American Spirituals," was only a part of Edmund S. Lorenz's contribution. In *The Otterbein Hymnal* were included many of the classical hymns, many of the new gospel songs, and 40 gospel songs by the editor. His openness to the campmeeting spiritual reflected his awareness of the range of musical resources and his sensitivity to the United Brethren experience. ■

¹ A microfilm copy of *The Lorenz Family* is in the United Theological Seminary archives.

² *Glory, Hallelujah: The Story of the Campmeeting Spiritual* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980). A copy is in the U.T.S. Library.

³ *Practical Church Music* (New York: Revell, 1909), p. 100.

⁴ *Hymns for the Sanctuary and Social Worship, with Tunes*. (Dayton: United Brethren Publishing House, 1874).

⁵ *Songs of Grace, for Revival Meetings, Prayer Meetings, Camp Meetings, Praise Meetings, Missionary Meetings, etc., For Sanctuary and Home* (Dayton: United Brethren Publishing House, 1879).

⁶ *The Otterbein Hymnal: For Use in Public and Social Worship* (Dayton: United Brethren Publishing House, 1890).