

## THE MUSIC OF THE EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY CAMP MEETING: SONG IN SERVICE TO EVANGELISTIC REVIVAL

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For John Wesley, the hymns of the community gathered for worship were a “little body of experimental and practical divinity,”<sup>1</sup> his *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists* being deemed “large enough to contain all the important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; yea, to illustrate them all, and to prove them both by scripture and reason and this is done in a regular order.”<sup>2</sup> An avid student of tune as well as text, Wesley admonished the people called Methodists to “sing them exactly as they are printed . . . [and] strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear melodious sound.”<sup>3</sup> Yet less than thirty years after his death, Wesley’s expectations for Methodist singing were dramatically challenged in the revivalistic camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening.

The camp meetings of the early nineteenth century were characterized by passionate preaching, fervent exhortation, and extraordinary manifestations of conversion, and from the emotionally charged atmosphere new forms of song emerged to serve the evangelistic purpose of the gathering. Made possible in part by Wesley’s own embrace of folk tunes to enliven hymn texts, these new forms nevertheless departed radically, in both style and content, from the classic hymnody of Wesley’s experience. Giving voice to the revivalistic fervor of the frontier, the music of the early camp meetings set the trajectory for congregational song in the United States for the next two centuries.

### **The Camp Meeting Congregation: A Challenge for Congregational Song**

The people who gathered in the early camp meetings were a mix of Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, with occasional additions of

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, “Preface,” *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists* (London: John Mason; R. Needham, Printer, n.d.), 2. The Preface is signed and dated “John Wesley, London, Oct. 20, 1779.” Carlton R. Young describes this Preface as appearing in Wesley’s “final hymnal,” which Young dates to 1780 (Carlton R. Young, *Companion to The United Methodist Hymnal* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1993], 12).

<sup>2</sup> Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> John Wesley, “Directions for Singing,” in *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1989), vii, from John Wesley’s *Select Hymns*, 1761.

Episcopalians, Dutch Calvinists, German Lutherans, Shakers, and others.<sup>4</sup> They gathered as heirs to varying streams of hymnic as well as doctrinal traditions.<sup>5</sup> From the Methodists came the hymns of Watts and Wesley; from the Presbyterians the heritage of metered psalms. Baptists shared some of this hymnody, particularly the hymns of Isaac Watts,<sup>6</sup> but brought a tradition of “common singing” and suspicion of the music as well as the ecclesiology of the more structured churches that were, in their minds, associated with governmental intrusion on individual freedoms.<sup>7</sup> The fact that different participants knew different songs may have contributed to the phenomenon noted at an 1801 gathering, where one observer reported having heard “no less than six different hymns at once.”<sup>8</sup> Another early camp-meeting witness reported:

A serenade of music cheered all their spirits, which never desisted from their first coalition until they decamped, and everyone sung what they pleased, and to the tunes with which he was best acquainted; under the sound of this general melody there was a band of preachers . . . & they with animation, and with powerful vociferation haranged as many as could hear consistent with the melody.<sup>9</sup>

While all could respond to the preaching of the ecumenical camp meeting, the invitation to join together in song thus presented a particular set of challenges.

Few people had hymnals themselves, and in some cases the limited hymnals that were available were torn apart and individual leaves distributed

<sup>4</sup> Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist UP, 1955), 37-38, 203-204; James Hall, “Narrative of a Most Extraordinary Work of Religion in North Carolina (1802),” in Michael McClymond, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America, Vol. 2, Primary Documents* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2007), 84-87, at 85; Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, With an Introduction, Bibliography, and Index by Charles L. Wallis* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 43-45; and Robert Davidson, *History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Kentucky* (New York: Robert Carter; Lexington, KY: Charles Marshall, 1847), 136.

<sup>5</sup> The image of hymnic “streams” comes from Harry Eskew and Hugh T. McElrath, *Sing with Understanding*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Church Street, 1995), 98-218, which provides a succinct summary of these varying traditions.

<sup>6</sup> Describing revival among the Baptists in the late eighteenth century, John Leland notes that “Dr. Watts is the general standard for the Baptists in Virginia but they are not confined to him; any spiritual composition answers their purpose” (John Leland and Miss L. F. Greene, *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland, Including Some Events in His life, Written by himself, with Additional Sketches by Miss L. F. Greene* [Lanesboro, MA: G. W. Wood, 1845], 115).

<sup>7</sup> George Pullen Jackson, *The Story of the Sacred Harp: 1844-1944: a Book of Religious Folk Song as an American Institution* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1944), 8-9. Noting that the early Baptists did not sing the psalms of the Calvinist, Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions, Jackson observed: “They had to sing something. So they decided, quite reasonably, to develop their own body of song. And this is just what they were doing” (Jackson, *Story*, 9).

<sup>8</sup> Davidson, *History*, 156, citing “Lyle’s Diary,” 58. An almost identical reference appears in Walter Brownlow Posey, *The Development of Methodism in the Old Southwest 1783-1824* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Weatherford, 1933), 25, citing a manuscript by John Lyle, *Diary of the Rev. John Lyle, 1801-1803*, held in the Durrett Collection, University of Chicago.

<sup>9</sup> Adam Rankin, *A Review of the Noted Revival in Kentucky, 1801* (Lexington: John Bradford, 1802), 16, as quoted in Ellen Jane Lorenz, *Glory, Hallelujah! The Story of the Campmeeting Spiritual* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 29.

among the people in hopes that everyone would then be able to learn and sing at least some of the songs.<sup>10</sup> Doubtless many congregants would not have been able to read the texts, much less the tunes, had there been hymnals aplenty. The episodic nature of the early camp meetings meant that there was no assured continuity of participants from meeting to meeting; leaders could not count on those gathered at any given time to share a common repertory of songs learned at earlier meetings. Perhaps most unusual for social gatherings of the period was the presence of a significant number of slaves, whose singing introduced to white congregants a strikingly new tone, filled with the rhythms and call-and-response style of African song and dance.

Despite these challenges, the leaders of the camp meeting movement would have taken for granted the inclusion of singing as a part of the community gathered for revival. Describing Methodist quarterly meetings, a precursor to the camp meetings, early circuit rider Peter Cartwright reported that “The Methodists in that early day . . . could, nearly every soul of them, sing our hymns and spiritual songs.”<sup>11</sup> Nor were the Methodists unique in their love of singing. Baptist elder John Leland, describing his experiences during the outbreak of revivalism among Virginia Baptists in the 1780s, wrote:

At such times of revival, it is wonderful to hear the sweet singing among the people, when they make melody in their hearts and voices to the Lord. In the last great ingathering in some places, singing was more blessed among the people than the preaching was. What Mr. Jonathan Edwards thought might be expedient in some future day, has been true in Virginia. Bands go singing to meeting, and singing home. At meeting, as soon as preaching is over, it is common to sing a number of spiritual songs; sometimes several songs are sounding at the same time, in different parts of the congregation.<sup>12</sup>

The incidental nature of the camp meeting congregation, combined with the lack of a common body of congregational song and limited access to hymnals or the ability to take advantage of those available, provided a cauldron ripe for the emergence of a new kind of spiritual song. And there was one additional impetus for change—the fervent evangelistic purpose and tenor of the camp-meeting. Here the people gathered for conversion, and neither the elegant eighteenth-century English poetry of Watts and Wesley nor the staid metered psalmody of the Calvinist traditions offered an adequate resource for the camp meeting congregation.<sup>13</sup> Instead, from the cacophony of experience and need, a new kind of music evolved, a form that would

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<sup>10</sup> Davidson, *History*, 141; Johnson, *Frontier*, 195.

<sup>11</sup> Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Leland, *Writings*, 115. See also Joshua Smith’s *Divine Hymns, or Spiritual Songs* (1784), described as a Baptist collection in Paul Garnett Hammond, “Hymns, Hymnody, and Christian Music in Revivals,” in Michael McClymond, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America, Vol. 1* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2007), 211-217, at 214.

<sup>13</sup> Lorenz quotes from the Preface of *The Christian Lyre*, 1831: “Every person conversant with revivals must have observed, that whenever meetings for prayer and conference assume a special interest, there is a desire to use hymns and music of a different character from those ordinarily heard in the church” (Lorenz, *Glory*, 72-73).

influence congregational song in this country—and, through the missionary movements of the latter nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the world—for at least the next two centuries.

### The Camp Meeting Chorus: A New Kind of Song

Many of the early camp meeting participants would have been accustomed to the lining-out (or “giving out the hymn”<sup>14</sup>) that had been used in the Anglican parishes of eighteenth-century England and the Congregational parishes of New England. Yet the old-style of lining out hymns, which tended to be ponderous and slow,<sup>15</sup> was ill-suited to the emotional pitch of camp ground evangelism, and soon a new form of song emerged. Instead of relying solely on the strophic hymns and metrical Psalters of their forebears, the people adopted a call-and-response pattern in which verses were supplemented by short refrains and choruses. The standard pattern that evolved took the form of alternating four-phrase verses and repeated choruses, with the preacher or other song-leader singing out the verses and the people joining in the choruses. Verses tended to be simplified versions of traditional hymns, with marked rhythms and often employing a pentatonic scale,<sup>16</sup> or narratives that juxtaposed scriptural texts with personal testimonies. Choruses typically did not rhyme or follow standard metric forms of traditional hymnody, favoring instead the forms familiar in folk and children’s tunes.<sup>17</sup> The repetitious nature of the refrains and choruses interspersed with the verses facilitated enthusiastic participation by even the least musical and literate in the group.

Frequently the texts of the verses bore little theological or substantive relationship to the choruses that followed.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, an entire genre of “traveling” or “wandering” choruses emerged—choruses that became familiar to the people of the camp meeting and that could be learned easily by newcom-

<sup>14</sup> Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 69-70.

<sup>15</sup> Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (New York: Oxford UP, 2001), 161; Carlton R. Young, *Music of the Heart: John & Charles Wesley on Music and Musicians: An Anthology* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope, 1995), 56-58; and Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1962), 219. Johnson asserts that lining-out was used in the camp meeting, but offers no specific contemporary source (Johnson, *Frontier*, 195-196). It is certainly possible that the Wesleyan style of lining-out, which differed from the slower old-style lining-out in both tempo and tune, also was used at the camp meeting. Clearly this style of song was still being used in Methodist assemblies into the mid-nineteenth century, as reflected in Gilruth’s Minutes of the 1834 Ohio conference (James Gilruth, *The Journal of James Gilruth*, excerpt for Friday, August 29, 1834, in William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier: 1783-1849, Vol. IV, The Methodists: A Collection of Source Materials* [New York: Cooper Square, 1964], 367-467, at 393). The available evidence suggests, however, that traditional lining-out would have been ineffective in the exuberant, spontaneous atmosphere of the camp meeting.

<sup>16</sup> Ellen Jane Porter, “William B. Bradbury, the Campmeeting Spiritual, and the Gospel Song,” in *The Hymn* 34:1 (January 1983), 34-40, at 36-37.

<sup>17</sup> Porter, “William B. Bradbury,” 36-37.

<sup>18</sup> Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1974), 96.

ers and used with any number of different hymn texts or verses.<sup>19</sup> Shaffer's *Pilgrim Songster*, published in 1848, includes a three-page section entitled, "A Collection of Choice Choruses,"<sup>20</sup> with such texts as:

O Canaan, sweet Canaan,  
I am bound for the land of Canaan,  
Canaan is my happy home,  
I am bound for the land of Canaan.<sup>21</sup>

And:

There's a better day, a better day a coming,  
Hallelujah,  
There's a better day a coming,  
Hallelujah.<sup>22</sup>

Other examples of these popular choruses include:

Roll, Jordan, Roll.<sup>23</sup>

Shout, Shout, we are gaining ground;  
Glory, Hallelujah.<sup>24</sup>

Hallelujah to the Lamb, Who has purchas'd our pardon!

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<sup>19</sup> Eileen Southern, former Professor of Music and of African American Studies at Harvard University, traces the wandering chorus to Richard Allen's *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns, selected from Various Authors*, published in 1801 as the first printed collection of hymns for use by black congregations (Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* [New York: W. W. Norton & Sons, 1971], 97-98). Dr. Southern concludes that Allen's *Collection* was the first to include hymn texts with wandering choruses attached, and thus names the work as "a primary source for the worship song later to be called the 'camp-meeting hymn'" (Southern, "Hymnals of the Black Church," in *Readings in African American Church Music and Worship*, James Abbingtion, ed. [Chicago: GIA, 2001], 137-151, at 141).

<sup>20</sup> Rev. Stephen D. Shaffer, *Shaffer's Pilgrim Songster, being a collection of Select Spiritual Songs; Embracing many adapted to Camp Meeting, and Revival occasions; as well as others designed to refresh the souls of Christians in Social Meetings, and in their solitary hours* (Zanesville, OH: Parke & Bennett, 1848), 210-212.

<sup>21</sup> Shaffer, *Pilgrim Songster*, 210. With the single change of "bright" for "sweet" in the opening line, this chorus can also be found in *The Revivalist* in Hymn 43 at 33-34. *The Revivalist* referenced in this paper is part of the Special Collections of Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology. Neither the volume itself nor the Pitts catalog provides any information concerning compiler, editor, publisher, or date, the volume being identified merely to the 1800s. It is unclear what the relationship, if any, this volume may bear to the often-cited work of Joseph Hillman, *The Revivalist*, which Hammond refers to as a "large collection" published in 1868 and containing "both camp meeting songs and the newer gospel songs" (Hammond, "Hymns, Hymnody," 214). Lorenz describes the 1868 work as containing some two hundred songs, including some of the composed revival hymns of the second half of the nineteenth century (Lorenz, *Glory*, 73-74).

<sup>22</sup> Shaffer, *Pilgrim Songster*, 211.

<sup>23</sup> Southern describes this and the following chorus as belonging "to the Negro tradition, according to contemporary sources" (Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 98).

<sup>24</sup> Southern, 98.

We will praise him again, When we pass over Jordan.<sup>25</sup>

To the land, to the land I am bound,  
Where there's no more stormy clouds arising.<sup>26</sup>

And we'll pass over Jordan, O, come and go with me;  
When we pass over Jordan, We'll praise th' eternal three.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to being repeated throughout the song, these choruses often included substantial repetitions within the chorus itself, such as:

We are walking in the light,  
We are walking in the light,  
We are walking in the light,  
We are walking in the beautiful light of God.<sup>28</sup>

And:

I'm bound for the promised land,  
I'm bound for the promised land.  
O, who will come and go with me?  
I am bound for the promised land.<sup>29</sup>

Some of the wandering choruses were merely two-line rhyme pairs or non-rhyming couplets, which themselves could be combined in any number of variations to form new four-line verses. These pairs have been described as "homeless distichs which had a way of turning up whenever conditions were right—that is, whenever the vocal voltage was high enough and the rhythmic gait of the song under way fitted their pattern."<sup>30</sup>

Similar to the wandering chorus was the interrupting refrain or tag line, in which a word or phrase was sung by the crowds in response to each one or two lines from the leader. For example:

We've found the rock, the travelers cried,  
O Halle Hallelujah,  
The stone that all the prophets tried;  
O Halle Hallelujah.  
Come, children, drink the balmy dew,  
O Halle Hallelujah,  
'Twas Christ who shed his blood for you,  
O Glory Hallelujah.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals*, 84.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce, *And They All Sang*, 98.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce, *And They All Sang*, 101-102.

<sup>28</sup> "The Beautiful Light," *The Revivalist*, Hymn 23 at 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> Bruce, *And They All Sang*, 103.

<sup>30</sup> Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals*, 86.

<sup>31</sup> Orange Scott, *The New and Improved Camp Meeting Hymn Book; being a Choice Selection of Hymns from The Most Approved Authors Designed to aid in the Public and Private devotion of Christians*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam, 1835), Hymn 33, at 46.

And:

While Jesus whispers to you,  
    Come, sinner, come!  
While we are praying for you,  
    Come, sinner, come!  
Now is the time to own him,  
    Come, sinner, come!  
Now is the time to know him,  
    Come, sinner, come!<sup>32</sup>

Also common was the use of repetitions with substitution, in which a basic pattern was established in an opening line or verse and then limited substitutions were made in subsequent lines or verses. Particularly popular were substitutions based on family relationships, sometimes called the “family word” song,<sup>33</sup> such as:

O brothers will you meet me,  
O sisters will you meet me,  
O mourners will you meet me  
On Canaan’s happy shore?<sup>34</sup>

The use of choruses, refrains, and substitutions enabled the song leaders to craft the texts to fit the evangelistic fervor of the camp meeting. Nineteenth-century Methodist preacher M. L. Haney, in his autobiography, offers a vivid description of how he used one such chorus to drive the mourner’s conversion:

A meeting of power was held in the church, during which a merchant was converted, who had a fearful struggle to find God. He was a quiet, cultivated man, in whom the people had much confidence. In those days few hymns or songs were sung in revival services, but these were often repeated. I had a favorite chorus which for years I sang over penitents when I thought them near deliverance. Seeing the merchant was nearing victory I struck up:

“For he has taken my feet from the mire and the clay  
And has set them on the rock of ages”

when the merchant sprang to his feet, filled with unspeakable joy. Though a very precise, modest man, with no knowledge of any tune, he went through the crowd shaking hands and attempting to sing this chorus. He had learned the words and kept repeating them with a loud voice, without the semblance of melody, but his face looked like the face of an angel of God! How we do forget the conventionalities of

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<sup>32</sup> “Come, Sinner, Come,” in *The Revivalist*, Hymn 68, at 68-69.

<sup>33</sup> Porter, “William B. Bradbury,” 37.

<sup>34</sup> Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals*, 84.

society when the soul is filled with the gladness of the Lord.<sup>35</sup>

### Ballads and Praise Songs

While the camp meeting chorus is perhaps the musical form most often associated with the camp meeting, it was not the only form of spiritual song that evolved in these gatherings. Ballads and praise hymns, such as the familiar “Come thou fount of every blessing,” were also heard during the long services at the tabernacle.<sup>36</sup> The narrative ballads often combined a rendering of a scriptural story with the signer’s personal experience of salvation.<sup>37</sup> The ballads were often exhortatory, with one of the most intriguing sub-categories being the “Come” songs, crafted to encourage congregants at the appropriate moment to come forward and receive the Spirit. In the Index to one popular collection of camp meeting songs, all thirteen entries under the letter “C” begin with “Come,” including “Come, all ye mourning pilgrims dear,” “Come, humble sinner in whose breast,” “Come on, my partners in distress,” and a text familiar to many present-day church-goers, “Come, ye sinners, poor and needy.”<sup>38</sup> It is not difficult to transplant the text of this latter hymn from today’s church congregations and envision its effect when sung while the exhorters were urging sinners to come forward and repent.<sup>39</sup> Shaffer’s *Pilgrim Songster* lists eleven “Come” songs, six of which do not appear in Scott. Dow’s collection includes one of the more hearty texts:

Come saints and sinners hear me tell  
 The wonders of Immanuel  
 Who sav’d me from a burning hell  
 And brought my soul with him to dwell  
 And gave me Heavenly Union.  
 .....

O come backsliders, come away  
 And mind to do as well as say

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<sup>35</sup> Milton Lorenzo (M. L.) Haney, *Pentecostal Possibilities or Story of My Life: An Autobiography* (New York: Da Capo, 1852), 104-105. This chorus, which echoes Ps. 40:2, also appears in Shaffer’s *Pilgrim Songster*, 211. A variant appears in *A Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies*, published by Marshall W. Taylor, an African-American preacher in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Irene V. Jackson-Brown, “African American Song in the Nineteenth Century: A Neglected Source,” from *The Black Perspective in Music*, published in 1976, reprinted in Abbington, *Readings*, 117-136, at 130). Joseph Hillman’s 1872 songster, *The Revivalist, Revised and Enlarged Edition*, includes this chorus wedded with verses that include a simplified text from Isaac Watts, “I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath” (*Sharon Mountain Harmony; A Golden Ring of Gospel*, FSI-86 [Sharon, CT: Folk-Legacy Records, Inc., 1982], 4).

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, *Frontier*, 196, 200.

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, *Frontier*, 196-197.

<sup>38</sup> Scott, *New and Improved*, 219-220.

<sup>39</sup> “Come ye Sinners, poor and needy” also appears as the opening hymn in Lorenzo Dow, *A Collection of Spiritual Songs Used at The Camp Meetings in the Great Revival in the United States of America, Selected by Lorenzo Dow* (London: John Jones, 1806), Hymn 1. An almost identical text is in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, Hymn 340.



And learn to watch as well as pray  
And bear your cross from day to day  
And then you'll feel this Union.<sup>40</sup>

Mrs. Frances Trollope, an English traveler visiting an early frontier camp meeting, provided a vivid first-hand account of how the “Come” songs set the tone for calling sinners to receive the Spirit:

The crowd fell back at the mention of the *pen*, and for some minutes there was a vacant space before us. The preachers came down from their stand, and placed themselves in the midst of it, beginning to sing a hymn, calling upon the penitents to come forth. As they sang they kept turning themselves round to every part of the crowd, and, by degrees, the voices of the whole multitude joined in chorus. This was the only moment at which I perceived any thing like the solemn and beautiful effect which I had heard ascribed to this woodland worship. 'Tis certain that the combined voices of such a multitude, heard at dead of night, from the depths of their eternal forests, the many fair young faces turned upward, and looking paler and lovelier as they met the moonbeams, the dark figures of the officials in the middle of the circle, the lurid glare thrown by the altar fires on the woods beyond, did altogether produce a fine and solemn effect, that I shall not easily forget . . .<sup>41</sup>

Similar to the “Come” songs in serving a particular function are the “Farewell” songs, including “Farewell,”<sup>42</sup> “Farewell, farewell, fare you well,”<sup>43</sup> and “Farewell my brethren in the Lord.”<sup>44</sup> In the camp meeting context these are generally understood to be the parting songs of a congregation preparing to leave the camp ground<sup>45</sup> but with the hope of reuniting at a subsequent meeting. A typical example begins:

FAREWELL, my dear brethren, the time is at hand,  
that we must be parted from this social band;  
Our several engagements now call us away,  
our parting is needful, and we must obey.<sup>46</sup>

As the “Farewell” songs made their way into the shape-note tunebooks of the early and mid-nineteenth century, they took on a different significance as songs not simply of parting at the close of the meeting, but of death and subsequent reunion in heaven. Just as many of the Negro spirituals have come to be understood as having a double meaning—songs of spiritual re-

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<sup>40</sup> Dow, *Collection*, Song IV, at 6-8.

<sup>41</sup> Frances Milton Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (London: Printed for Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1832), 143.

<sup>42</sup> *The Revivalist*, Hymn 75.

<sup>43</sup> Shaffer, *Pilgrim Songster*, 160.

<sup>44</sup> Scott, *New and Improved*, 79. Appearing as “Farewell Song” in Scott is “Lord, dismiss us with thy blessing,” a text that continues in mainstream hymnody today, generally with the deletion or substitution of the third verse (Scott, *New and Improved*, Hymn 65, p. 90; *The United Methodist Hymnal*, Hymn 671; *The Presbyterian Hymnal* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990], Hymn 538; *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006], Hymn 545).

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, *Frontier*, 199.

<sup>46</sup> Scott, *New and Improved*, Hymn 48, at 69-70.

demption but also codes for liberation from the bondage of slavery<sup>47</sup>—so the “Farewell” songs have taken on different connotations in different times and contexts.

As the camp meeting movement matured, ballads began to appear that dealt with the camp meeting experience itself. Several of these appeared in periodicals of the day, including: “The Tented Grove,” published in 1829<sup>48</sup>; “Hymn for a Camp Meeting” or “Beneath Heaven’s azure dome,” published in 1851;<sup>49</sup> “Camp-Meeting Hymn” or “When the Redeemer of mankind,” published in 1820;<sup>50</sup> and “Camp Meeting Hymn” or “In the shady woodland wending,” written by R. F. Fuller and published in 1863.<sup>51</sup> Some of these texts appear almost a harbinger of the Victorian hymn in their sentimental nostalgia, but a typical theme is the comparing of the joys and bliss of the camp meeting with the delights to be found in the heavenly reunion of the saints, the camp meeting as the earthly counterpart or recreation of Zion.

### The Camp Meeting and the Negro Spiritual

A final category of song traceable to the early nineteenth-century camp meeting is one that has long been understood as a genre in itself—the Negro spiritual. One of the major musicological controversies of the twentieth century stemmed from contrasting claims as to whether the Negro spiritual had its roots in African traditional song or was merely a poor copy or derivative of white hymnody heard by the slaves in plantation churches and camp meetings.<sup>52</sup> While it is impossible to trace the vast majority of spirituals to any single source, it is clear that both blacks and whites were present in the early camp meetings, and they were inevitably exposed to the songs and singing styles of the other’s traditions.<sup>53</sup> Describing a camp meeting attended around

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 78-87.

<sup>48</sup> “The Tented Grove: Hymn for Camp Meetings,” *The Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald 1828-1833*, July 17, 1829, 3, 46, APS Online p. 184; ProQuest No. 818986462.pdf.

<sup>49</sup> “Hymn for a Camp-Meeting,” *The Christian Advocate and Journal (1833-1865)*, July 3, 1851, 26, 27, APS Online p. 108; ProQuest No. 852316312.pdf.

<sup>50</sup> J. Platts, “Account of the Ranters,” *The Monthly Magazine* (May 1820), reprinted in *The Atheneum; or, Spirit of the English Magazines*; July 1, 28, 7,7, APS Online, p. 372; ProQuest No. 818538502.pdf.

<sup>51</sup> R. F. Fuller, “Camp Meeting Hymn,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal (1842-1867)*; June 17, 1863, 34, 24, APS Online, p. 96; ProQuest No. 771656232.pdf.

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g., Cone, *Spirituals*, 9-12; Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1981), 191-192; John W. Work, ed., *American Negro Songs and Spirituals* (New York: Crown, 1940), 1-27; Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (New York: Citadel, 1990), 13-26; John Lovell, Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame: The Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual Was Hammered Out* (New York: MacMillan, 1972); and George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1933), 242-302.

<sup>53</sup> Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, 197-199; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 141-142; Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, trans. Mary Howitt, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Bros., 1854), 311; and Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980), 59-61, 67-69, 226.

1830, Methodist preacher Lucius Bellinger wrote in his memoirs that, “The negroes are out in great crowds, and sing with voices that make the woods ring.”<sup>54</sup> Swedish traveler Fredrika Bremer, writing of her experience in 1850 in a camp meeting in Georgia, described the “holy dance” of the blacks and wrote:

In a fourth [tent], a song of the spiritual Canaan was being sung excellently . . . at half past five I was dressed and out. The hymns of the negroes, which had continued through the night, were still to be heard on all sides . . . The hymns were fervent and beautiful on the side of the negroes’ camp . . .<sup>55</sup>

and in a second letter of the same date:

Beneath the tabernacle an immense crowd was assembled, certainly from three to four thousand persons. They sang hymns—a superb choir! Strongest of all was the singing of the black portion of the assembly, as they were three times as many as the whites, and their voices are naturally pure and beautiful.<sup>56</sup>

An early critic of the camp meetings traced much of unorthodox musical practices of the meetings to these black congregants, whose songs he characterized as “short scraps of disjointed affirmations, pledges, or prayers, lengthened out with long repetition choruses,”<sup>57</sup> judging them to be “gross perversions of true religion!”<sup>58</sup>

[T]he example [of blacks] has already visibly affected the religious manners of some whites. From this cause, I have known in some camp meetings, from 50 to 60 people croud [*sic.*] into one tent, after the public devotions had closed, and there continue the whole night, singing tune after tune, (though with occasional episodes of prayer) scarce one of which were in our hymn books. Some of these from their nature, (having very long repetition choruses and short scraps of matter) are actually composed as sung, and are indeed almost endless.<sup>59</sup>

Records of the camp meeting era thus make clear that, in this multi-ethnic gathering, each community was exposed to the singing traditions of the other. “That the participants were mutually influenced seems inescapable.

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<sup>54</sup> Rev. Lucius Bellinger, *Stray Leaves from the Port-folio of a Methodist Local Preacher* (Macon, GA: For the author by J. W. Burke & Co., 1870), 17.

<sup>55</sup> Bremer, *Homes*, 311.

<sup>56</sup> Fredrika Bremer, *America of the Fifties: Letters of Fredrika Bremer*, ed. Adolph B. Benson (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1924), 115. Lovell observed that while relatively few slaves had the opportunity to attend the camp meetings, those who did attend found in that venue “a special opportunity to sing [their] original songs” (Lovell, *Black Song*, 278). He notes in particular “The ‘Walk Together, Children’ song [which] usually ended, ‘There’s a great camp meeting in the Promised Land’” (Cf. “There’s a Meeting Here To-Night,” in William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, Lucy McKim Garrison, eds., *Slave Songs of the United States* [Bedford, MA: Applewood, 1966], No. 11, at 9, facsimile of 1867 edition).

<sup>57</sup> *Methodist Error; or, Friendly, Christian Advice, to those Methodists, who indulge in extravagant emotions and bodily exercises. By a Wesleyan Methodist.* (Trenton, NJ: D. & E. Fenton, 1819), 30. This work has been attributed to John F. Watson (see, e.g., Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* [New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001], 121), but Watson’s name does not appear in the volume nor does the Pitts Theology Library catalog identify him as the acknowledged author of the work.

<sup>58</sup> *Methodist Error*, 31.

<sup>59</sup> *Methodist Error*, 31.

Songs, parts of songs, and ways of singing must have been exchanged, without the excited folk knowing or caring who started what.”<sup>60</sup> When characteristics of either group served the social and evangelistic purposes of the gathering, they would likely be adopted by members of the other group. Thus the driving rhythms, improvisational style, and call-and-response patterns of traditional African music became a standard practice in the camp meeting assemblies, just as the biblical texts and salvation stories preached in the stand, and the stanzas of Watts and Wesley offered up by song leaders, provided new verbal images that made their way into the spirituals of the black community.

### Motifs and Theological Themes

The motifs and theological themes of the camp meeting songs, and particularly the popular choruses, reflect the culture and aim of the camp meeting. In contrast to Wesley’s meticulous collecting of hymns to reflect “all the important truths,”<sup>61</sup> the camp meeting leaders did not attempt to educate the congregation on a broad range of theological or doctrinal topics. “The dominant concern of frontier religion was with the individual soul, its conversion and ultimate salvation,” and the choruses and ballads reflect that emphasis.<sup>62</sup> The salvation theme underscores numerous texts characterized by a rejection of this world, the certainty of salvation for the converted, and descriptions of the glories awaiting the saints in heaven. Thus the texts are filled with themes of journeying—traveling through this world, being a pilgrim, tarrying, crossing the river, moving through the storm, traveling to Canaan or to Zion. In keeping with this emphasis on individual salvation is a dualistic view of the world, contrasting the travails of life in this world with the visions of heavenly bliss in store for the saints. For example:

This world is all a fleeting show,  
For man’s illusion given;  
the smiles of joy, the tears of wo, [*sic*]  
Deceitful shine, deceitful flow;  
there’s nothing *true* but heaven.<sup>63</sup>

And:

JERUSALEM, my happy home,  
O how I long for thee!  
When shall my sorrows have an end?  
Thy joys when shall I see?<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, 199. Also see Cone, *Spirituals*, 38-39, for the influence of white camp meeting songs on the black spirituals.

<sup>61</sup> Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Bruce, *And They All Sang*, 121.

<sup>63</sup> “Heaven,” from Scott, *New and Improved*, Hymn 67, at 91-92.

<sup>64</sup> Scott, *New and Improved*, Hymn 1, at 5-6. The final verse of this hymn in Scott is the familiar “When we’ve been there ten thousand years,” frequently sung today as a part of “Amazing Grace.”

Both ballads and choruses were often characterized by martial imagery that would have resonated particularly with those congregants in the frontier meetings for whom not only the Revolution but subsequent conflicts with native tribes were still recent memories.<sup>65</sup> “In Kentucky the martial spirit of the Revolution had been kept alive and developed by Indian wars as nowhere else in the Union,”<sup>66</sup> and the very physical setting of the campground would have triggered thoughts of the military encampment.<sup>67</sup> Shaffer’s “Choice Choruses” include several examples of such imagery, including:

Brethren, march along, and you shall gain the victory,  
O march along, and you shall gain the day.<sup>68</sup>

I am bound to live in the service of the Lord,  
I am bound to die in the army.<sup>69</sup>

A soldier for Jesus, I’ve listed in the war,  
And I’ll fight until I die.<sup>70</sup>

Orange Scott’s collection includes a hymn entitled “Fight the Good Fight of Faith,” in which the initial couplets of the opening and closing verses reflect the military theme:

1. I’ve listed in the holy war,  
To fight for life and endless joy . . .
2. Under my Captain, Jesus Christ,  
I now am listed during life,  
.....
10. I have a sword, which, when I wield,  
The stoutest foes must quit the field; . . .
11. Come, sinners, then enlisted be,  
And Christ our King shall make you free, . . . .<sup>71</sup>

In contrast to the core understanding of social holiness that characterized eighteenth-century Methodism, the choruses of the camp meeting tended to take a passive approach to salvation, rejecting notions of God at work in the

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<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *Frontier*, 198-99.

<sup>66</sup> Benson, *English Hymn*, 293. Also see “The Early Camp-Meeting Song Writers,” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* (1841-1884), July 1859, 11, APS Online p. 401, ProQuest No. 792250372.pdf.

<sup>67</sup> “Early Camp-Meeting Song Writers,” APS Online p. 401.

<sup>68</sup> Shaffer, *Pilgrim Songster*, 210.

<sup>69</sup> Shaffer, *Pilgrim Songster*, 211.

<sup>70</sup> Shaffer, *Pilgrim Songster*, 211.

<sup>71</sup> “Fight the good fight of faith,” in Scott, *New and Improved*, Hymn 7 at 14-16. Johnson quotes portions of the same hymn, taken from *The Wesleyan Camp Meeting Hymn Book* (Johnson, *Frontier*, 199).

world.<sup>72</sup> The verses might speak of the mighty works of God, but the choruses tended more toward the personalized experience of Jesus, truncating the process of sanctification to a relatively simplistic view of conversion as leading eventually, but assuredly, to heavenly glory.<sup>73</sup> This theological contrast between verse and chorus is entirely consistent with the way the music evolved. If, as appears to be the case, the verses were often sung or lined out by the preacher, drawing on the traditional hymns of Watts, Wesley, Cowper, Newton, Doddridge and others, it is not surprising that they would have offered a broader range of theological content than do the choruses. The hymn texts offered a way of teaching and proclaiming the Word, as well as a way to move the service forward. The choruses, in contrast, were the song of the people, often improvised or picked up from the crowd and used to heighten the emotional pitch of the assembly. The far more simplistic texts enabled the saints to testify to their salvation and urge the mourners on to the moment of conversion.

### Camp Meeting Songsters and Shape-Note Tunebooks

Accustomed to an oral tradition of folk song, the people of the early camp meetings would have had little difficulty in spontaneously embracing these new forms of spiritual song. As the camp meetings became more popular, however, camp meeting “songsters”<sup>74</sup> began to appear, generally compiled by private individuals without the blessing of any organized denominational authority.<sup>75</sup> Typically described as collections of “spiritual songs” rather than “hymns,” the songsters provide the best extant records of the texts sung in the early camp meetings.<sup>76</sup>

The songsters were generally pocket-sized and proved to be immensely popular. One small, undated collection, *The Revivalist*, measured only four by five-and-a-half inches.<sup>77</sup> The popularity of such collections is evidenced by the number of editions that appeared and the number of volumes sold. Thomas S. Hinde’s *The Pilgrim Songster* reportedly had a combined three-edition circulation of at least 10,000, and Orange Scott’s popular collection, in various editions, sold more than 9,500 copies even before the issuance of the pocket-sized edition.<sup>78</sup> In 1835 Orange Scott printed the fourth edition of his collection, noting in the preface that since the first edition had appeared three years earlier, some 12,000 copies had been sold.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Bruce, *And They All Sang*, 104-105.

<sup>73</sup> Bruce, *And They All Sang*, 104-105, 110-111.

<sup>74</sup> Lorenz, *Glory*, 41.

<sup>75</sup> As the camp meetings themselves became more single-denominational, songsters began to appear that, while not authorized by specific denominations, were allied, by design or by virtue of the songs selected, with particular ecclesiological traditions. Thus songsters can be identified with Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and United Brethren, as well as Mormons and Shakers (Lorenz, *Glory*, 73-77).

<sup>76</sup> Hammond, “Hymns, Hymnody,” 214.

<sup>77</sup> See note 21, above.

<sup>78</sup> Johnson, *Frontier*, 193-195.

<sup>79</sup> Scott, *New and Improved*, “Advertisement,” 3.

Like the traditional hymnals of the eighteenth century, the camp meeting songsters typically contained only the poetry.<sup>80</sup> The assigning of tunes to go with the various texts was left to the preacher or other song leader,<sup>81</sup> who probably drew on local traditions to call up folk tunes that had been associated with particular texts<sup>82</sup> or that would have been known to congregants or easily picked up from the singing, particularly the repetitious singing of the choruses. To the extent the tunes of the early camp meetings survive today, it is due in large part to an entirely different movement—the proliferation of the singing schools and the shape-note tunebooks that appeared in abundance between 1800 and the Civil War.<sup>83</sup>

The shape-note books were not hymnals but tunebooks. While they used predominantly sacred texts, their principal purpose was not to disseminate poetry for worship but to teach people how to read music. Like the early camp meetings themselves, these collections were generally independent of any specific denomination.<sup>84</sup> To the extent they were used in churches, “it was more often by popular support won ‘by degrees’ than by appeals to denominational bureaucracies. As such, tunebooks stood outside the scope of organized evangelical reform.”<sup>85</sup>

The connection between the camp meeting and the spread of shape-note singing is not precisely linear, as both came to prominence, particularly on the southern and western frontiers, during essentially the same period. The tunebooks were apparently not used at the camp meetings, where they probably would not have been particularly useful, both because of the limited

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<sup>80</sup> One notable exception was Leavitt’s *The Christian Lyre*, which included texts and two-part tunes (Hammond, “Hymns, Hymnody,” 214).

<sup>81</sup> Johnson, *Frontier*, 192.

<sup>82</sup> See Johnson, *Frontier*, 196.

<sup>83</sup> Johnson credits the shape-note tunebooks with “originally publiciz[ing]” camp meeting tunes (Johnson, *Frontier*, 194). For the evolution of shape-note singing in the United States, see Eskew, *Sing*, 178-180; and Alan Clark Buechner, *Yankee Singing School and the Golden Age of Choral Music in New England, 1760-1800* (Boston: Boston University for The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, 2003), 86-87.

<sup>84</sup> John Bealle, *Public Worship, Private Faith: Sacred Harp and American Folksong* (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1997), 32-35. While not enjoying the status of official denominational hymnals, some of the tunebooks, like the songsters, can be identified to particular traditions. The original *Sacred Harp* early became a favorite of Primitive Baptists, many of whom continue to have Sacred Harp sings today (Buell E. Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* [Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1989], 19-21). Ananias Davisson, himself a Presbyterian, wrote that his “principle [*sic*] design in offering his Supplement [to *Kentucky Harmony*] is, that his Methodist friends may be furnished with a suitable and proper arrangement of such pieces as may seem best calculated to animate the zealous Christian in his acts of devotion . . .” (Ananias Davisson, A.K.H., *A Supplement to the Kentucky Harmony* [Harrisonburg, VA: Printed and sold by the Author, 1820]). In 1832, Mennonite Joseph Funk published *A Compilation of Genuine Church Music*, a forerunner of *The Harmonia Sacra* that continues to be a cherished part of the Mennonite legacy, the twenty-fifth edition being published in 1993 (Mary K. Oyer, “Introduction,” in Joseph Funk and Sons, *The Harmonia Sacra, a Compilation of Genuine Church Music. Comprising a great variety of Metres, harmonized for four voices: Together with a copious explication of The Principles of Vocal Music. Exemplified and illustrated with tables, in a plain and comprehensive manner*, 25<sup>th</sup> ed. [Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1993]).

<sup>85</sup> Bealle, *Public Worship*, 35.

musical literacy of the people and also because the idea of reading music, and particularly the complex harmonies and rhythms of much of the shape-note repertory, would have been contrary to the emotional, improvisational spirit of camp meeting song. As shape-note historian John Bealle concluded: "Camp meeting music itself was so completely wedded to the principle of instant emotional appeal that tunebooks would have been at best unhelpful, if not an outright hindrance."<sup>86</sup>

Yet the shape-note tunebooks did play a critical role in the camp meeting movement, because it was to a great extent the collectors and publishers of these tunebooks who ensured the preservation and continuing popularity of many of the camp meeting songs and choruses. In the camp meetings, people were singing choruses and texts to familiar folk tunes that were a part of the oral tradition. It was left to the editors of the shape-note tunebooks to collect these tunes and notate them, attempting to capture the complex rhythms of the camp meeting and adding harmonic arrangements of increasing complexity. The improvisational style of camp meeting song made the task of notating melody and text something of a challenge, much like that which faced William Frances Allen and his colleagues when they attempted to notate the rich variants of tune and text of the Negro spiritual for their 1867 collection.<sup>87</sup> But the efforts of the tunebook compilers proved a critical complement to the text-only songsters of the camp meeting movement, as it was their work in arranging the tunes that would "capture the spirited rhythm of the revival favorites and fit the songs with the appropriate harmony."<sup>88</sup> Of particular significance in this process was the publication in 1820 of Ananias Davisson's *Supplement to the Kentucky Harmony*, probably the first of the shape-note tunebooks to include a significant number of camp meeting spirituals.<sup>89</sup> Later B. F. White, E. J. King and their colleagues would

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<sup>86</sup> Bealle, *Public Worship*, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Allen, *Slave Songs*, iii-vi, xxi-xxiii.

<sup>88</sup> Cobb, *Sacred Harp*, 83.

<sup>89</sup> Cobb, *Sacred Harp*, 82. Hammond asserts that "revival hymnody" also appeared in John Wyeth's *Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second*, published in 1813 (Hammond, "Hymns, Hymnody," 214). Irving Lowens writes that "Wyeth's *Repository, Part Second* may have been the source from which Southern folk hymnody flowed, but its influence was exerted at second hand through another tune book, Ananias Davisson's *Kentucky Harmony*," and describes Davis' *Supplement to Kentucky Harmony* as "a quite extraordinary compilation of spiritual folk song much more distinctly oriented in the direction of Southern folk hymnody than the *Kentucky Harmony* itself" (Irving Lowens, "Introduction," in A. Davisson, *Kentucky Harmony or A Choice Collection of Psalm Tunes, Hymns, and Anthems in Three Parts. 1816. Facsimile edition, with Introduction by Irving Lowens* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976]). The 1810 edition of Wyeth does include one verse of "Come, ye sinners," set to the tune "Invitation," by Bronson, as well as "There is a land of pure delight," set to "Jordan" by U.S. composer William Billings. Both of these texts appear in camp meeting songsters, but the tunes in Wyeth are folk settings without the characteristics of the camp meeting chorus. A single entry, "Happy soul, thy days are ended," set to "Dying Believer," has one four-phrase verse with a chorus consisting of "Hallelujah" sung four times, then "Amen." This may be the first notation of a camp meeting chorus in a shape-note tunebook (John Wyeth, *Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Song, Selected from the Most Eminent and Approved Authors in that science, for the use of Christian churches of every denomination, singing-schools and private societies, together with a plain and concise introduction to the grounds of music, and rules for learners* [Harrisburg, PA: John Wyeth, 1810], 99, 102, and 91).



transcribe other camp meeting songs for *The Sacred Harp*, first published in 1844, including “There is a happy land, far, far away,” “Our bondage here will be ended by and bye,” “Till the warfare is over,” and “We have but one more river to cross.”<sup>90</sup>

### Critics and Controversies

The music of the camp meeting, while effective for its revivalistic purposes, was not without its critics. To clergy and musicians trained in a more formal hymnody, the songs probably seemed theological doggerel coupled with the lowest forms of musical composition and performance. The anonymous author of *Methodist Error* doubtless voiced the sentiments of many when he castigated the songs of the camp meeting as “often miserable as poetry, and senseless as matter.”<sup>91</sup> An 1859 article describing Hinde’s *The Pilgrim Songster* was somewhat more charitable, observing that “Most of [the sixty hymns by unfamiliar authors] are destitute of poetical merit, but they were treasured in the memories of the people, and were popular at a time when such compositions were in great demand.”<sup>92</sup>

The songs of the camp meeting were rejected for a different reason by some leaders of the revival movement itself. In 1831, Joshua Leavitt published *The Christian Lyre*, a collection of both standard hymns and camp meeting songs that Leavitt intended to accompany the revivals of evangelist Charles G. Finney.<sup>93</sup> Finney rejected the collection, however, holding that the highly-charged songs were counterproductive to “the agonizing spirit of prayer required for sinners to come to salvation.”<sup>94</sup> Yet it is certainly possible that the singing actually served to increase the dramatic urgings to repentance precisely because of the contrast between the exhorter’s dark and sinister descriptions of what lay ahead for sinners and the joyful singing of the saints describing what awaited the saved in heaven.<sup>95</sup> The format itself—juxtaposing the talk of doom with the songs of delight—reflected and doubtless reinforced the dualistic world view that was so central to the theology of the frontier camp meeting.

A third area of controversy was the implicit competition between the camp meeting songsters and the authorized hymnals of the emerging denominations, particularly the Methodists, who from the beginning had approached the selection of both tune and text with great care. In the preface to his 1765 collection of tunes and texts, John Wesley wrote:

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<sup>90</sup> Cobb, *Sacred Harp*, 83. See also Jackson, *White Spirituals*, 214-241.

<sup>91</sup> *Methodist Error*, 28-29. Also see Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, 69.

<sup>92</sup> “The Early Camp-Meeting Song Writers,” APS Online p. 401.

<sup>93</sup> Hammond, “Hymns, Hymnody,” 214.

<sup>94</sup> Hammond, “Hymns, Hymnody,” 214. Finney later worked with New England music reformists Thomas Hastings and Lowell Mason, whose *Spiritual Songs for Social Worship*, 1833, “sought to counteract the ‘vulgar melodies’ of Leavitt’s collection” (Hammond, “Hymns, Hymnody,” 214).

<sup>95</sup> Bruce, *And They All Sang*, 97.

I have been endeavouring for more than Twenty Years to procure such a Book as this. But in vain: Matters of Music were above following any Direction but their own. And I was determined, whoever compiled this, should follow *my* direction: Not *mending* our Tunes, but setting them down, neither better nor worse than they were. At length I have prevailed. The following Collection contains all the Tunes which are in *common Use* among us. They are pricked *true*, exactly as I desire all our Congregations may sing them: And here is prefix to them a Collection of those Hymns which are (I think) some of *the best* we have published. The *Volume* likewise is *small*, as well as the *Price*. This therefore I recommend, preferable to all others.<sup>96</sup>

In their Preface to *The Methodist Pocket Hymn Book, revised and improved*, issued in the United States in 1802 or 1803, Bishops Coke and Whatcoat assured its readers that any profits from sales would be applied to “religious and charitable purpose,” adding, “We must therefore earnestly entreat you, if you have any respect for the authority of the Conferences, or of us, or any regard for the prosperity of the Connection, to purchase no Hymn-Books, but what are signed with the names of your Bishops.”<sup>97</sup>

Thus the emergence of the popular camp meeting songsters would have posed problems for the organized church, particularly when songsters appeared to target members of particular ecclesial traditions, such as *THE WESLEYAN PSALMIST: or, Songs of Canaan: a Collection of Hymns and Tunes to be Used at Camp Meetings, at class and Prayer Meetings, and other occasions of Social Devotion*.<sup>98</sup> In his study of the frontier camp meeting, Charles Johnson determined that “at least seventeen such Methodist songbooks [were] printed in the United States” in the period from 1805 to 1843,<sup>99</sup> none of them authorized by denominational authorities.<sup>100</sup> Reviewing William Hunter’s *SELECT MELODIES: comprising the best of those Hymns and Spiritual Songs in common use, not to be found in the standard Methodist Episcopal Hymn-Book; as also, a number of original pieces*, in 1843, the editors of *Ladies Repository, and Gatherings of the West (1841-1848)* commented: “This contains many excellent hymns; and, if our friends will not be satisfied with the Methodist Hymn-Book, is one of the best selections extant.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> John Wesley, “Preface,” in John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Select Hymns Designed chiefly for the Use of the people called Methodists, 2d edition, Corrected and Enlarged* (London: n.p., 1765), bound together with John Wesley, *Sacred Melody or A choice Collection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes, with a Short Introduction*, [n.p.: n.d.].

<sup>97</sup> Young, *Companion*, 107.

<sup>98</sup> “Editor’s Table,” *Ladies Repository, and Gatherings of the West*, February 1845, 5, APS Online, p. 62, ProQuest No. 89945220; referring to a collection compiled by M. L. Scudder of the New England Conference, Boston.

<sup>99</sup> Johnson, *Frontier*, 193.

<sup>100</sup> Stith Meade’s collection, which ran to two editions, was endorsed by one conference, though not by the general church (Arthur L. Stevenson, *The Story of Southern Hymnology* [New York: AMS, 1975], 29, discussing *A General Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs in Use; By Rev. Stith Meade, Second Edition—Revised, Corrected and Enlarged; Published by Permission of the Virginia Conference by Jacob Haas, 1811, Lynchburg, Virginia*).

<sup>101</sup> “Editor’s Table,” *Ladies Repository, and Gatherings of the West*, February 1843, 3, APS Online, p. 63, ProQuest No. 69198023.

A few months later the *Ladies Repository* editors expanded on the theme of “official vs. non-official” hymnals, in a notice announcing the publication of a new collection of songs “for Social, Prayer, and Camp Meetings” from A. W. Musgrove:

Fidelity to our own conscience obliges us to say, in the first place, that we go against all substitutes for the old Methodist Hymn Book. We heartily wish, all things considered, that the Methodists had never seen any other collection of hymns, or used any other melodies. It is pure bathos to yield our excellent Church hymns for any other spiritual songs extant. When families, praying circles, classes, or love feasts use any others it is a clear loss, and a heavy draw-back on deep devotion.

Having satisfied our conscience by entering this protest, we now proceed, in justice to Mr. Musgrove, to say this collection of spiritual songs is far superior to those which have heretofore been in use amongst us. If the members of the Church must, (and it seems they will) use other “melodies” than those contained in our Hymn Book, we cordially recommend this. The supplement contains fifty-seven hymns, the most of them strangers to us.<sup>102</sup>

### **From the Camp Meeting to Contemporary Worship**

The choruses and musical styles that emerged from the early nineteenth-century camp meeting paved the way for successive waves of congregational song, from the popular hymns of Fannie Crosby and the revival songs of Ira Sankey to the white and black gospel sounds of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Because hymns learned in childhood tend to become a part of one’s spiritual identity, it is not surprising that many of these songs, originating in the need for texts and tunes that were singable and easily learned by ear, were passed down through generations of church-goers long after most mainstream Protestants were worshipping in splendid buildings rather than in the tented grove. But beyond the continuity of text and tune is the striking similarity of form and function between the early camp meeting songs and the music of the contemporary seeker service. With an increasingly unchurched populace, worship planners have again encountered a culture characterized by a limited repertoire of familiar hymnody and a need for songs that can be picked up aurally rather than from the notated page. Music and evangelism continue to be ecclesial yokefellows, and churches have increasingly turned to the same devices that characterized the music of the camp meeting, whether in the repetitions of the praise chorus or in the call-and-response patterns of Taizé and Iona. Like the camp meeting choruses, the music has adapted to the culture in order to engage the people in the liturgy.

Lovers of classical hymnody may echo in modern voice the criticisms expressed almost two centuries ago in *Methodist Error*, judging these new musical forms as monotonous doggerel and inadequate theology sung to unimaginative tunes. Yet history suggests that the question to be asked is not simply how the text and music measure up to the deepest riches of theology and song. The question, rather, is whether the song of today’s congregations

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<sup>102</sup> “Notices,” *Ladies Repository*, and *Gatherings of the West*, August 1843, 3, APS Online, p. 255, ProQuest No. 69243802.

again offers “practical divinity”<sup>103</sup> in a form that serves the evangelistic task of “spreading scriptural holiness across the land.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns*, 2.

<sup>104</sup> *A Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (New York: W. Ross, 1787), 4, online at <http://docs.newsbank.com/s/Evans/eaidoc/EVAN/0F3018C7961F6038/0D0CB4F3D1A01B2A>.