

Music Blurbs for 3-24-19

News and Notes

This week in music there are many well-liked hymns: “Come thou fount of every blessing,” “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,” and “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah.” The choir will sing music by Richard Farrant, a member of the Chapel Royal who survived through the reigns of both Protestant and Catholic monarchs. The communion hymn, “O Food to pilgrims given” is sung to the Lutheran tune, O WELT, ICH MUSS DICH LASSEN (O world, I now must leave thee). This tune serves as the basis for the organ music: two settings by Brahms, the second of which turned out to be the last music he ever wrote.

Bulletins

The hymn, “Come thou fount of every blessing” appears in most major American denominational hymnals. The text was penned in 1757 by a 22 year old named Robert Robinson. It was intended for Whitsunday (Pentecost) celebration and published in London in 1760. The text entered an American Episcopal hymnal in 1826 but by then had been much altered. It has continued to undergo changes between then and when it was published not only in the Episcopal Church’s *The Hymnal 82*, but also *Lift Every Voice and Sing (LEVAS)*. *LEVAS* is an Episcopal Church hymnal published in 1981 and sponsored by the Office of Black Ministries of the Episcopal Church. Interestingly, there is a text variant between the two Episcopal publications. The *LEVAS* version opens the second verse with an older variant: “Here I raise my Ebenezer.” The reference is to 1 Samuel 7:12, when the Israelites erect a stone as a monument of gratitude for protecting them against the Philistines.

The tune, likely a folk tune, has been called by many names since it first appeared as a shape note tune in *Wyeth’s Repository of Sacred Music: Part Second* published in Harrisburg, PA in 1813. It appeared with the tune name HALLELUJAH

and was set to the text “Come thou fount of every blessing.” The text and tune were published with this coupling several times in the early 19th century, with almost a different tune name every time. But in 1852, Darius Jones published a collection, *Temple Melodies* and called the tune NETTLETON, as we do today. Conjecture has it that it was in honor of Asahel Nettleton, a well-known evangelist of the day. Nettleton had compiled a collection of texts called *Village Hymns for Social Worship* in 1824 which included the text of “Come thou fount.” Ironically, in the book of tunes meant to accompany it (*Zion’s Harp*) this tune never appears.