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## Atlantic Monthly; Negro Spirituals (Reprint); 1867

Thomas Wentworth Higginson

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## Negro Spirituals

Thomas Wentworth Higginson

from the *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1867

THE war brought to some of us, besides its direct experiences, many a strange fulfilment of dreams of other days. For instance, the present writer has been a faithful student of the Scottish ballads, and had always envied Sir Walter the delight of tracing them out amid their own heather, and of writing them down piecemeal from the lips of aged crones. It was a strange enjoyment, therefore, to be suddenly brought into the midst of a kindred world of unwritten songs, as simple and indigenous as the Border Minstrelsy, more uniformly plaintive, almost always more quaint, and often as essentially poetic.

This interest was rather increased by the fact that I had for many years heard of this class of songs under the name of "Negro Spirituals," and had even heard some of them sung by friends from South Carolina. I could now gather on their own soil these strange plants, which I had before seen as in museums alone. True, the individual songs rarely coincided; there was a line here, a chorus there, - just enough to fix the class, but this was unmistakable. It was not strange that they differed, for the range seemed almost endless, and South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida seemed to have nothing but the generic character in common, until all were mingled in the united stock of camp-melodies.

Often in the starlit evening I have returned from some lonely ride by the swift river, or on the plover-haunted barrens, and, entering the camp, have silently approached some glimmering Ore, round which the dusky figures moved in the rhythmical barbaric dance the negroes call a "shout," chanting, often harshly, but always in the most perfect time, some monotonous refrain. Writing down in the darkness, as I best could - perhaps with my hand in the safe covert of my pocket, - the words of the song, I have afterwards carried it to my tent, like some captured bird or insect, and then, after examination, put it by. Or, summoning one of the men at some period of leisure, - Corporal Robert Sutton, for instance, whose iron memory held all the details of a song as if it were a ford or a forest, - I have completed the new specimen by supplying the absent parts. The music I could only retain by ear, and though the more common strains were repeated often enough to fix their impression, there were others that occurred only once or twice.



The words will be here given, as nearly as possible, in the original dialect; and if the spelling seems sometimes inconsistent, or the misspelling insufficient, it is because I could get no nearer. I wished to avoid what seems to me the only error of Lowell's "Biglow Papers" in respect to dialect,- the occasional use of an extreme misspelling, which merely confuses the eye, without taking us any closer to the peculiarity of sound.

The favorite song in camp was the following,-sung with no accompaniment but the measured clapping of hands and the clatter of many feet. It was sung perhaps twice as often as any other. This was partly due to the fact that it properly consisted of a chorus alone, with which the verses of other songs might be combined at random.

### I. HOLD YOUR LIGHT.

"Hold your light, Brudder Robert,-  
Hold your light,  
Hold your light on Canaan's shore.

"What make ole Satan for follow me so?  
Satan ain't got notin' for do wid me.  
Hold your light,  
Hold your light,  
Hold your light on Canaan's shore."

This would be sung for half an hour at a time, perhaps, each person present being named in turn. It seemed the simplest primitive type of "spiritual." The next in popularity was almost as elementary, and, like this, named successively each one of the circle. It was, however, much more resounding and convivial in its music.

### II. BOUND TO GO.

"Jordan River, I 'm bound to go,  
Bound to go, bound to go,-  
Jordan River, I 'm bound to go,  
And bid 'em fare ye well.

"My Brudder Robert, I 'm bound to go,  
Bound to go, &c.

"My Sister Lucy, I 'm bound to go,  
Bound to go," &c.

Sometimes it was "tink 'em " (think them) "fare ye well." The *ye* was so detached, that I thought at first it was "very" or "vary well."

Another picturesque song, which seemed immensely popular, was at first very bewildering to me. I could not make out the first words of the chorus, and called it the "Romandâr," being reminded of some Romaic song which I had formerly heard. That association quite fell in with the Orientalism of the new tent-life.

### III. ROOM IN THERE.

"O, my mudder is gone ! my mudder is gone !  
My mudder is gone into heaven, my Lord !  
I can't stay behind !  
Dere's room in dar, room in dar,  
Room in dar, in de heaven, my Lord !  
I can't stay behind,  
Can't stay behind, my dear,  
I can't stay behind !

"O, my fader is gone !" &c.

"O, de angels are gone !" &c.

"O, I 'se been on de road ! I 'se been on de road !  
I 'se been on de road into heaven, my Lord !  
I can't stay behind !  
O, room in dar, room in dar,  
Room in dar, in de heaven, my Lord !  
I can't stay behind !"

By this time every man within hearing, from oldest to youngest, would be wriggling and shuffling, as if through some magic piper's bewitchment; for even those who at first affected contemptuous indifference would be drawn into the vortex ere long.

Next to these in popularity ranked a class of songs belonging emphatically to the Church Militant, and available for camp purposes with very little strain upon their symbolism. This, for instance, had a true companion-in-arms heartiness about it, not impaired by the feminine invocation at the end.

### IV. HAIL MARY.



"One more valiant soldier here,  
One more valiant soldier here,  
One more valiant soldier here,  
To help me bear de cross.  
O hail, Mary, hail !  
Hail!, Mary, hail !  
Hail!, Mary, hail !  
To help me bear de cross."

I fancied that the original reading might have been "soul," instead of "soldier,"-with some other syllable inserted, to fill out the metre,-and that the "Hail, Mary," might denote a Roman Catholic origin, as I had several men from St. Augustine who held in a dim way to that faith. It was a very ringing song, though not so grandly jubilant as the next, which was really impressive as the singers pealed it out, when marching or rowing or embarking.

#### V. MY ARMY CROSS OVER.

"My army cross over,  
My army cross over.  
O, Pharaoh's army drowned !  
My army cross over.

"We 'll cross de mighty river,  
My army cross over;  
We 'll cross de river Jordan,  
My army cross over;  
We 'll cross de danger water,  
My army cross over;  
We 'll cross de mighty Myo,  
My army cross over. (*Thrice.*)  
O, Pharaoh's army drowned !  
My army cross over."

I could get no explanation of the "mighty Myo," except that one of the old men thought it meant the river of death. Perhaps it is an African Word. In the Cameroon dialect, "Mawa" signifies "to die."

The next also has a military ring about it, and the first line is well matched by the music. The rest is conglomerate, and one or two lines show a more Northern origin. "Done" is a Virginia shibboleth, quite distinct from the "been" which replaces it in South Carolina. Yet one of their best choruses, without any fixed words, was, "De bell done ringing," for which, in proper South Carolina dialect, would have been substituted, "De bell been a-ring." This refrain may have gone South with our army.

#### VI. RIDE IN, KIND SAVIOR.

"Ride in, kind Saviour !  
No man can hinder me.  
O, Jesus is a mighty man !  
No man, &c.  
We 're marching through Virginny fields.  
No man, &c.  
O, Satan is a busy man,  
No Man, &c.  
And he has his sword and shield,  
No man, &c.  
O, old Secesh done come and gone !  
No man can hinder me."

Sometimes they substituted "hinder *we*," which was more spicy to the ear, and more in keeping with the usual head- over-heels arrangement of their pronouns.

Almost all their songs were thoroughly religious in their tone, however quaint their expression, and were in a minor key, both as to words and music. The attitude is always the same, and, as a commentary on the life of the race, is infinitely pathetic. Nothing but patience for this life,- nothing but triumph in the next. Sometimes the present predominates, sometimes the future ; but the combination is always implied. In the following, for instance, we hear simply the patience.

#### VII. THIS WORLD ALMOST DONE.

"Brudder, keep your lamp trimmin' and a-burnin',  
Keep your lamp trimmin' and a-burnin',  
Keep your lamp trimmin' and a-burnin',  
For dis world most done.  
So keep your lamp, &c.  
Dis world most done."

But in the next, the final reward of patience is proclaimed as plaintively.

#### VIII. I WANT TO GO HOME.



"Dere's no rain to wet you,  
 O, yes, I want to go home.  
 Dere's no sun to burn you,  
 O, yes, I want to go home ;  
 O, push along, believers,  
     O, yes, &c.  
     Dere's no hard trials,  
     O, yes, &c.  
 Dere's no whips a-crackin',  
     O, yes, &c.  
 My brudder on de wayside,  
     O, yes, &c.  
 O, push along, my brudder,  
     O, yes, &c.  
 Where dere's no stormy weather,  
     O, yes, &c.  
     Dere's no tribulation,  
     O, yes, &c."

This next was a boat-song, and timed well with the tug of the oar.

#### IX. THE COMING DAY.

"I want to go to Canaan,  
 I want to go to Canaan,  
 I want to go to Canaan,  
 To meet 'em at de comin' day.  
 O, remember, let me go to Canaan, (*Thrice.*)  
     To meet 'em, &c.  
 O brudder, let me go to Canaan, (*Thrice.*)  
     To meet 'em, &c.  
 My brudder, you-oh !-remember (*Thrice.*)  
     To meet 'em at de comin' day."

The following begins with a startling affirmation, yet the last line quite outdoes the first. This, too, was a capital boat-song.

#### X. ONE MORE RIVER.

"O, Jordan bank was a great old bank !  
 Dere ain't but one more river to cross.  
 We have some valiant soldier here,  
     Dere ain t, &c.  
 O, Jordan stream will never run dry,  
     Dere ain't, &c.  
 Dere's a hill on my leff, and he catch on my right,  
 Dere ain't but one more river to cross."

I could get no explanation of this last riddle, except, "Dat mean, if you go on de leff, go to 'struction, and if you go on de right, go to God, for sure."

In others, more of spiritual conflict is implied, as in this next.

#### XI. O THE DYING LAMB !

"I wants to go where Moses trod,  
     O de dying Lamb !  
 For Moses gone to de promised land,  
     O de dying Lamb !  
 To drink from springs dat never run dry,  
     O, &c.  
     Cry O my Lord !  
     O, &c.  
 Before I 'll stay in hell one day,  
     O, &c.  
 I 'm in hopes to pray my sins away,  
     O, &c.  
     Cry O my Lord !  
     O, &c.  
 Brudder Moses promised for be dar too,  
     O &c.  
 To drink from streams dat never run dry,  
     O de dying Lamb ! "

In the next, the conflict is at its height, and the lurid imagery of the Apocalypse is brought to bear. This book, with the books of Moses, constituted their Bible ; all that lay between, even the narratives of the life of Jesus, they hardly cared to read or to hear.

#### XII. DOWN IN THE VALLEY.



"We 'll run and never tire,  
We 'll run and never tire,  
We 'll run and never tire,  
Jesus set poor sinners free.  
Way down in de valley,  
Who will rise and go with me ?  
You 've heern talk of Jesus,  
Who set poor sinners free.

"De lightnin' and de flashin',  
De lightnin' and de flashin'  
De lightnin' and de flashin'  
Jesus set poor sinners free.  
I can't stand de fire. (*Thrice.*)  
Jesus set poor sinners free,  
De green trees a-flamin'. (*Thrice.*)  
Jesus set poor sinners free,  
Way down in de valley,  
Who will rise and go with me ?  
You 've heern talk of Jesus  
Who set poor sinners free."

"De valley" and "de lonesome valley" were familiar words in their religious experience. To descend into that region implied the same process with the "anxious-seat" of the camp-meeting. When a young girl was supposed to enter it, she bound a handkerchief by a peculiar knot over her head, and made it a point of honor not to change a single garment till the day of her baptism, so that she was sure of being in physical readiness for the cleansing rite, whatever her spiritual mood might be. More than once, in noticing a damsel thus mystically kerchiefed, I have asked some dusky attendant its meaning, and have received the unfailing answer, - framed with their usual indifference to the genders of pronouns, - "He in de lonesome valley, sa."

The next gives the same dramatic conflict, while its detached and impersonal refrain gives it strikingly the character of the Scotch and Scandinavian ballads.

### XIII. CRY HOLY.

"Cry holy, holy !  
Look at de people dat is born of God.  
And I run down de valley, and I run down to pray,  
Says, look at de people dat is born of God.  
When I get dar, Cappen Satan was dar,  
Says, look at, &c.  
Says, young man, young man, dere 's no use for pray,  
Says, look at, &c.  
For Jesus is dead, and God gone away,  
Says, look at, &c.  
And I made him out a liar and I went my way,  
Says, look at, &c.  
Sing holy, holy !

"O, Mary was a woman, and he had a one Son,  
Says, look at, &c.  
And de Jews and de Romans had him hung,  
Says, look at, &c.  
Cry holy, holy !

"And I tell you, sinner, you had better had pray,  
Says look at, &c.  
For hell is a dark and dismal place,  
Says, look at, &c.  
And I tell you, sinner, and I would n't go dar !  
Says, look at, &c.  
Cry holy, holy !"

Here is an infinitely quaint description of the length of the heavenly road:-

#### XIV. O'ER THE CROSSING.

"Yonder 's my old mudder,  
Been a-waggin' at de hill so long.  
It 's about time she 'll cross over;  
Get home bimeby.  
Keep prayin', I do believe  
We 're a long time waggin' o'er de crossin'.  
Keep prayin' I do believe  
We 'll get home to heaven bimeby.



"Hear dat mournful thunder  
Roll front door to door,  
Calling home God's children ;  
Get home bimeby.  
Little chil'en, I do believe  
We 're a long time, &c.  
Little chil'en, I do believe  
We 'll get home, &c.

"See dat forked lightning  
Flash from tree to tree,  
Callin' home God's chil'en ;  
Get home bimeby.  
True believer, I do believe  
We 're a long time, &c.  
O brudders, I do believe,  
We 'll get home to heaven bimeby."

One of the most singular pictures of future joys, and with a fine flavor of hospitality about it, was this:-

#### XV. WALK 'EM EASY.

"O, walk 'em easy round de heaven,  
Walk 'em easy round de heaven,  
Walk 'em easy round de heaven,  
Dat all de people may join de band.  
Walk 'em easy round de heaven. (*Thrice.*)  
O, shout glory till 'em join dat band !"

The chorus was usually the greaterpart of the song, and often came in paradoxically, thus:-

#### XVI. O YES, LORD.

"O, must I be like de foolish mans ?  
O yes, Lord !  
Will build de house on de sandy hill.  
O yes, Lord !  
I 'll build my house on Zion hill,  
O yes, Lord !  
No wind nor rain can blow me down  
O yes, Lord !"

The next is very graceful and lyrical, and with more variety of rhythm than usual:-

## XVII. BOW LOW, MARY.

"Bow low, Mary, bow low, Martha,  
For Jesus come and lock de door,  
And carry de keys away.  
Sail, sail, over yonder,  
And view de promised land.  
For Jesus come, &c.  
Weep, O Mary, bow low, Martha,  
For Jesus come, &c.  
Sail, sail, my true believer ;  
Sail, sail over yonder ;  
Mary bow low, Martha, bow low,  
For Jesus come and lock de door  
And carry de keys away."

But of all the "spirituals" that which surprised me the most, I think- perhaps because it was that in which external nature furnished the images most directly,-was this. With all my experience of their ideal ways of speech, I was startled when first I came on such a flower of poetry in that dark soil.

## XVIII. I KNOW MOON-RISE.

"I know moon-rise, I know star-rise,  
Lay dis body down.  
I walk in de moonlight, I walk in de starlight,  
To lay dis body down.  
I 'll walk in de graveyard, I 'll walk through de graveyard,  
To lay dis body down.  
I 'll lie in de grave and stretch out my arms ;  
Lay dis body down.  
I go to de judgment in de evenin' of de day,  
When I lay dis body down ;  
And my soul and your soul will meet in de day  
When I lay dis body down."

"I 'll lie in de grave and stretch out my arms." Never, it seems to me, since man first lived and suffered, was his infinite longing for peace uttered more plaintively than in that line.

The next is one of the wildest and most striking of the whole series: there is a mystical effect and a passionate striving throughout the whole. The Scriptural struggle between Jacob and the angel, which is only dimly expressed in the words, seems all uttered in the music. I think it impressed my imagination more powerfully than any other of these songs.

## XIX. WRESTLING JACOB.



"O wrestlin' Jacob, Jacob, day 's a-breakin';  
I will not let thee go !  
O wrestlin' Jacob, Jacob, day 's a-breakin';  
He will not let me go !  
O, I hold my brudder wid a tremblin' hand ;  
I would not let him go !  
I hold my sister wid a tremblin' hand ;  
I would not let her go !

"O, Jacob do hang from a tremblin' limb,  
He would not let him go !  
O, Jacob do hang from a tremblin' limb ;  
De Lord will bless my soul.  
O wrestlin' Jacob, Jacob," &c.

Of "occasional hymns," properly so called, I noticed but one, a funeral hymn for an infant, which is sung plaintively over and over, without variety of words.

#### XX. THE BABY GONE HOME.

"De little baby gone home,  
De little baby gone home,  
De little baby gone along,  
For to climb up Jacob's ladder.  
And I wish I 'd been dar,  
I wish I 'd been dar,  
I wish I 'd been dar, my Lord,  
For to climb up Jacob's ladder "

Still simpler is this, which is yet quite sweet and touching.

#### XXI. JESUS WITH US.

"He have been wid us, Jesus,  
He still wid us, Jesus,  
He will be wid us, Jesus,  
Be wid us to the end."

The next seemed to be a favorite about Christmas time, when meditations on "de rollin' year" were frequent among them.

#### XXII. LORD, REMEMBER ME !

"O do Lord, remember me !  
O do, Lord, remember me !  
O, do remember me, until de year roll round !  
Do, Lord, remember me !

"If you want to die like Jesus died,  
Lay in de grave,  
You would fold your arms and close your eyes  
And die wid a free good will.

"For Death is a simple ting,  
And he go from door to door  
And he knock down some, and he cripple up some,  
And he leave some here to pray.

"O do, Lord, remember me !  
O do, Lord, remember me !  
My old fader 's gone till de year roll round ;  
Do, Lord, remember me !"

The next was sung in such an operatic and rollicking way that it was quite hard to fancy it a religious performance, which, however, it was. I heard it but once.

### XXIII. EARLY IN THE MORNING.

"I meet little Rosa early in de mornin',  
O Jerusalem ! early in de mornin' ;  
And I ax her, How you do, my darter?  
O Jerusalem ! early in de mornin'.

"I meet my mudder early in de mornin',  
O Jerusalem ! &c.  
And I ax her, How you do, my mudder?  
O Jerusalem ! &c.

"I meet Budder Robert early in de mornin'  
O Jerusalem ! &c.  
And I ax him, How you do, my sonny?  
O Jerusalem ! &c.

"I meet Tittawisa early in de mornin',  
O Jerusalem ! &c.  
And I ax her, how you do, my darter?  
O Jerusalem !" &c.



"Tittawisa" means "Sister Louisa." In songs of this class the name of every person present successively appears.

Their best marching song, and one which was invaluable to lift their feet along, as they expressed it, was the following. There was a kind of spring and *lilt* to it, quite indescribable by words.

#### XXIV. GO IN THE WILDERNESS.

"Jesus call you. Go in de wilderness,  
Go in de wilderness, go in de wilderness,  
Jesus call you. Go in de wilderness  
To wait upon de Lord.  
Go wait upon do Lord,  
Go wait upon de Lord,  
Go wait upon de Lord, my God,  
He take away de sins of de world.

"Jesus a-waitin'. Go in de wilderness,  
Go, &c.  
All dem chil'en go in de wilderness  
To wait upon de Lord."

The next was one of those which I had heard in boyish days, brought North from Charleston. But the chorus alone was identical ; the words were mainly different, and those here given are quaint enough.

#### XXV. BLOW YOUR TRUMPET, GABRIEL.

"O, blow your trumpet, Gabriel,  
Blow your trumpet louder ;  
And I want dat trumpet to blow me home  
To my new Jerusalem.

"De prettiest ting dat ever I done  
Was to serve de Lord when I was young.  
So blow your trumpet, Gabriel, &c.

"O, Satan is a liar, and he conjure too,  
And if you don't mind, he 'll conjure you.  
So blow your trumpet, Gabriel, &c.

"O, I was lost in de wilderness,  
King Jesus hand me de candle down.  
So blow your trumpet, Gabriel," &c.

The following contains one of those odd transformations of proper names with which their Scriptural citations were often enriched. It rivals their text, "Paul may plant, and may polish wid water," which I have elsewhere quoted, and in which the sainted Apollos would hardly have recognized himself.

#### XXVI. IN THE MORNING.

"In de mornin',  
In de mornin',  
Chil'en? Yes, my Lord !  
Don't you hear de trumpet sound?  
If I had a-died when I was young,  
I never would had de race for run.  
Don't you hear de trumpet sound?

"O Sam and Peter was fishin' in de sea,  
And dey drop de net and follow my Lord.  
Don't you hear de trumpet sound?

"Dere 's a silver spade for to dig my grave  
And a golden chain for to let me down.  
Don't you hear de trumpet sound?  
In de mornin',  
In de mornin',  
Chil'en ? Yes, my Lord !  
Don't you hear de trumpet sound?"

These golden and silver fancies remind one of the King of Spain's daughter in "Mother Goose," and the golden apple, and the silver pear, which are doubtless themselves but the vestiges of some simple early composition like this. The next has a humbler and more domestic style of fancy.

#### XXVII. FARE YE WELL.

"My true believers, fare ye well,  
Fare ye well, fare ye well,  
Fare ye well, by de grace of God,  
For I 'm going home.

"Massa Jesus give me a little broom  
For to sweep my heart clean,  
And I will try, by de grace of God,  
To win my way home."



Among the songs not available for marching, but requiring the concentrated enthusiasm of the camp, was "The Ship of Zion," of which they had three wholly distinct versions, all quite exuberant and tumultuous.

XXVIII. THE SHIP OF ZION.

"Come along, come along,  
And let us go home,  
O, glory, hallelujah !  
Dis de ole ship o' Zion,  
Halleloo ! Halleloo !  
Dis de ole ship o' Zion,  
Hallelujah !

"She has landed many a thousand,  
She can land as many more.  
O, glory, hallelujah ! &c.

"Do you tink she will be able  
For to take us all home?  
O, glory, hallelujah ! &c.

"You can tell 'em I 'm a coming,  
Halleloo ! Halleloo !  
You can tell 'em I 'm a coming  
Hallelujah !  
Come along, come along," & c.

XXIX. THE SHIP OF ZION. (*Second version.*)

"Dis de good ole ship o' Zion,  
Dis de good ole ship o' Zion,  
Dis de good ole ship o' Zion,  
And she 's makin' for de Promise Land.  
She hab angels for de sailors, (*Thrice.*)  
And she 's, &c.  
And how you know dey 's angels? (*Thrice.*)  
And she 's, &c.  
Good lord, shall I be de one? (*Thrice.*)  
And she 's, &c.

"Dat ship is out a-sailin', sailin', sailin',  
And she 's, &c.  
She 's a-sailin' mighty steady, steady, steady,  
And she 's, &c.  
She 'll neither reel nor totter, totter, totter,  
And she 's, &c.  
She 's a-sailin' away cold Jordan, Jordan, Jordan,  
And she 's, &c.  
King Jesus is de captain, captain, captain,  
And she 's making for de Promise Land."

XXX. THE SHIP OF ZION. (*Third Version.*)

"De Gospel ship is sailin',  
Hosann-sann.  
O, Jesus is de captain,  
Hosann-sann.  
De angels are de sailors,  
Hosann-sann.  
O, is your bundle ready?  
Hosann-sann.  
O, have you got your ticket?  
Hosann-sann."

This abbreviated chorus is given with unspeakable unction.

The three just given are modifications of an old camp-meeting melody ; and the same may be true of the three following, although I cannot find them in the Methodist hymnbooks. Each, however, has its characteristic modifications, which make it well worth giving. In the second verse of this next, for instance, "Saviour" evidently has become "soldier."

XXXI. SWEET MUSIC.

"Sweet music in heaven,  
Just beginning for to roll.  
Don't you love God?  
Glory, hallelujah !

"Yes, late I heard my soldier say,  
Come, heavy soul, I am de way.  
Don't you love God?  
Glory, hallelujah !



"I 'll go and tell to sinners round  
What a kind Saviour I have found.  
Don't you love God?  
Glory, hallelujah !

"My grief my burden long has been,  
Because I was not cease from sin.  
Don't you love God ?  
Glory, hallelujah !"

#### XXXII. GOOD NEWS.

"O, good news ! O, good news !  
De angels brought de tidings down,  
Just comin' from de trone.

"As grief from out my soul shall fly,  
Just comin' from de trone;  
I 'll shout salvation when I die,  
Good news, O, good news !  
Just comin' from de trone.

"Lord, I want to go to heaven when I die,  
Good news, O, good news ! &c.

"De white folks call us a noisy crew,  
Good news, O, good news !  
But dis I know, we are happy too,  
Just comin' from de trone."

#### XXXIII. THE HEAVENLY ROAD.

"You may talk of my name as much as you please,  
And carry my name abroad,  
But I really do believe I 'm a child of God  
As I walk in de heavenly road.  
O, won't you go wid me? (*Thrice.*)  
For to keep our garments clean.

"O, Satan is a mighty busy ole man,  
And roll rocks in my way ;  
But Jesus is my bosom friend,  
And roll 'em out of de way.  
O, won't you go wid me? (*Thrice.*)  
For to keep our garments clean.

"Come, my brudder, if you never did pray,  
 I hope you may pray to-night ;  
 For I really believe I 'm a child of God  
 As I walk in de heavenly road.  
 O, won't you," &c.

Some of the songs had played an historic part during the war. For singing the next, for instance, the negroes had been put in jail in Georgetown, S. C., at the outbreak of the Rebellion. "We 'll soon be free," was too dangerous an assertion ; and though the chant was an old one, it was no doubt sung with redoubled emphasis during the new events. "De Lord will call us home," was evidently thought to be a symbolical verse; for, as a little drummer-boy explained to me, showing all his white teeth as he sat in the moonlight by the door of my tent, "Dey tink *de Lord* mean for say *de Yankees*."

#### XXXIV. WE 'LL SOON BE FREE.

"We 'll soon be free,  
 We 'll soon be free,  
 We 'll soon be free,  
 When de Lord will call us home.  
 My brudder, how long,  
 My brudder, how long,  
 My brudder, how long,  
 'Fore we done sufferin' here?  
 It won't be long (*Thrice*.)  
 'Fore de Lord will call us home.  
 We 'll walk de miry road (*Thrice*.)  
 Where pleasure never dies.  
 We 'll walk de golden street (*Thrice*.)  
 Where pleasure never dies.  
 My brudder, how long (*Thrice*.)  
 'Fore we done sufferin' here?  
 We 'll soon be free (*Thrice*.)  
 When Jesus sets me free.  
 We 'll fight for liberty (*Thrice*.)  
 When de Lord will call us home."

The suspicion in this case was unfounded, but they had another song to which the Rebellion had actually given rise. This was composed by nobody knew whom, -though it was the most recent, doubtless, of all these "spirituals," -and had been sung in secret to avoid detection. It is certainly plaintive enough. The peck of corn and pint of salt were slavery's rations.

#### XXXV. MANY THOUSAND GO.



"No more peck o' corn for me,  
No more, no more,-  
No more peck o' corn for me,  
Many thousand go.

"No more driver's lash for me, (*Twice.*)  
No more, &c.

"No more pint o' salt for me, (*Twice.*)  
No more, &c.

"No more hundred lash for me, (*Twice.*)  
No more, &c.

"No more mistress' call for me,  
No more, No more,-  
No more mistress' call for me,  
Many thousand go."

Even of this last composition, however, we have only the approximate date, and know nothing of the mode of composition. Allan Ramsay says of the Scotch songs, that, no matter who made them, they were soon attributed to the minister of the parish whence they sprang. And I always wondered, about these, whether they had always a conscious and definite origin in some leading mind, or whether they grew by gradual accretion in an almost unconscious way. On this point I could get no information, though I asked many questions, until at last, one day when I was being rowed across from Beaufort to Ladies' Island, I found myself, with delight, on the actual trail of a song. One of the oarsmen, a brisk young fellow, not a soldier, on being asked for his theory of the matter, dropped out a coy confession. "Some good sperituals," he said, "are start jess out o' curiosity. I been a-raise a sing, myself, once."

My dream was fulfilled, and I had traced out, not the poem alone. but the poet. I implored him to proceed.

"Once we boys." he said, "went for tote some rice, and de nigger-driver, he keep a-callin' on us ; and I say, 'O, de ole nigger-driver!' Den anudder said, 'Fust ting my mammy tole me was, notin' so bad as nigger-driver.' Den I made a sing, just puttin' a word, and den anudder word."

Then he began singing and the men, after listening a moment, joined in at the chorus as if it were an old acquaintance, though they evidently had never heard it before. I saw how easily a new "sing" took root among them.

#### XXXVI. THE DRIVER.

"O, de ole nigger-driver !  
 O, gwine away !  
 Fust ting my mammy tell me,  
 O, gwine away !  
 Tell me 'bout de nigger-driver,  
 O, gwine away !  
 Nigger-driver second devil,  
 O, gwine away !  
 Best ting for do he driver,  
 O, gwine away !  
 Knock he down and spoil he labor,  
 O, gwine away ! "

It will be observed that, although this song is quite secular in its character, its author yet called it a "spiritual." I heard but two songs among them, at any time, to which they would not, perhaps, have given this generic name. One of these consisted simply in the endless repetition-after the manner of certain college songs-of the mysterious line,

"Rain fall and wet Becky Martin."

But who Becky Martin was, and why she should or should not be wet, and whether the dryness was a reward or a penalty, none could say. I got the impression that, in either case, the event was posthumous and that there was some tradition of grass not growing over the grave of a sinner ; but even this was vague, and all else vaguer.

The other song I heard but once, on a morning when a squad of men came in from picket duty, and chanted it in the most rousing way. It had been a stormy and comfortless night, and the picket station was very exposed. It still rained in the morning when I strolled to the edge of the camp, looking out for the men, and wondering how they had stood it. Presently they came striding along the road, at a great pace, with their shining rubber blankets worn as cloaks around them, the rain streaming from these and from their equally shining faces, which were almost all upon the broad grin, as they pealed out this remarkable ditty:-

#### HANGMAN JOHNNY.

"O, dey call me Hangman Johnny !  
 O, ho ! O, ho !  
 But I never hang nobody,  
 O, hang, boys, hang !

"O, dey call me Hangman Johnny !  
 O, ho ! O, ho !  
 But we 'll all hang togedder,  
 O, hang, boys, hang ! "



My presence apparently checked the performance of another verse, beginning, "De buckra 'list for money," apparently in reference to the controversy about the pay-question, then just beginning, and to the more mercenary aims they attributed to the white soldiers. But "Hangman Johnny" remained always a myth as inscrutable as "Becky Martin."

As they learned all their songs by ear, they often strayed into wholly new versions, which sometimes became popular, and entirely banished the others. This was amusingly the case, for instance, with one phrase in the popular camp-song of "Marching Along," which was entirely new to them until our quartermaster taught it to them, at my request. The words, "Gird on the armor," were to them a stumbling-block, and no wonder, until some ingenious ear substituted, "Guide on de army," which was at once accepted, and became universal.

"We 'll guide on de army, and be marching along,"

is now the established version on the Sea Islands.

These quaint religious songs were to the men more than a source of relaxation ; they were a stimulus to courage and a tie to heaven. I never overheard in camp a profane or vulgar song. With the trifling exceptions given, all had a religious motive, while the most secular melody could not have been more exciting. A few youths from Savannah, who were comparatively men of the world, had learned some of the "Ethiopian Minstrel" ditties, imported from the North. These took no hold upon the mass ; and, on the other hand, they sang reluctantly, even on Sunday, the long and short metres of the hymnbooks, always gladly yielding to the more potent excitement of their own "spirituals." By these they could sing themselves, as had their fathers before them, out of the contemplation of their own low estate, into the sublime scenery of the Apocalypse. I remember that this minor-keyed pathos used to seem to me almost too sad to dwell upon, while slavery seemed destined to last for generations ; but now that their patience has had its perfect work, history cannot afford to lose this portion of its record. There is no parallel instance of an oppressed race thus sustained by the religious sentiment alone. These songs are but the vocal expression of the simplicity of their faith and the sublimity of their long resignation.

*W. Higginson*

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