

“ON THE BANKS”—1873

BY OLIVER KIP WESTLING

WHILE rummaging through some old music books belonging to the Library, the author of the following article came across a copy of the second edition of *Carmina Collegensia*, in which he noticed thirteen Rutgers songs, including “On the Banks of the Old Raritan.” Realizing that this was probably the earliest known printing of the song, he set out in search of more facts regarding its composition. Mr. Westling, an ardent searcher into the history of the University, is a graduate of the class of 1933. He has been on the staff of the University Library since 1935 and is a former contributor to the Journal.

IN 1869, Oliver Ditson and Company of Boston published what was termed the first complete collection of American college songs, *Carmina Collegensia*. Indirectly, this collection was responsible not only for the composition of “On the Banks,” but also of many other early Rutgers songs. Although not a single Rutgers song appears in this first edition, we know that the men of Rutgers had songs at this time and sang them at the banquets following the victories on the football field over Princeton in 1869 and Columbia in 1870 and 1872.

Disappointed by the fact that Rutgers songs had been omitted from this supposedly complete collection, in November, 1873, a group of loyal Rutgers men formed a committee to make Rutgers better known musically.¹ This committee consisted of Chairman Alexander Johnston '70, author of the first Rutgers football song, Edwin E. Colburn '76, a member of the first Rutgers Glee Club, Howard N. Fuller '74, who was to become famous as the author of “On the Banks,” John W. Searing '74, who along with Fuller was a Rutgers representative at the initial inter-collegiate football conference in 1873, John Lefferts '76, who later transferred to Columbia Law School and became a prominent Brooklyn attorney and bank director, and John Oppie '74, the college organist, who later became a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church and a writer for the *Christian Intelligencer*.

In the autumn of 1873, ten sophomores evidently formed a glee club, of which Edwin E. Colburn and John Lefferts were members. Associated with them were William R. Taylor, John D. Prince,

¹ *The Targum*, November 1873, p. 7.

Cortland C. Van Deusen, William H. Osborne, Hayden C. Kelly, and Edward Lyall. It was this group of young men, whom the *Targum* called the "Glee Club of '76," who journeyed to Flatbush, Long Island, on December 11, 1873, to give a "trial exhibition." In reporting this concert, the *Kings County Rural Gazette* for December 13, 1873, commented, "The young men composing this club are entitled to great credit for . . . the excellent manner in which they rendered their college songs, among which were, 'On the Banks of the Old Raritan,' 'Stars of the Summer Night,' 'As Fresh We Came to Rutgers,' 'The Bull Frog,' 'Farewell, Good Night,' and others." This is the first printed reference of which we have record to "On the Banks," which was evidently one of the first fruits of the committee on Rutgers songs.

In his story of the composition of "On the Banks,"² Mr. Fuller related that the song was written between three and five o'clock one afternoon in the early winter of 1873 so that some copies could be made and rehearsal held before the club started for Metuchen. The first public appearance of the *whole* Glee Club of '76 is known to have been at Metuchen on Tuesday, March 17, 1874. Undoubtedly, Fuller's memory deceived him into thinking that it was for this concert that he composed "On the Banks." Actually he had composed it for the Flatbush performance which was held the preceding autumn.

The words were set to the music of a popular song of that time, "On the Banks of the Old Dundee," which to Mr. Fuller seemed to have "the right melody and the stirring and martial swing for an effective college song."³ Its popularity three quarters of a century later proves his judgement to have been correct.

In 1876, a second edition of *Carmina Collegensia* appeared on the market and contained thirteen Rutgers songs. It is in this second edition that we find the oldest known copy of "On the Banks." Apparently no separate copy of an earlier date has survived.

² H. N. Fuller, "Story of 'On the Banks,'" *Rutgers Alumni Monthly*, I (December, 1921).

³ *Ibid.*

NOTES FROM THE LIBRARY

MRS. CLEMENS APOLOGIZES FOR HER HUSBAND

MARK TWAIN's very individual deportment, compounded of unconventionality and absentmindedness, was a frequent source of distress to his devoted but much-tried wife, as Albert Bigelow Paine has made sufficiently evident in his voluminous biography of the great humorist. Among the manuscripts in the Stanton Memorial Collection at New Jersey College for Women is the following letter from Mrs. Clemens to Theodore Stanton, which gives further proof that "Livy's" rigorous sense of social correctness sometimes suffered violence at the hands of her unpredictable husband.

Riverdale on the Hudson

Oct. 13th 1901

Dear Mr Stanton:

I was more shocked than I can tell you when I came back from town yesterday and found that you had been here from eleven o'clock until two or thereabouts and had had no luncheon. We seem like that kind of people but really we are not.

Mr Clemens exclaimed at dinner "There! I asked Mr Stanton to come out here and said that although we had no cook we would give him *something* to eat in case he staid until luncheon or until tea time."

I said "and yet you let him go back without anything to eat?" His excuse was that he never thought of it.

The facts in the case are that my daughters and I were all away and Mr Clemens never takes luncheon, and he never can believe that people want anything to eat between nine in the morning & seven at night. I have lived with him more than thirty years. I always take luncheon at one & tea at four to five, but he never gets used to it. When we are traveling together & I begin to feel about one o'clock the demands of hunger he almost invariably says "You want to eat again!"

He also offers in excuse that he was so greatly interested in what you & he were talking that he could not be expected to think of anything else.

Will you forgive us?

Believe me

Sincerely yours

Olivia L. Clemens

O.S.C.

"WORDS BY LONGFELLOW"

"WORDS BY LONGFELLOW" is the proudly displayed (and misspelled) announcement on the cover of a piece of nineteenth-century sheet music, one of a group of songs set to Longfellow's poetry which belong in the Rutgers Library collection of Americana—or, perhaps, *curiosa Americana*. Eight pieces in all, the music was published between 1847 and 1875 and bears on its title pages the names of some popular composers of the period—Ethelbert Nevin, Michael William Balfe, William R. Demp-

ster, J. Edgar Gould, Hodges, and Lemmens. These musicians, ranging from writers of opera to hymnodists, found inspiration in such poems of Longfellow as "The Rainy Day," "Resignation," "The Day is Done," and "Stars of the Summer Night" for vocal and instrumental music of the sentimental, inspirational type. On the cover of the sheet music for "Resignation" in the elaborately ornate typescript of the time appear the opening lines of the poem:

There is no flock, however watched
and tended,
But one dead lamb is there . . .

beneath which in flourishes and flourishes: "a song, with or without the Aeolian piano, words written by H. W. Longfellow." This must have sold well in those days, however much we may smile with twentieth-century sophistication at the sentiments.

The fact that Longfellow, perhaps more than most of his contemporaries including Poe, inspired popular composers to give his words musical settings is not surprising.¹ The note of serious feeling, touched gently with religious or philosophic elevation, suited perfectly the mood of a period described by a recent writer as "the feminine fifties." "The Skeleton in Armor" and especially "Hiawatha" received various musical renderings, as did "The Wreck of the Hesperus," though Arthur Foote, who did all three, complained that the monotony

of the versification in certain places was an impediment to the composer.

Nevertheless, the composers of these songs succeeded on the whole admirably in adapting music to the poems. William R. Dempster, a Scotsman and composer of music for Tennyson, adapted "The Rainy Day" of Longfellow with its mood of subdued resignation by the appropriate use of a minor key—A minor. By a clever shift to a major key in the closing phrase, he caught the sense of completeness and repose in the final lines of the poem: "Into each life some rain must fall/ Some days must be dark and dreary." Ethelbert Nevin's musical setting of Longfellow's "Stars of the Summer Night" is melodious and even beautiful in its minor key. It has a lyrical sweetness characteristic of Nevin and seems to enhance the mood of peaceful calm in the closing words: "she sleeps, my lady sleeps . . . sleeps."

Michael William Balfe, a noted Irish composer known best for his "The Bohemian Girl," is represented twice in the Longfellow collection. He adapted "The Day is Done" and "Good Night, Good Night Beloved." In the first song his melodic pattern moves easily with the moods of the verse which, one recalls, pleads for

¹ W. Hastings, "Longfellow's Influence on Musical Composition," *Etude*, LV, no. 7 (July, 1937), p. 433, states: "By actual count more of Longfellow's works than those of any other American author have been used musically; and it is fitting . . . because he was himself greatly interested in music."

“some simple and heartfelt lay”—“not from the grand old masters, not from the bards sublime” (here there is a rising passage, a tingle of the heroic) and concludes with a sigh, “Tonight I long for rest” (the music has an octave-long dying fall in the final passage). Balfe’s musical version of “Good Night, Good Night Beloved” is equally successful in a livelier tempo, 6/8 time, *allegretto moderato*. The work begins *fortissimo* and moves along with considerable variety to the end, where a tremulo effect is followed by five strong chords in a speeded tempo. The piece suggests Balfe’s more famous “I Dream’t I Dwelt in Marble Halls” in its color and variety of tempo.

Other songs in the group aren’t quite so successful. The setting to “Resignation” by an American hymn writer, J. Edgar Gould, seems a little too fluent for the seriousness of the subject. Written “with tender expression” in place of a regular tempo indication, the piece is easy-flowing and tuneful, but gives too much the effect of a revival hymn. The last two pieces include a setting for the poet’s over-pretentious treatment of a religious theme, “The Legend of the Crossbill”

—music by Le Chevalier Lemmens; and a lugubrious trio by Faustina Hodges, an American organist, for the German poet Klopstock’s “The Holy Dead,” translated by Longfellow. The music for the former is conventional and undistinguished, as is the poem; the latter, more complex, has a softness of volume and a weird, mysterious effect suggestive of morbidity and the grave. Written for three voices with piano accompaniment, the movement is slow and repetitive, and the *arpeggios* in the accompaniment express the religious or hymnal quality of the poem in shimmering chords.

R. E. AMACHER

R. P. FALK

VIRGINIA S. BURNETT

THE Library suffered a grievous loss in the death on August 22 of Virginia S. Burnett, Curator of Special Collections. Many of the Friends of the Library will remember her with affection and gratitude for the aid that she rendered them in their research.

She was an authority on early newspapers and almanacs, and was a contributor to the *Journal*.