William Billings's 'Anthem for Easter': The Persistence of an Early American 'Hit'

KARL KROEGER

TODAY, AT SOME TIME during the normal Sunday-morning church service, it is customary for the choir to perform an anthem, that is, an extended choral work, usually in a single movement, set to a sacred or devotional text. This type of piece serves a number of functions in today's liturgical ritual, from the didactic to the aesthetic. This was not the normal situation, by any means, in most American churches during much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. During that period, the performance of an anthem in church was much more the exception than the rule.[1] Considered to be music for special occasions, the anthem was more likely to be performed at quasi-secular events, such as sacred music concerts and singing-school exhibitions, than in public worship services. This is not to say that anthems were never performed in church. Different denominations used music in different ways, and even churches of the same persuasion varied in musical practices in the same locality. However, from what we can gather from reports of eighteenth-century religious practice in America, there was no set place for an extended choral work in the public worship services of most denominations.[2] Nevertheless,

1. Ralph T. Daniel, *The Anthem in New England Before 1800* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), pp. 37–38.

2. Daniel, *Anthem in New England*, p. 38, lists the order of service at the New North Meeting House in Boston about 1792. Prior to the beginning of the service, there is a note saying, 'The Singers commence with a short piece, without any Psalm being read,' which

KARL KROEGER is associate professor and music librarian at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and editor of volumes 1 and 3 of *The Complete Works of William Billings*.

anthems are found in most American sacred music collections of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and during the era several publications were issued that were devoted almost exclusively to the genre.[3]

To the American composer of sacred music of the time, trained in the singing school and limited in opportunities for musical growth, the anthem presented formidable problems. Its large-scale form and unmetered text denied him the structural props found in strophic, metered verse. Also, the text of the anthem usually contained dramatic elements, the appropriate setting of which strained his limited technical means and musical experience. Most American composers of the period seem to have approached the anthem with caution and seldom wrote in the genre, channeling the great bulk of their compositional efforts into the less problematical and more utilitarian psalm- and fuging-tune. Such prolific composers as Samuel Holyoke, Jacob Kimball, Daniel Read, Timothy Swan, and Abraham Wood wrote few anthems, and these works are not among their stronger compositions.

Excluding the Moravians, whose vigorous musical culture stemmed from a quite different tradition but whose influence on the wider musical life of America during the eighteenth century was small, the one American composer of the era who extensively cultivated the anthem was William Billings. Never one to shrink from a challenge, Billings attacked the anthem with characteristic gusto. Approximately one-sixth of his catalogue of over 300 works

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Daniel interprets as possibly referring to an anthem. Nicholas Temperley, in *Music of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 165–67, discusses the use of anthems among English country congregations and the musical situation among the Methodists (pp. 209–13). Temperley notes that in country congregations, 'Sometimes an anthem was sung during the celebration of communion. . . . Much more common, however, is the anthem for special occasion.' Later he notes that 'on the whole Evangelicals discouraged more elaborate forms of music, such as anthems, if they formed part of public worship.' The same situations are likely to have prevailed in American churches of the day.

3. For example, Josiah Flagg's *Sixteen Anthems* (Boston, 1766), Daniel Bayley's *The New Universal Harmony* (Newburyport, 1773), *The Worcester Collection of Sacred Harmony, Part Third* (Worcester, 1786), and Oliver Holden's *The Union Harmony*, vol. 2 (Boston, 1793) are tunebooks largely devoted to anthems.

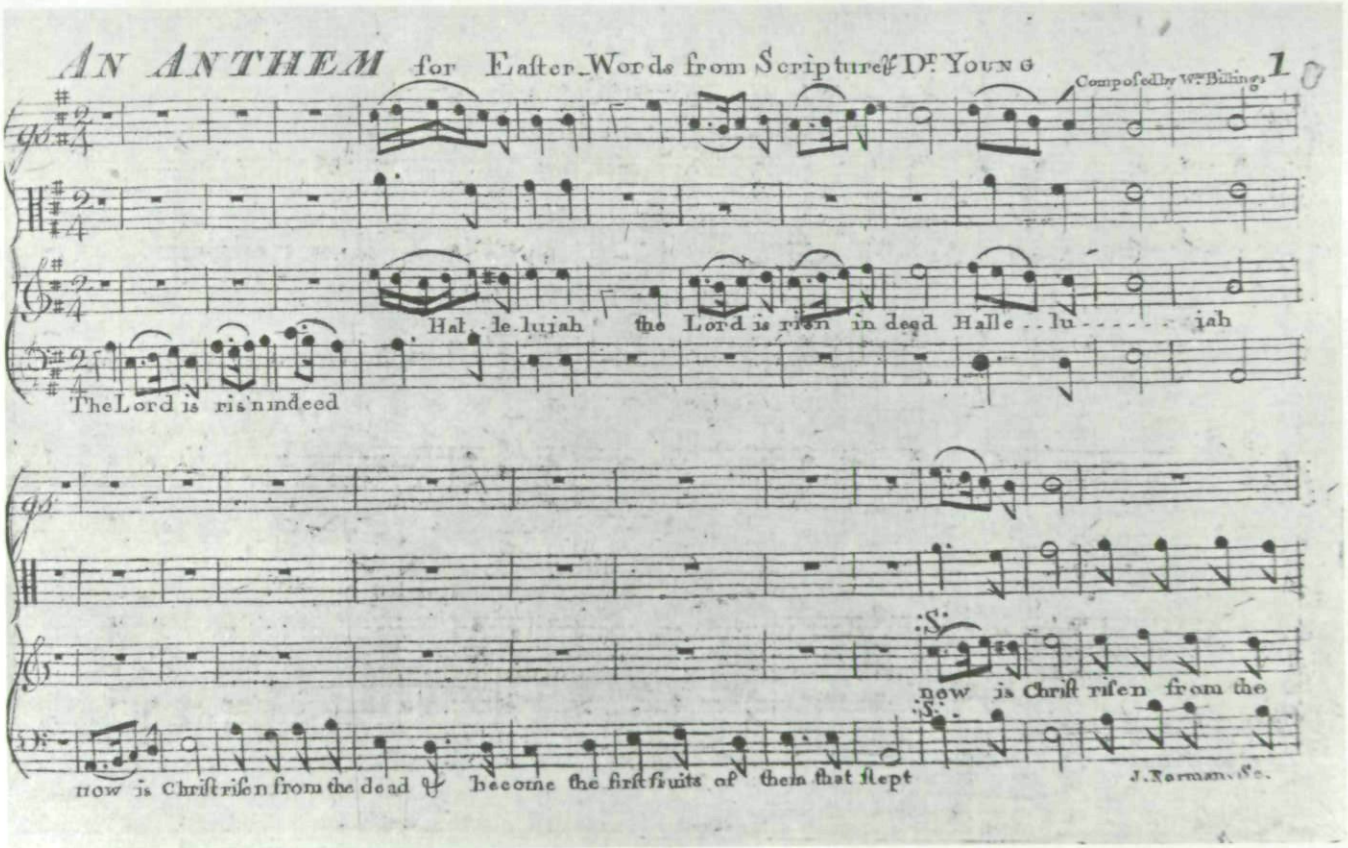

Fig. 1. *Billings's original issue of 'Anthem for Easter' ([Boston] 1787). American Antiquarian Society.*

are anthems—a total of forty-nine compositions.[4] In terms of performance time, however, this total is likely to approach 50 percent or more, for an average anthem might take five or more minutes to perform, while even an extended psalm- or fuging-tune could usually be sung in less than a minute. Of the six tunebooks that Billings published during his career, only one did not include anthems—*Music in Miniature* (Boston, 1779), issued as a tune supplement to a psalter or hymnal for congregational singing. Anthems are found in varying numbers in all of his other tunebooks, with his final one, *The Continental Harmony* (Boston, 1794), having seventeen. In addition, Billings published six anthems as separate issues, and at least one remained in manuscript unpublished.[5]

Of the nearly 120 anthems written by American composers of the singing-school tradition and published by 1800, one stands out as uniquely popular: Billings's *Anthem for Easter*—'The Lord is Ris'n Indeed.' At a time when few anthems received a second printing, this work was reprinted more often than any other Anglo-American anthem of the era.[6] By 1800, it had appeared in print at least fifteen times, and its popularity continued undiminished for at least another decade. Forty-six printings of the work were made by 1810.[7]

As the forces of a reform movement in American psalmody, which had been gathering since the early 1790s, bore down on the eighteenth-century American repertory, forcing its replacement by often inferior tunes from European sources, Billings's *Anthem for Easter* followed the path of other American pieces to the rural

4. Daniel, *Anthem in New England*, pp. 104–5, lists forty-seven anthems by Billings. He does not include DAVID'S LAMENTATION from *The Singing Master's Assistant*, perhaps because it is so short. He, of course, did not know about 'Praise the Lord, O My Soul,' recently discovered in a manuscript at the New York Public Library.

5. Independently published anthems by Billings are: PEACE (ca. 1783), 'The Lord is Ris'n Indeed' (1787), 'O Clap Your Hands' (ca. 1786–90), 'Except the Lord Build the House' (ca. 1786–90), UNIVERSAL PRAISE (1793), and the revised version of 'The Lord is Ris'n Indeed' (1795).

6. Richard Crawford, *The Core Repertory of Early American Psalmody* (Madison: A-R Editions, 1984), pp. lxxvii–lxxviii, lists the 101 works most often printed in American tunebooks between 1698 and 1811. 'Anthem for Easter' is the only anthem included among the pieces.

7. Crawford, *Core Repertory*, p. lxxviii.

South and frontier West, where it remained a popular item in tunebooks into the twentieth century. Indeed, it seems probable that there has never been a time since its first publication in 1787 when the *Anthem for Easter* was completely out of print and unavailable. Such a record of longevity and popularity is unequaled by any anthem of the era and is surpassed by only a few hymn tunes.[8] It can truly be characterized as an early American 'hit,' in the broadest popular meaning of the term.

When a popular work passes into the public domain, often, as generations pass, it gains accretions, small changes, and thematic developments. The people have a way of adapting old material to present needs that is both resourceful and indomitable. A good example of this process at work is seen in the hymn. In many cases, almost as soon as the words become known, they begin to change. As theological perspectives develop, new stanzas are often added and old ones seldom sung are dropped. In music, too, the mutative process works to alter melody, harmony, and rhythm, as the people find what best suits their needs and capacities as performers. It is a process that not only renews the old but also stimulates the new. As the most popular anthem in America during its day, Billings's *Anthem for Easter* felt these forces of change as the years passed and did not escape unaltered. It is worth taking a closer look at the structure, sources, history, and traditions surrounding a work of such enduring popularity and to observe how the mutative process adapted it to its changing roles in the various segments of American society.

Billings first published the anthem as a separate piece and advertised it for sale in the *Massachusetts Centinel* of April 4, 1787. Although it was published independently, surviving copies are usually found bound with Billings's tunebook, *The Suffolk Harmony* (Boston, 1786), the stiff board covers of which protected the paper and preserved it for later generations. A story related to its compo-

8. For example, OLD HUNDRED, Oliver Holden's CORONATION, ADESTE FIDELES, Aaron Williams's ST. THOMAS, and William Knapp's ALL SAINTS are popular tunes of the eighteenth century that remain in the active hymn-tune repertory today.

sition was passed on by Alexander Wheelock Thayer, the future biographer of Beethoven: 'The story goes, that [Billings] composed his Easter Anthem one Evening after his return from a [singing school]—lying flat on the hearth, and writing by the light of the coals, raked open for the purpose; however, that may be, it is even now [in 1847], to an ear not over nice, a spirit stirring composition.'[9]

This story may be apocryphal, but the anthem does show traits suggesting that it was composed spontaneously or at least that it had not been worked over extensively. It falls into five sections, each clearly delineated by a measure of rest. The music shows little evidence of great intellectual effort in the compositional process: musical ideas are presented but not developed; there is little independent polyphony and none of the contrapuntal devices often found in eighteenth-century anthems. The chief musical procedure is antiphony, the answering of one voice or group of voices by a contrasting or larger group. The harmony is simple, and there are no changes of key. It is, indeed, a composition that a talented and experienced composer, which Billings was in 1787, could have written at one sitting (or lying), particularly if he had done some planning beforehand.

If the music and its structure seem simple and spontaneous, the text is not, suggesting that Billings had thought about and prepared for composing the anthem for some time. Richard Crawford notes, 'Rather than offering a coherent narrative, Billings's *Anthem for Easter* delivers a series of assertions and questions about Jesus's resurrection, each with its own response. . . . Typically, the assertions are announced by one or two voices, while the full chorus delivers the responses.'[10]

The text is an interesting composite from Biblical and literary sources, undoubtedly assembled by Billings himself. Billings maintained a free attitude toward anthem texts. He often altered the

9. Alexander Wheelock Thayer, 'Mr. Thayer's Catalogue Continued,' *The World of Music*, vol. 4, no. 11 (May 15, 1847), p. 43, quoted in David P. McKay and Richard Crawford, *William Billings of Boston* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 150.

10. Crawford, *Core Repertory*, p. xxiv.

Biblical words, substituting stronger images or phrases more suitable for singing, and combined them with hymn stanzas by Isaac Watts or of his own. However, in *Anthem for Easter* he ranged far outside his usual orbit for most of the words. The first line of the anthem's text comes from Luke 24:34: 'Saying, the Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.' Billings chose only those words that suited his need: 'The Lord is risen indeed.' The next portion of text—'Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept'—is taken from 1 Cor. 15:20.

To this point there is nothing unusual about Billings's selection or use of the texts. It was common for a composer to compile his own anthem texts from several Biblical books, and the Gospel of Luke and the Epistles of Paul were popular sources. But now something singular happens: the remaining text is not drawn from the Bible or from any other standard liturgical or hymnological source but from *The Complaint; or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality*, a lengthy, philosophical poem by Edward Young, an eighteenth-century English theologian and poet.[11] *Night Thoughts*, as it was popularly known, is a long poem in blank verse, divided into nine sections or 'Nights,' as the poet called them. Billings selected the final three passages of his text from the fourth 'Night,' subtitled 'The Christian Triumph.'[12] Nor were consecutive lines chosen, for Billings used only those that suited his aesthetic purpose. The next words in the anthem occur about one quarter of the way through the section,

> And did he rise?
> Hear, O ye nations! hear it, O ye dead!
> He rose! he rose! he burst the bars of death.

Billings then skipped seventeen lines in Young's poem, resuming with

11. 'The Complaint' was first published in nine separate sections, or 'Nights,' between 1742 and 1745. It was subsequently issued in over a dozen editions by various British publishers before 1787. The first of many American editions was printed by Bell in Philadelphia in 1777. It remained popular well into the nineteenth century.

12. The lines from 'Night Thoughts' that Billings used are in Book 4, lines 271–73, 288–93, and 298–300.

Then, then I rose; then first humanity
Triumphant past the crystal ports of light,
. . . and seiz'd eternal youth.

The words for Billings's final passage appear four lines later,

Man, all immortal! hail;
Hail, heav'n, all-lavish of strange gifts to man!
Thine all the glory; man's the boundless bliss.

Billings's intention seems clearly to have been more than just to write an anthem to be sung on Easter (about which more in a moment). He need not have chosen his text with such great care and precision if he merely wished to be utilitarian. His purpose appears to have been both didactic and philosophical. It was not enough for him merely to report Christ's resurrection and praise God for it; he wished to apply that experience directly to the human condition. He wished to reveal it not as a promise of things to come but as a promise fulfilled. Concurrent with Christ's triumph is man's triumph. Thus, while the music gives every indication of spontaneity, Billings's choice and treatment of the text shows the strong intellectual commitment of careful preparation.

Another curious facet of the work is its designated purpose: an anthem for performance on Easter. Billings was raised in a Congregational Church and was a pew holder at the well-known Hollis Street Church in Boston. As an outgrowth of the Calvinist-Puritan tradition, Congregational churches did not celebrate Christmas, Easter, or the other holy days of the traditional church year.[13] Some other denominations, such as the Church of England, did observe Easter, of course, but it seems unlikely that Billings composed the anthem with performance in these specific churches in mind. It may well be that the anthem, although nominally designed for use on Easter, was not really intended for use at this time at all. The

13. Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and other nonritualistic churches of Puritan descent did not observe Easter, Christmas, or other church holidays during the eighteenth century. It was not until the time of the Civil War that the observance of Easter became widespread. See George William Douglas, *The American Book of Days* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1948), p. 201.

philosophical focus of the text made its application more general and universal than just to that one day.[14] Billings chose lines from Young's poem that not only stress man's triumph through Christ's resurrection, but also present man as the active agent: informed of the Resurrection, man rises, passes 'the crystal ports of light,' seizes 'eternal youth,' and attains 'boundless bliss.' The Resurrection is thus viewed as the catalyst for the attainment of the highest human aspirations. This emphasis on human achievement stands in contrast to the more traditional Puritan view of man as an irredeemable sinner and suggests that Billings was anything but orthodox in his beliefs.[15]

It was Billings's misfortune (and our good fortune) to have published his *Anthem for Easter* prior to the enactment of a federal copyright statute.[16] Without legal protection, his work was fair game for other compilers and printers, and they were not long in latching onto the anthem, as they had his popular psalm- and fuging-tunes written earlier. The Boston printer John Norman, who engraved the first edition, was the first to reprint the work in

14. For example, William Bentley, pastor of the East Church in Salem, Massachusetts, noted in his diary the performance of 'Anthem for Easter' on Thanksgiving Day, November 30, 1809. (See Crawford, *Core Repertory*, p. xxv.)

15. While we have no conclusive evidence that Billings was anything other than a devout member of the Congregational Church, several things suggest that he might have come under the influence of Universalism. In *The Suffolk Harmony* (Boston, 1786), Billings set eighteen hymns by James Relly, the English founder of Universalism, in such a way as to strongly suggest that he intended to supply music for singing the whole of Relly's collection, *Christian Hymns* (London, 1757; repr. Burlington, N.J., 1776). The hymns sing of free grace, the certainty of salvation, and man's triumph through Christ's resurrection. The text of 'Anthem for Easter' also has strong Universalist overtones.

16. Congress passed the first federal copyright law in 1790. Prior to this, what copyright protection existed was limited to the individual states. Billings had tried since 1772 to gain a copyright in Massachusetts for his music, but it was not until 1783 that the Massachusetts legislature enacted a copyright statute. Since it was limited to Massachusetts, printers in other states could freely copy Massachusetts publications. Similarly, Massachusetts printers could copy imprints from other states and could circumvent the Massachusetts law simply by proving that their print came from an out-of-state publication. Thus, in the preface of his *Worcester Collection of Sacred Harmony* (Worcester, 1786), Isaiah Thomas made a point of crediting Billings's music published in that tunebook to *The Chorister's Companion*, published in Connecticut. *The Suffolk Harmony* (Boston, 1786) was the first of Billings's tunebooks to enjoy state protection; *The Continental Harmony* (Boston, 1794) was the first to have federal protection. See McKay and Crawford, appendix 1, *William Billings*, pp. 221–30, for a discussion of Billings and copyright.

The Federal Harmony (Boston [ca.1791]).[17] After that the floodtide was on, and each year saw more and more reprints added to the growing number: by 1795, there were six; by 1800, fourteen; by 1805, twenth-three; by 1810, forty-five. Billings appears to have gained little from the anthem's popularity. The work was in the public domain, and publishers and compilers did not even have to inform the composer, much less pay him, when they reprinted it.

Perhaps it was Billings's hope to stem the tide of reprints that led him in 1795 to issue a revised version of the anthem with an entirely new section inserted in the middle. He certainly wished to benefit from the anthem's popularity. But the sale apparently did not go well, for on April 6, 1797, Billings placed the following remarkable advertisement in Boston's *Independent Chronicle*:

> Thomas and Holden, have published this piece in their Collections, without the Addition, and I am credibly informed, that their Collections did not sell the worse for it, and as I own the Vineyard and have done *all* the labor in it myself—I beg the Community to grease the Rollers of the Press, so as to enable me to eat *some* of the Fruit thereof, *viz.* Be so kind as to buy a large number of ANTHEMS, and give me 1s6 each, and in so doing, you will much oblige the real owner.
>
> W. BILLINGS.[18]

That the revised anthem did not sell well can be surmised both from the irony of Billings's advertisement and from the fact that no copy of Billings's independent issue appears to have survived. Fortunately, it was not completely lost, however, for the pirates fell upon it as they did the 1787 version. Less than a month after Billings's death in 1800, Henry Ranlet, a printer in Exeter, New Hampshire, included the revised version in the fifth edition of his

17. John Norman engraved the music for all of the publications Billings issued between 1781 and 1790. Because the two men had long-established business dealings, it may well be that Norman secured Billings's permission to publish 'Anthem for Easter' in *The Federal Harmony*. However, it seems likely that Norman failed to secure copyright for his printing, which may have opened up the work to piracy. Billings's severe financial situation during the 1790s may have led him to sell the copyright to other compilers. In any case, his financial plight probably prevented Billings from taking any legal action against the pirate printers. See McKay and Crawford, *William Billings*, p. 141n, for information about Norman.

18. Quoted in Hans Nathan, *William Billings: Data and Documents* (Detroit: Information Coordinators, 1976), p. 45.

popular *Village Harmony*.[19] Either Billings had neglected to secure copyright, or the printer, feeling that the family would not notice the piracy, went ahead with his printing anyway.

Billings's revision consists of an added section inserted between the third and fourth sections of the 1787 version, following the words 'He burst the bars of death and triumph'd o'er the grave.' The added text also comes from Young's *Night Thoughts*, and is the two and one-half lines immediately preceding the words used in the following section (now section five):

> Shout earth and heaven!
> This sum of good to man: whose nature, then,
> Took wing, and mounted with him from the tomb.

Why did Billings make this addition? The financial reason may have been a compelling factor, but it almost certainly was not the only one. Billings's primary considerations may have been artistic, as an investigation of the effect of the addition clearly confirms. There can be little doubt that the progression of events from Christ's resurrection in section three to man's resurrection in section four of the 1787 version is abrupt. The additional lines of text provide a smoother transition of thought. Additionally, the new text—particularly the line 'Whose nature, then, took wing'—provided Billings with the opportunity to add a new and contrasting texture to the anthem, which the composer utilized fully. After a short passage in block chords (which briefly emphasizes a new key), the new section begins an extensive imitative passage with musical word-painting, particularly on the word 'wing.'

Musically and textually, the new section may have added significantly to the artistry of the anthem, but therein lay its problem. A primary virtue of the *Anthem for Easter*, perhaps the main reason for its continuing popularity, was its relative simplicity. It presented few problems for the singers to overcome that were not encountered in the psalm- and fuging-tune repertory of the day. Because

19. *The Village Harmony*, first published in 1795, soon became the most popular eclectic tunebook of its day, reaching its seventeenth edition in 1821. The original version of 'Anthem for Easter' first appeared in the second edition (Exeter, 1796).

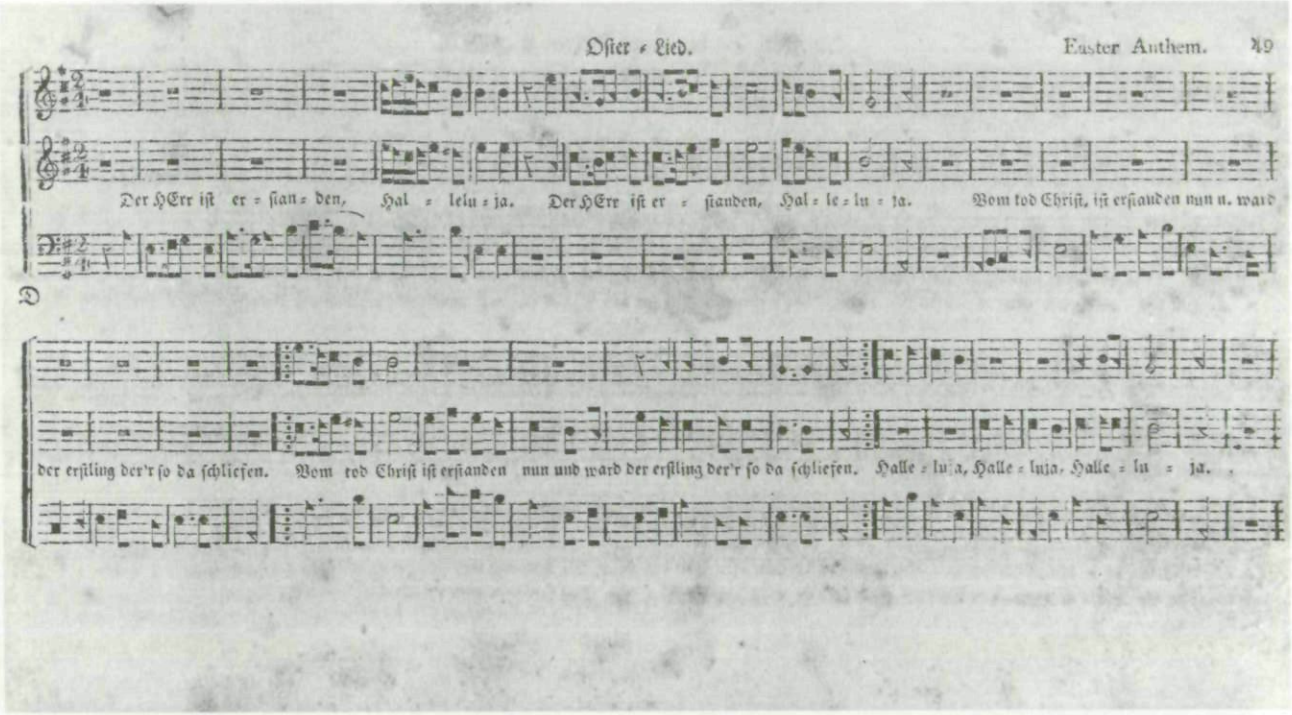

Fig. 2. *German-language version of 'Anthem for Easter' (Harrisburg, Pa., 1815). American Antiquarian Society.*

a satisfying result could be obtained with only a modest effort, singers probably enjoyed singing the *Anthem for Easter* more than they did a better-made but technically more difficult anthem. The new section presented challenges that many church choirs must have been ill-equipped to handle. Thus, after only one appearance in the fifth edition of *The Village Harmony* (Exeter, N.H., 1800), the revised version was replaced by the original version. The sixth through eleventh editions of *The Village Harmony* (1803–13) continued to carry the original version, after which the anthem was dropped completely from the repertory of that tunebook.

Meanwhile, the revised anthem soon found a place in two other tunebooks: Jacob French's *Harmony of Harmony* (Northampton, Mass., 1802) and Elias Mann's *The Northampton Collection*, 2d ed. (Northampton, Mass., 1802). Later it also appeared in Jonathan Huntington's *The Apollo Harmony* (Northampton, Mass., 1807) and Stephen St. John's *The American Harmonist* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1821), after which it passed into oblivion.

In the two decades after 1810, the music of Billings and the American composers of his generation did not fare well on its home ground. A reaction against the so-called 'crudities' of the music, led largely by ministers and educated laymen in the urban centers, resulted in a virtual banishment of this music by 1820.[20] As the reformers swept the sanctuaries clean in the Northeast, the music of the Billings generation found a new life among the unsophisticated pioneers of the western movement and the farmers and merchants of the rural South. Among the pieces that gained a new acceptance was Billings's *Anthem for Easter*, but not without some changes.

First of all, the music assumed a new dress: shaped notes—patent notes, as they were called, as well as more derogatory names.[21] This was the standard notation of the South and West,

20. Richard Crawford documented the reform movement in American psalmody in his essay 'A Hardening of the Categories: "Vernacular," "Cultivated," and Reactionary in American Psalmody,' in his *American Studies and American Musicology* (Brooklyn: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1975), pp. 16–32.

21. They were also called 'buckwheat' notes and 'dunce' notes by their detractors.

and nearly all sacred music printed for sale in these areas conformed to this notational format. Second, the music was often printed in only three parts; frequently, the counter (or alto) part was simply omitted without any alterations in the other parts. Third, for the German-speaking areas of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, the text was translated, with the German words occasionally being set down along with the English text.

Among the earliest tunebooks to include *Anthem for Easter* in shaped notes were William Smith and William Little's *Easy Instructor* (Albany, 1809) and John Wyeth's *Repository of Sacred Music* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1810). To these popular and influential compilations goes the credit for rescuing the anthem from what might have been a forced oblivion and for transmitting it to a culture in which it could remain popular. Most of the later southern and western tunebooks owe some debt to one or both of these collections.

Joseph Doll's *Leichter Unterricht in der Vokal Musik*, 2d vol., (Harrisburg, Pa., 1815), appears to be the earliest tunebook to include a three-part setting and a German text. The translation, although quite literal in its meaning, plays havoc with prosody and musical accent. The translation of 'The Lord is ris'n indeed' as 'Der Herr ist erstanden' not only grossly violates the German accentual pattern by placing the primary musical stress on the syllable 'den' in the word 'erstanden,' but in so doing it also makes an unpleasant musical effect with the brief vocal flourish at this point. Similar problems appear later in adapting the translation to Billings's music, created largely by the feminine line endings found so frequently in German. The problem was somewhat re-

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Shaped notes attempted to incorporate symbols for the four English solmization syllables (fa, sol, la, and mi) into the musical notation by altering the shape of the note head. Instead of just an oval shape, as in standard notation, shaped notes also employed the triangle, the square, and the diamond, each standing for one of the solmization syllables. The first tunebook to use these symbols was Little and Smith's *The Easy Instructor* (Philadelphia [1801?]). Some later tunebooks (e.g., Aikin's *The Christian Minstrel* [Philadelphia, 1849]) used seven shapes adapted to the Italian solmization system (do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti, and variants). The four-shape system was by far the most popular, and it is still in use today among some churches, singers, and music publishers in the southeastern states. See *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. 'Shape-note hymnody.'

solved in later tunebooks by using a different, less literal translation. It appeared as 'Der Herr verliess das Grab ' or 'Der Herr erstund von Grab' in several tunebooks, including H. C. Eyer's *Union Choral-Harmonie* (Philadelphia, 1836) and S. M. Musselman's *Die Neue Choral Harmonie* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1844). But it continued as 'Der Herr ist erstanden' in T. R. Weber's *Pennsylvania Choral-Harmonie*, (Philadelphia, 1849), the most durable of the German-language tunebooks, which reached its sixteenth edition in 1891.

In the South and West, the *Anthem for Easter* appeared in most of the important tunebooks, including Davisson's *The Kentucky Harmony* ([n.p.,] 1816), Carden's *The Missouri Harmony* (Cincinnati, 1836), Walker's *The Southern Harmony* (Philadelphia, 1847), Houser's *The Hesperian Harp* (Philadelphia, 1848), McCurry's *The Social Harp* (Philadelphia, 1855), and White and King's *The Sacred Harp* (Philadelphia, 1860). It also appeared in others so numerous that naming them assumes the sound of a litany. But it is important to note that the anthem is still alive today in southern tunebooks, having been included in slightly revised form in the Deason and Parris revision of William Walker's *The Christian Harmony* ([n.p.,] 1958) and the Denson revision of *The Original Sacred Harp* (Kingsport, Tenn., 1971). Meanwhile, since we have momentarily reached the present day, it may be pertinent to observe at this point that at least nine octavo editions of the anthem are currently available from church-music publishers.[22]

In addition to the four-shaped notation in which it appeared in most southern tunebooks, the anthem was adapted to the seven-shape system employed by J. B. Aikin in his *The Christian Minstrel* (Philadelphia, 1849). Aikin dispensed entirely with clefs and key signatures (although he used accidental sharps and flats). One read

22. *Choral Music in Print, Vol. 1: Sacred Choral Music* (Philadelphia, 1974 and supplements) lists editions published by Bourne, Flammer, Frank, Gentry, Peters, G. Schirmer, Southern, and Walton. Separate editions, probably from the late nineteenth century, are listed in Franz Pazdirek's *Universal-Handbuch der Musikliteratur* (Vienna, 1904–10; repr. Hilversum, 1967), vol. 2. The Boston Public Library has an edition, arranged by Joseph W. Clokey, published by J. Fisher and Bro., with a 1929 copyright date. It also appeared in William Arms Fisher's *Ye Olde New-England Psalm Tunes*, (Boston, 1930), pp. 18–19.

the bottom line of each staff as C and transposed octaves to accommodate the voice range. In addition to the notational change, the anthem was attributed (not for the first time) to Joseph Stephenson, an English composer of a generation earlier than Billings, whose fuging-tunes and anthems exerted a marked influence on American composers of the eighteenth century.[23] Perhaps it was difficult for a reform-minded tunebook compiler of the mid-nineteenth century to accept Billings as the composer of a work so widely popular. By attaching the name of an European composer to it, the anthem may have gained an aura of respectability among people to whom such things mattered.

About the time that the reform movement in the eastern urban centers had succeeded in pushing all but the last vestiges of the Billings-era music from the church, the singing school, and the musical society, nostalgia seems to have taken hold of some members of genteel society. An interest was rekindled in the old American tunes, not as living music of the church, but as odd relics of the past.[24] They were apparently fun to sing and not at all bad to listen to if one did not take them seriously as music. From about 1830 until well into the 1870s, collections were issued that not only included some of the old tunes in new harmonic dress but some also made an effort to reprint the best of them in their original form. An ever-present member of these retrospective collections was Billings's *Anthem for Easter*. Among the earliest collections of this type were the Stoughton Musical Society's *Stoughton Collection* (Boston, 1829, and several later editions) and the Billings and Holden Society's *Billings and Holden Collection* (Boston, 1836).

In the 1850s and later, several troups of performers, foremost

23. Joseph Stephenson (1723–1810), was clerk of the Unitarian Church and a customs official in Poole, Dorset, England. He published *Church Harmony* (3d ed., London, 1760, is the earliest extant) and several shorter works. His fuging-tunes, PSALM 34, and MILFORD, were extremely popular in America, and his Christmas anthem, 'Behold I Bring You Glad Tidings,' was the most frequently published foreign anthem in America during the eighteenth century. See Daniel, *The Anthem in New-England*, pp. 65–67. Stephenson's style was not significantly different from Billings's.

24. For a discussion of the subject, see Judith T. Steinberg, 'Old Folks Concerts and the Revival of New England Psalmody,' *The Musical Quarterly* 49 (1973): 602–19.

among whom were 'Father' Robert Kemp's singers, toured America and England, presenting 'Old Folks Concerts,' as they were billed—concerts devoted largely to music from the Billings era. Presented in costume, with clever comments and countrified accents, these concerts often had a circuslike atmosphere of unabashed entertainment.[25] Nevertheless, the popularity of the 'Old Folks Concerts' brought into print another small flurry of retrospective collections, including D. H. Mansfield's *The American Vocalist* (Boston, 1849), Leonard Marshall's *The Antiquarian* (Boston, 1849), *Ancient Harmony Revived* (Boston, 1847 and later editions), *The Continental Harmony* (Boston, 1857), and *Father Kemp's Old Folks Concert Music* (Boston, 1860, 1874, and 1889). Billings's 'Anthem for Easter' appeared in each of them.

While most mainstream tunebook compilers and composers from the 1830s to the 1860s tried to ignore or forget their immediate forebears, some began to view early American psalmody with less distaste than earlier. Most pieces had reasonably good tunes, even if the harmony was, according to their standards, wretched. Apparently they thought that some of the better tunes could be salvaged by giving them a new setting. This was tried several times with *Anthem for Easter.*

Ephraim Reed attempted a revision of the anthem in his *Musical Monitor* (Utica, N.Y., 1817), giving the opening phrase to the sopranos instead of the bass and altering or filling in the harmony at various spots. Alexander Davidson's *Sacred Harmony* (Toronto, 1823) added thoroughbass[26] figures to a bass line that had been altered from Billings's original. Later compilers, such as T. Bissell in *The Boston Sacred Harmony* (Boston, 1849), Isaac B. Woodbury in *The Lute of Zion* (New York, 1853), Leonard Marshall in *The Hosanna* (Boston, 1850) and Luther O. Emerson in *Sabbath Har-*

25. See Robert Kemp, *A History of the Old Folks' Concerts* (Boston, 1868; repr. New York, 1984), pp. 30–34, for a description of the atmosphere of the 'Old Folks Concerts.'

26. Thoroughbass, or figured bass, was a harmonic shorthand by which the chord structure above a bass note was indicated by means of Arabic numerals. It was used by keyboard players between about 1600 and 1750 to accompany both vocal and instrumental works. It died out in most secular music during the latter half of the eighteenth century, but it hung on in church music until well into the nineteenth century.

mony (Boston, 1860) included their own arrangements and harmonizations of Billings's anthem, which usually differed only in details from Billings's own version.

In one case, however, Billings's anthem served as material for an extensive recomposition. In George Kingsley's *The Sacred Choir* (New York, 1838), the changes are so fundamental that the resulting anthem can only be considered a parody of Billings's work.[27] Much of the original text was replaced by a sentimental doggerel, consisting partly of a hymn by Thomas Kelly, a few words from Young's *Night Thoughts*, and some anonymous text, in which Billings's carefully constructed allusions to man's coincidental triumph with his risen Lord were totally negated. The outlines of the melodies were retained, but these were extended, pushed, and twisted out of the tight rhythmic and melodic shapes in which Billings had cast them, assuming the bland, regular features of a typical mid-nineteenth-century American anthem.

Anthem for Easter was one of the early American pieces chosen to be memorialized in Simeon Pease Cheney's *The American Singing Book* (Boston, 1879). Concerning his purpose in compiling the book, Cheney wrote:

> I have aimed at a book of good music, Sacred and Secular, for classes, choirs and all places and purposes where such music is needed, and to set forth the various styles of sacred music particularly which have prevailed from the beginning of composing and printing the same in America to the present time. . . .
>
> I have taken great interest in bringing forward our early psalm tune composers, and giving some permanence, as I hope, to their true position. Their natural, and in many cases their excellent compositions, compel me to believe them to have been men of no ordinary gifts.[28]

Cheney designed his book to be not so much a collection of living music but an anthology of the styles of American sacred music from its beginnings. To further emphasize the museum

27. 10th ed., pp. 254–58.
28. Cheney, *American Singing Book* (Boston, 1879; repr. New York, 1980), pp. 215–16.

aspect of the book, Cheney included extended biographical sketches of the early composers.

The version of the *Anthem for Easter* that Cheney chose to cast in Vermont granite was neither that which Billings published in 1787 nor the 1795 revision, but an altered version, probably done by Cheney himself, which differs from Billings's in many small details. Cheney praised Billings's work, saying, 'His "Anthem for Easter" is still used in cities and country. Many of his tunes, like Jordan and Majesty, continue popular. . . . William Billings must stand chief among American composers until some one sends forth a production superior to his "Anthem for Easter." '[29] Cheney was not alone in his praise of the 'Anthem for Easter.' Even some of Billings's severest critics acknowledged that the anthem contained merit above the ordinary. Thomas Hastings, no friend of early American composers generally and Billings in particular, begrudgingly allowed this empty compliment, 'His Anthem for Easter contains some interesting traits, and was formerly much admired.'[30]

But *Anthem for Easter* did not need the approbation of the eastern musical elite to make its way. During the early years of the nineteenth century, it had become part of the people's music through its own intrinsic merit. It has continued to be sung and enjoyed up to the present not only in worship services, but also in college choral concerts, community sings, and places where people, in Alexander Thayer's words, have 'an ear not over nice.' The anthem remains today 'a spirit stirring composition.'

29. Ibid., p. 169.

30. Thomas Hastings, 'Musical Authors and Publications of the United States,' *Musical Magazine* 1 (1835): 86, quoted in McKay and Crawford, *William Billings*, p. 203.

CHECKLIST

Printings of Billings's 'Anthem for Easter'

NOTE: This checklist does not pretend at completeness, but only intends to give a representative sampling of the publication history of Billings's *Anthem for Easter*. It is based largely on the tunebooks in the Irving Lowens Memorial Collection at the Moravian Music Foundation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The assistance of Richard Crawford in tracing the publications of the anthem through 1810 is gratefully acknowledged. The full bibliographic descriptions of pre-1811 materials are cited in *American Sacred Music Imprints, 1698–1810: A Bibliography*, by Allen P. Britton, Irving Lowens, and Richard Crawford (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, in press).

LEGEND

I Reprint of or related to Billings's original edition of 1787.
II Reprint of Billings's revision of 1795.
III Reprint of three-part version, with German or English text.
IV George Kingsley's parody in his *Sacred Choir*.

1787 Separate issue (Boston) [I]

1791 *Federal Harmony* (Boston) [I]

1792 *Federal Harmony* (Boston) [I]

1793 *Federal Harmony* (Boston) [I]
Holden, *Union Harmony* (Boston) [I]
Sanford, *Columbian Harmony* (Baltimore) [I]

1794 *Federal Harmony* (Boston) [I]
Worcester Collection, 5th ed. (Boston) [I]

1795 Atwill, *New York Collection* (Lansingburgh, N.Y.) [I]
Separate issue (Boston) [II]

1796 Holden, *Union Harmony*, 2 ed. (Boston) [I]
Village Harmony, 2d ed. (Exeter, N.H.) [I]

1797 Brownson, *New Collection* (Simsbury, Conn.) [I]
Mann, *Northampton Collection* (Northampton, Mass.) [I]
Worcester Collection, 6th ed. (Boston) [I]

1798 Read, *Columbian Harmonist No. 2* (New Haven, Conn.) [I]
Village Harmony, 4th ed. (Exeter, N.H.) [I]

1799 Merrill, *Psalmodist's Best Companion* (Exeter, N.H.) [I—altered]

1800 Terril, *Episcopal Harmony* (New Haven, Conn.) [I]
Village Harmony, 5th ed. (Exeter, N.H.) [II]
Worcester Collection, 7th ed. (Boston) [I]

1802 French, *Harmony of Harmony* (Northampton, Mass.) [II]
Mann, *Northampton Collection*, 2d ed. (Northampton, Mass.) [II]
Atwill, *New York Collection* (Lansingburgh, N.Y.) [I]

1803 Stammers, *Philadelphia Chorister* (Philadelphia) [I]
Village Harmony, 6th ed. (Exeter, N.H.) [I]
Worcester Collection, 8th ed. (Boston) [I]

1804 Atwill, *New York and Vermont Collection* (Albany, N.Y.) [I]

1805 Maxim, *Northern Harmony* (Exeter, N.H.) [I]
Robbins, *Columbian Harmony* (Exeter, N.H.) [I]

1806 Aitken, *Collection* (Philadelphia) [I]
Erben, *Selection* (New York) [I]
First Church Collection, 2d ed. (Boston) [I]
Read, *Columbian Harmonist*, 3d ed. (Dedham, Mass.) [I]
Village Harmony, 7th ed. (Exeter, N.H.) [I]

1807 Huntington, *Apollo Harmony* (Northampton, Mass.) [II]
Read, *Columbian Harmonist*, 3d [sic] ed. (Dedham, Mass.) [I]
Village Harmony, 8th ed. (Exeter, N.H.) [I]

1808 Chapin, *Musical Instructor* (Philadelphia) [I]
Maxim, *Northern Harmony*, 2d ed. (Exeter, N.H.) [I]
Village Harmony, 9th ed. (Exeter, N.H.) [I]

1809 Little, *Easy Instructor* [I]
Seymour, *New York Selection* (New York) [I]

1810 Blake, *Vocal Harmony* (Philadelphia) [I—attrib. Stephenson]
Chapin, *Musical Instructor* (Philadelphia) [I]
Little, *Easy Instructor* (Albany, N.Y.) [I]
Read, *Columbian Harmonist*, 4th ed. (Boston) [I]
Village Harmony, 10th ed. (Exeter, N.H.) [I]
Wyeth, *Repository* (Harrisburg, Pa.) [I]

1812 *Village Harmony*, 11th ed. (Newburyport, Mass.) [I]

1814 Lewis, *Beauties of Harmony* (Pittsburgh) [I]
Little, *Easy Instructor* (Albany, N.Y.) [I]

1815 Doll, *Leichter Unterricht* (Harrisburg, Pa.) [III]

1816 Davisson, *Kentucky Harmony* (Harrisonburg, Va.) [I]
Little, *Easy Instructor* (Albany, N.Y.) [I]
Seymour, *New York Selection* (New York) [I]

1817 Little, *Easy Instructor* (Albany, N.Y.) [I]
Reed, *Musical Monitor* (Utica, N.Y.) [I]

1818 Lewis, *Beauties of Harmony* (Pittsburgh) [I]
Little, *Easy Instructor* (Albany, N.Y.) [I]

1819 Davisson, *Kentucky Harmony* (Harrisonburg, Va.) [I]
Little, *Easy Instructor* (Albany, N.Y.) [I]

1820 Wyeth, *Repository*, 5th ed. (Harrisburg, Pa.) [I]

1821 Rothbaust, Franklin Harmonie (Harrisburg, Pa.) [III]
St. John, *American Harmonist* (Harrisburg, Pa.) [II]

1822 Gerhard, *Choral Harmonie* (Harrisburg, Pa.) [III]

1823 Davidson, *Sacred Harmony* (Toronto) [I]

1826 Little, *Easy Instructor* (Albany, N.Y.) [I]
Wyeth, *Repository* (Harrisburg, Pa.) [I]

1828 Lewis, *Beauties of Harmony* (Pittsburgh) [I]
Little, *Easy Instructor* (Albany, N.Y.) [I]

1829 *Stoughton Collection* (Boston) [I]

1830 Rothbaust, *Franklin Harmonie* (Chambersburg, Pa.) [III]

1831 Clayton, *Virginia Harmony* (Winchester, Va.) [III]
Lewis, *Beauties of Harmony*, 2d ed. (Pittsburgh) [I]
Little, *Easy Instructor* (Albany, N.Y.) [I]
Rinehart, *American or Union Harmonist* [III]
Stoughton Collection, 4th ed. (Boston) [I]

1832 Funk, *Genuine Church Music* (Winchester, Va.) [III]

1833 Eyer, *Union Choral Harmonie* (Harrisburg, Pa.) [III]
Moore, *New Hampshire Collection* (Concord, N.H.) [I]

1835 *Stoughton Collection*, 6th ed. (Boston) [I]

1836 *Billings and Holden Collection* (Boston) [I]
Carden, *Missouri Harmony* (Cincinnati) [I]
Eyer, *Union Choral Harmonie*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia) [III]

1838 Kingsley, *Sacred Choir*, 3d ed. (New York) [IV]

1839 Eyer, *Union Choral Harmonie*, 6th ed. (Harrisburg, Pa.) [III]

1842 *Harmonist* (New York) [I—attrib. Stephenson]; Funk, *Genuine Church Music* (Winchester, Va.) [III]

1843 *Harmonist* (New York) [I—attrib. Stephenson]; Kingsley, *Sacred Choir*, 10th ed. (New York) [IV]

1844 *Harmonist* (New York) [I—attrib. Stephenson]
Musselman, *Neue Choral Harmonie* (Philadelphia) [III]
Weber, *Pennsylvania Choral Harmonie* (n.p.) [III]

1845 *Harmonist* (New York) [I—attrib. Stephenson]; Steffy, *Valley Harmonist* (Winchester, Va.) [III]

1847 *Ancient Harmony Revived* (Boston) [I]
Funk, *Genuine Church Music* (Winchester, Va.) [III]
Walker, *Southern Harmony* (Philadelphia) [I]

1848 Houser, *Hesperian Harp* (Philadelphia) [I]

1849 Aikin, *Christian Minstrel* (Philadelphia) [I—attrib. Stephenson]
Bissel, *Boston Sacred Harmony* (Boston) [I]
Dingley, *Devotional Harmonist* (New York) [I]
Mansfield, *American Vocalist* (Boston) [I]
Marshall, *Antiquarian* (Boston) [I]
Weber, *Pennsylvania Choral Harmonie*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia) [III]

1850 *Ancient Harmony Revived*, 3d ed. (Boston) [I]
Marshall, *Hosanna* (Boston) [I]

1851 Walker, *Southern Harmony* (Philadelphia) [I]
Weber, *Pennsylvania Choral Harmonie*, 3d ed. (n.p.) [III]

1852 Aikin, *Christian Minstrel* (Philadelphia) [I—attrib. Stephenson]

1853 Aikin, *Christian Minstrel* (Philadelphia) [I—attrib. Stephenson]
Collins, *Timbrel of Zion* (Philadelphia) [I—attrib. Stephenson]
Houser, *Hesperian Harp* (Philadelphia) [I]
Johnson, *Western Psalmist* [III]
Woodbury, *Lute of Zion* (New York) [I—attrib. Stephenson]

1854 Walker, *Southern Harmony* (Philadelphia) [I]
Weber, *Pennsylvania Choral Harmonie*, 4th ed. (n.p.) [III]
Winebrenner, *Seraphina* (Lebanon, Pa.) [I]

1855 McCurry, *Social Harp* (Philadelphia) [I]

1856 Marshall, *Hosanna* (Boston) [I]
Woodbury, *Lute of Zion* (New York) [I—attrib. Stephenson]

1857 *Continental Harmony* (Boston) [I]

1858 Aikin, *Christian Minstrel* (Philadelphia) [I—attrib. Stephenson]

1859 Weber, *Pennsylvania Choral Harmonie*, 5th ed. (n.p.) [III]

1860 Emerson, *Sabbath Harmony* (Boston) [I]
Kemp, *Old Folks Concert Music* (Boston) [I]
White, *Sacred Harp* (Philadelphia) [I]

1864 Weber, *Pennsylvania Choral Harmonie*, 5th [sic] ed. (n.p.) [III]

1865 Hayden, *Sacred Melodeon* (Cincinnati) [I]

1866 Hayden, *Sacred Melodeon* (Cincinnati) [I]

1867 Funk, *Harmonia Sacra* 12th ed. (Winchester, Va.) [I]
Swan, *Harp of Columbia* [I]
Jubilee Harp (Boston) [I]
Weber, *Pennsylvania Choral*

Harmonie, 6th ed. (Hellertown, Pa.) [III]

1869 *American Tune Book* (Boston) [I]
Funk, *Harmonia Sacra* (Winchester, Va.) [I]

1870 Weber *Pennsylvania Choral Harmonie*, 8th ed. (Allentown, Pa.) [III]

1872 Allebach, *Temple Harp* (Philadelphia) [I—attrib. Stephenson]

1873 Weber, *Pennsylvania Choral Harmonie*, 9th ed. (Bethlehem, Pa.) [III]

1874 Kemp, *Old Folks Concert Music* (Boston) [I]

1878 *Stoughton Centennial Collection* (Boston) [I]

1879 Cheney, *American Singing Book* (Boston) [I]
Emerson, *Anthem Book* [IV]

1884 Weber, *Sammlung* (Hellertown, Pa.) [III]

1889 Kemp, *Old Folks Concert Music* (Boston) [I]

1891 Weber, *Pennsylvania Choral Harmonie*, 16th ed. (Hellertown, Pa.) [III]

1911 White, *Original Sacred Harp* (Atlanta, Ga.) [I]

1921 Swan, *New Harp of Columbia* (Nashville, Tenn.) [I]

1930 Fisher, *Ye Olde New-England Psalm Tunes* (Boston) [I]

1936 *Original Sacred Harp* (Denson rev.; Haleyville, Ala.) [I]

1949 *The B. F. White Sacred Harp* [I]

1958 *Christian Harmony* (Deason & Parris rev.; n.p.) [I]

1971 *Original Sacred Harp* (Kingsport, Tenn.) [I]

1978 Swan, *New Harp of Columbia* (Knoxville, Tenn.) [I]

1984 Crawford, *The Core Repertory of Early American Psalmody* (Madison, Wis.) [II]

1986 *The Complete Works of William Billings*, Vol. III (Boston) [II]