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“O My Father”: The Musical Settings

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O My Father

O my Fa-ther thou that dwellest in the high and glo - rious place, When shall

CHORUS.

I re - gain thy presence And a - gain be - hold thy face? In thy ho - ly ha - bi -

ta - tion did my spirit once re - side? In my first pri-me-val child-hood was I nur-tured near thy side?

Fig. 1. "O My Father" was given several settings during Brigham Young's lifetime, none of which are in use now. Here the poem is set to the tune Brigham Young preferred, Stephen Foster's "Gentle Annie" (1856).

“O My Father”: The Musical Settings

Saints sang this hymn to musical settings ranging from a Stephen Foster tune to a melody played by a Nephite in a dream. But eventually they canonized a tune from the genre of “gospel hymns.”

Michael Hicks

“O My Father” began public life as a poem on the back page of an obscure newspaper. It is now a lilting, pastoral hymn instantly recognizable throughout the world, sung in dozens of languages by millions of people. The transformation was convoluted. Latter-day Saints always wanted to sing Eliza R. Snow’s poem. But as they sought for the best way to do so, they found a bewildering set of options, all complicated by inconsistencies of publication, competing musical tastes, visionary experiences, political happenstance, and quirks in Snow’s text itself.

In tracing the history of “O My Father,” we should begin with the obvious question: Did Eliza R. Snow intend it to be sung? As first published in 1845, “O My Father” (then under the title “My Father in Heaven”) was clearly labeled as poetry, not as a hymn.¹ But poetry and song lyrics were virtually interchangeable in early Mormonism; a great deal of verse was published under the heading of “poetry” with a notation of the tune to which it should be sung. So even if Snow did not originally *intend* her poem to be sung, she probably knew that it would be. Practically speaking, the Saints needed hymns to fill their meetings, not poems to fire their private meditations. (They had an abundance of new revelations to do that.) They craved hymn texts like “O My Father”—short, didactic, distinctively Mormon, and strict in the number of syllables per line. So it was not surprising that, six years after its publication as a poem, “O My Father” entered the LDS hymnbook.

At that time, the hymnbook contained no music, only words and metrical designations, which enabled singers to match texts to

existing tunes of the same meter. This situation posed a problem for "O My Father." Superficially, as a hymn text, the poem would have the meter known as 8787 Double. Such a hymn would normally feature a trochaic meter—the "long-short" pattern of accents that appears in some lines of "O My Father":

/ u / u / u / u
Truth is reason, truth eternal

But most of the lines in Snow's poem seem to begin not with a long-short pair of syllables, but with two short (unaccented) syllables, as in this line:

u u / u / u / u
In thy holy habitation

Moreover, the scan of some lines is ambiguous; for example, one can debate which way the following line should be scanned:

u u / u / u /
Was I nurtured near thy side?

or

/ u / u / u /
Was I nurtured near thy side?

The variability of accents at the beginning of lines made the text difficult to match with a typical trochaic tune. Insignificant words (such as "in") would sometimes receive undue emphasis. Moreover, the changeability of accents from verse to verse made it hard to find a tune that would work for all verses—and hymns were always sung strophically (that is, with the same music for every verse).

So on one hand, the text was irresistible: it virtually had to be sung. On the other hand, it was nearly impossible to find a tune to which "O My Father" could be comfortably sung. The difficulty of finding a suitable tune, together with the imperative to do so, drove a parade of musical settings for "O My Father" through the nineteenth-century Church.

One of the earliest musical settings of "O My Father" was Stephen Foster's 1856 parlor song "Gentle Annie."² Although the tune was far from hymnlike—and one had to fudge it a little to make Snow's text fit—this setting was apt (see fig. 1).³ The tune was gently plaintive, enhancing the spirit of the words. And the

opening of the lines in "Gentle Annie" contained ambiguities of accent similar to those in Snow's poem.⁴ As early as 1855, the *Deseret News* observed that "O My Father" was Brigham Young's favorite hymn, which ensured that it would be sung often.⁵ According to Heber J. Grant, "Gentle Annie" was the tune that President Young came to prefer—a point confirmed by Augusta Joyce Crocheron, who wrote:

I once heard Pres. Brigham Young, in the St. George Temple, designate his preference thus: "Will the Parowan choir please sing 'O My Father,' to that sweet, gentle air I love so well?" The air was "Gentle Annie," a strange choice it sounded, but the effect proved the correctness of his taste.⁶

Nevertheless, during the pioneer period, "O My Father" was more commonly sung to a melody completely different in spirit: a bouncy, martial tune known as "Harwell" (see fig. 2).⁷ This tune was far easier to sing than "Gentle Annie"—three of the four phrases of "Harwell" were identical to one another. And if the music seemed at odds with the poem's contemplative tone, "Harwell" was nonetheless catchy and memorable—something like a bugle call—traits that suited it to congregational singing. Eliza Snow apparently did not object. In 1880, as the editor of the Primary's *Tune Book*, Snow included "O My Father" set to the tune of "Harwell."⁸

In 1857 the first setting composed by a Latter-day Saint appeared. For his *Latter Day Saints' Psalmody*, British convert John Tullidge composed settings of thirty-seven hymns for keyboard and choir. His setting of "O My Father" (see fig. 3)⁹ is relatively elaborate, with a somewhat disjunct opening line and, near the end of the hymn, alternations between three- and four-part textures. However noble the effort, Tullidge's *Psalmody* never sold enough copies to make this setting known widely.

In 1863 the well-respected music teacher David Calder published a unique setting of "O My Father," this one primarily for the use of youth choirs throughout Utah.¹⁰ Notated in the curious "Tonic Sol-Fa" system, this version features dynamic markings and fermatas to ensure that choirs render it with the proper expression (see fig. 4).¹¹ It also turns the first two lines of the poem into a chorus to be sung at the end of each verse, a chorus in which the

O, MY FATHER!

O, my Father, thou that dwellest In the high and glorious place,
 When shall I re-gain Thy presence, And a-gain behold Thy face? } In Thy ho-ly hab-i-
 tation Did my spirit once re-side? In my first primeval childhood Was I nurtur'd near Thy side?
 Did my spir-it

Fig. 2. One of the earliest and most common settings of Eliza R. Snow's text, Lowell Mason's tune "Harwell." As editor of the Primary's 1880 *Tune Book*, Snow chose it as the "official" tune for children to sing. This setting later appeared in many LDS hymnbooks.

No. 6.

O, MY FATHER. 8^N & 7^S D.

13

ANDANTE ESPRESSIVO.

O, my Fa - ther, thou that dwellest In the high and glorious place;

ANDANTE ESPRESSIVO.

Fig. 3. An excerpt from John Tullidge's 1857 choral setting of "O My Father," the first known setting of Snow's text by a Latter-day Saint.

side? d . t ₁ : : t ₁ , d here,	In my And I	first prim - e - val child - m . r : - . r : d . t ₁ felt that I had wand-	hood m : : m . m er'd	Was From a	bur - tur'd near thy p more ex - alt - ed
l . s ₁ : : s ₁ , tu ₁ stare!	Truth is	s ₁ . s ₁ : - . s ₁ : tu ₁ . s ₁ rea - son truth e - ter-	s ₁ : : d . d nal	Tells me,	I've a mo - ther
r . r : : r., r do,	With your	r . r : - . r : r . r mu - tual ap - pro - ba-	d : : s . s tion,	Let me	come and dwell with
s ₁ . s ₁ : : s ₁ , l ₁		t ₁ . t ₁ : - . t ₁ : l ₁ . s ₁	d : : d . d		r : - . r : r ₁ . r ₁

side. s ; f : m, r sphere.		d : - . d : t ₁ , d	m . r : : r . m	f : - . f : m . nu
t : - : here.	DOL. O, my	d : - . s ₁ ; s ₁ , s ₁ Fa - ther, thou that	s ₁ . s ₁ : : s ₁ . s ₁ dwell - est In the	t ₁ : - . r : d . t high and glo - rious
r : - : you.	s, f	m : - . m : r., m	f . f : : f . m	r : - . s : s . s
s ₁ : - : d., d	d, d	d ; - . d : d, d	s ₁ . s ₁ : : s ₁ . s ₁	s ₁ : - . s ₁ : s ₁ . s ₁

m : : m, f	s : - . m : r . d	t ₁ . l ₁ : - . : d., r	<i>Dim</i> m : f., m : m., r
d : : d., t ₁ place; When shall	d : - . s ₁ : f ₁ . s ₁ I re - gain thy	s ₁ . f ₁ : - . : d., d pres - ence, And a -	d : d., d : t ₁ gain be - hold thy
s : : s., s	s : - . d : t ₁ . d	d . d : - . : l., l	s : l., s : s., f
d : : d., r	m : - . d ₁ : r ₁ . m ₁	f ₁ . f ₁ : - . : f ₁ , f ₁	s ₁ : s ₁ , s ₁ : s., s ₁

d : . s : s., tu	s : . r : r., m	d : -
d : . t ₁ : t ₁ , d fac.? Be - hold thy	r : . t ₁ : t ₁ , t ₁ face, Be - hold thy	d : -
m : . r : r., r	r : . f : f., s	m : -
d : . s ₁ : s ₁ , l	t ₁ : . s ₁ : s ₁ , s ₁	d ¹ : -

Fig. 4. A page from David Calder's "Tonic Sol-Fa" singing manual that Calder used for teaching music to hundreds of Utah children in the early 1860s. The unusual notation purported to be an improvement on traditional notation. This setting of "O My Father" is of unknown origin and appears in no other LDS publication.

closing words "behold thy face" are to be sung three times. This setting may have been Calder's own; it is unattributed but appears in no other known publication.

Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, "Gentle Annie," "Harwell," and the "Tonic Sol-Fa" setting all had some claim to "official" status. "Gentle Annie" was the favorite of the prophet; "Harwell" was the favorite of the people; and the "Tonic Sol-Fa" tune was the one being taught to hundreds of children in Calder's singing schools—which themselves were endorsed throughout the territory by Brigham Young.¹² But the year of Young's death, 1877, ushered in a new era of "O My Father" settings.

At Young's funeral, popular choir director C. J. Thomas led the Union Glee Club in singing Young's favorite hymn to a fittingly solemn tune: the "Austrian Hymn" composed by Franz Josef Haydn (see fig. 5).¹³ While this tune suited the spirit of the funeral, it served the words poorly, giving heavy downbeat accentuation to words like "in" and "and." Nevertheless, this setting became somewhat "official"—at least among the youth of the Church—by its inclusion in *The Improvement Association Song Book* (1887).¹⁴

In the same month as Young's funeral, Tabernacle Choir director George Careless published his own new version of "O My Father." It was a nonstrophic anthem comprising only two verses—a solo and duet on the first verse and full choir on the second (see fig. 6).¹⁵ By having different music for each verse, Careless not only could distribute the textual accents differently, but could subtly dramatize the words. Although a version such as this may have attracted choir directors in search of new material, the setting weakened the text: "O My Father" badly needed its latter two verses—the one declaring the existence of a heavenly mother, the other asking for the poet to return after death to both heavenly parents.

The Deseret Sunday School Union soon published two fresh settings, one for congregations, the other for choirs. In 1879 they issued the jaunty new "O My Father" written by a young Welsh emigrant, Evan Stephens (see fig. 7). Similar to "Harwell" in character, it was considerably harder to sing. But it had the social virtue of being composed by a Latter-day Saint. Not only did this version appear in the Sunday School magazine, the *Juvenile Instructor*,¹⁶ but it was also issued on the official Sunday School music cards.¹⁷


No. 181.

O My Father.


ELIZA R. SNOW.

(Tune: "Austrian Hymn.")


JOSEPH HAYDN.

Prayerfully.



1. O my Fa-ther, Thou that dwell-est In the high and glo-rious place!
 2. For a wise and glo-rious pur-pose Thou hast placed me here on earth,
 3. I had learned to call Thee Fa-ther, Thro' Thy Spir-it from on high;
 4. When I leave this frail ex-ist-ence, When I lay this mor-tal by,



When shall I re-gain Thy pres-ence, And a-gain be-hold Thy face?
 And with-held the rec-ol-lec-tion Of my for-mer friends and birth;
 But, un-til the Key of Knowl-edge Was re-stored, I knew not why.
 Fa-ther, Moth-er, may I meet you In your roy-al court on high?



In Thy ho-ly hab-i-ta-tion, Did my spir-it once re-side;
 Yet oft-times a se-cret some-thing Whispered, You're a stran-ger here!
 In the heav'n's are par-ents sin-gle? No! the tho't makes rea-son stare!
 Then, at length, when I've com-plet-ed All you sent me forth to do,



In my first pri-me-val child-hood, Was I nur-tured near Thy side.
 And I felt that I had wan-dered From a more ex-alt-ed sphere.
 Truth is rea-son; truth e-ter-nal Tells me I've a moth-er there.
 With your mu-tual ap-pro-ba-tion Let me come and dwell with you.

Fig. 5. "O My Father" set to the tune of Haydn's "Austrian Hymn." This setting was sung at Brigham Young's funeral (1877) and was included in *The Improvement Association Song Book* (1887) and *Deseret Sunday School Songs* (1909), from which this page is taken.

O MY FATHER.

SOLO. *Andante.*

G. CARELESS.

TREBLE.

O my Fa - ther, thou that dwellest In the high and glo - rious place!

ORGAN.

When shall I re - gain thy presence, And a - gain be - hold thy face?

DUET.

ALTO.

In thy ho - ly hab - i - ta - tion, Did my spir - it once re - side? In my first pri -

TREBLE.

TENOR.

CHORUS.

For a wise and glo - rious

ALTO.

me - val childhood, Was I nur - tured near thy side?

TREBLE.

For a wise and glo - rious

BASS.

ORGAN.

Fig. 6. A page from George Careless's choral anthem on the text of "O My Father" as published in his *Utah Musical Times* (1877).

O, MY FATHER!

WORDS BY E. R. SNOW.

MUSIC BY E. STEPHENS.

Allegretto.

1. O my Father, thou that dwellest In the high and glorious place! When shall I re-gain thy
2. For a wise and glorious purpose Thou hast placed me here on earth, A. I. d with - held the re - col-

mf

presence, And a - gain be - hold thy face? In thy ho - ly hab - i - ta - tion, Did my
lec - tion Of my for - mer friends and birth; Yet oft - times a se - cret something Whispered

p

spir - it once ra - side? In my first, pri-me - val childhood, Was I nurtured near thy side?
You're a stranger here; And I felt that I had wandered From a more ex - alt - ed sphere.

f *cres*

Fig. 7. Evan Stephens's first setting of "O My Father" as published in the *Juvenile Instructor* (1879). From 1889 through 1927, this version of the song appeared in the only "official" LDS sacrament meeting hymnbook (in English) that had musical notation, the *Latter-day Saints' Psalmody*.

Five years later, the *Instructor* published a markedly different setting by LDS composer A. C. Smyth (see fig. 8).¹⁸ Designed for a choir to sing, his "O My Father" was slow and sturdy, its phrases shaped by detailed dynamic markings. This setting was probably little used, although, under Ebenezer Beesley's direction, the Tabernacle Choir copied it into their choirbooks.¹⁹

Perhaps the most curious setting of "O My Father" to appear during these years was Thomas Durham's so-called "Nephite Lamentation"—curious, at least, in its origins. A longtime choir director in Parowan, Utah, Durham claimed the tune came to him in a dream about the aftermath of the great battle at the Hill Cumorah; in that dream, a Nephite survivor played the tune on a horn as a lament. According to Durham, "he missed the two high notes in the latter part of the tune, but I seemed to know what he was trying to get."²⁰ The Nephite played the tune twice, and Durham awoke and wrote it down. He soon began to use it as a setting for "O My Father." It gained renown in Utah not only for its heavenly origins, but also for the graceful way that it handled the text. The beginning of each line consists of a lilting three-note figure that suits either a long-short or short-short pair of syllables with relative ease (see fig. 9).²¹

Although Evan Stephens's "O My Father" was probably little sung, it became the only version of "O My Father" to appear in the first official LDS hymnbook for sacrament meetings, the *Latter-day Saints' Psalmody* (1889; republished regularly until 1927).²² Stephens was a member of the five-man committee who compiled the *Psalmody*, a committee that included George Careless and Ebenezer Beesley, who probably would have preferred other settings. Stephens's setting, however, had two advantages: it had the imprimatur of the Sunday School, and Stephens had personally taught it to thousands of children enrolled in his music classes and choruses.²³

Two funerals in 1893 brought new settings of "O My Father" to the Saints' attention. One setting never caught on; the other proceeded to eclipse every previous one and become the standard throughout the world.

For the funeral of his first wife, Lucy, Heber J. Grant asked that a mixed quartet sing "O My Father" to a tune from the first act

O, MY FATHER.

WORDS BY E. R. SNOW.

MUSIC BY A. C. SMYTH.

Andante. p *Cres.* *Dim.* *p*

O my Fa - ther Thcu that dwell - est In the high and glo - rious place! When shall

Cres. *Dim.* *Grazioso. mf*

I re - gain Thy presence, And a - gain be - hold Ti₇ face? In Thy ho - ly

p *Cres.* *Dim.*

hab - i - ta - tion Did my spir - it once re - side? In my first pri - mev - al

p *mf* *f* *Dim. e piu lento,*

childhood Was I nur - tured near Thy side? Was I nur - tured near Thy side?

Fig. 8. A. C. Smyth's 1884 choral setting of "O My Father" as it appeared in the *Juvenile Instructor* of that year. The Tabernacle Choir, under Ebenezer Beesley's direction, hand copied this version into their choirbooks.

O MY FATHER.

Tune—Nephte Lamentation.

THOMAS DURHAM.

E. R. SNOW.

Arr. by H. E. GILES.

Solo. Andante moderato.

1. O my Fa - ther, Thou that dwell - est In the
2. For a wise and glori - ous pur - pose Thou hast

CHORUS. p Very distinct.

3. I had learned to call Thee Fa - ther, Through Thy
4. When I leave this frail ex - ist - ence, When I

high and glorious place! When shall I re - gain Thy
placed me here on earth, And with - held the re - col -

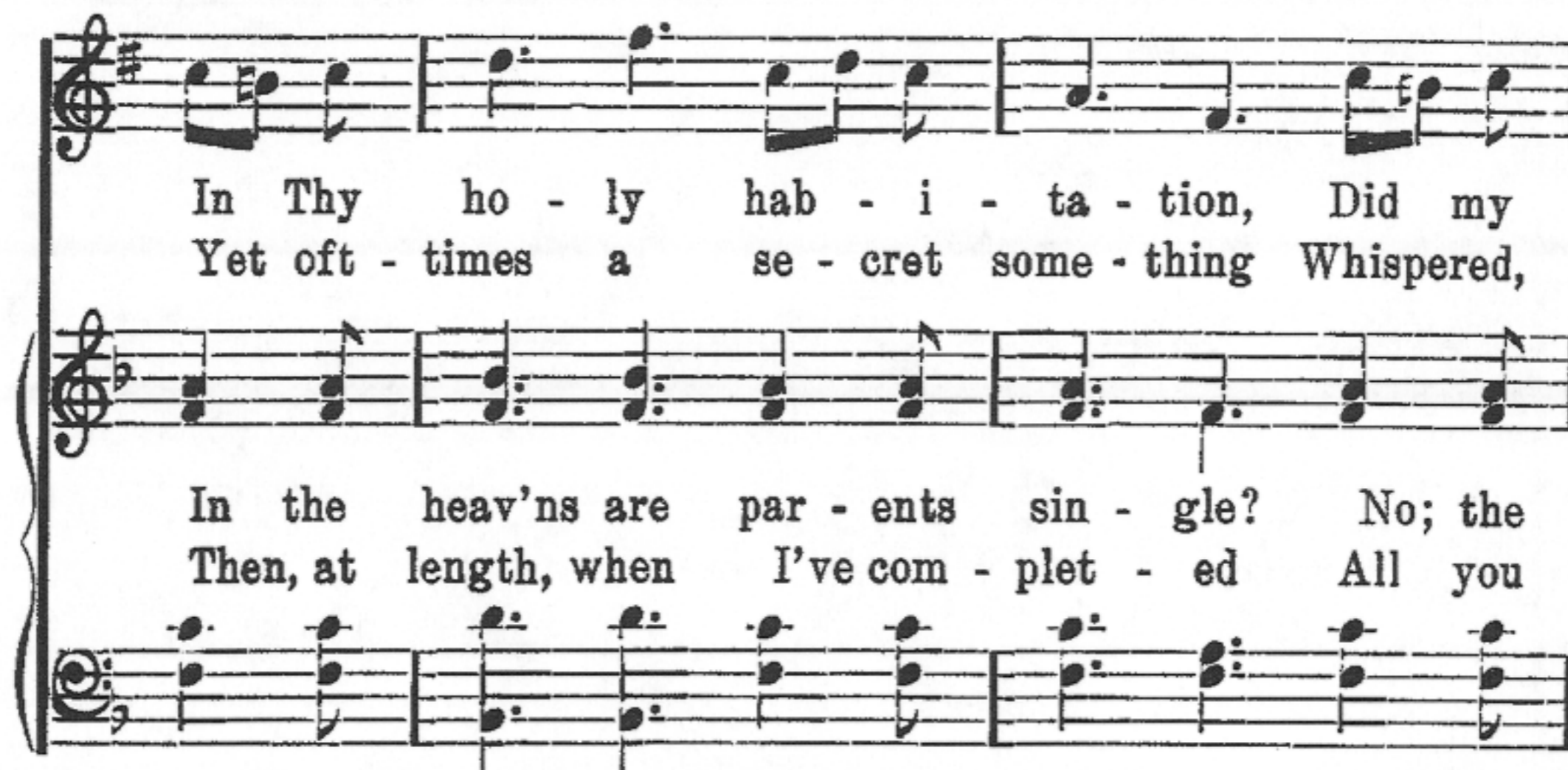
Spir - it from on high; But un - til the Key of
lay this mor - tal by, Fa - ther, Moth - er, may I

pres - ence, And a - gain be - hold Thy face?
lec - tion Of my for - mer friends and birth,

Know - ledge Was re - stored I knew not why.
meet you In your roy - al courts on high?

Fig. 9. In a dream, Thomas Durham heard a Nephte warrior playing a tune for his dead comrades. Known as the "Nephte Lamentation," the tune was put to the text of "O My Father" in several publications, including the *Relief Society Magazine* (1919), from which this page and the next are taken.

"O My Father" set to "Nephite Lamentation," cont.



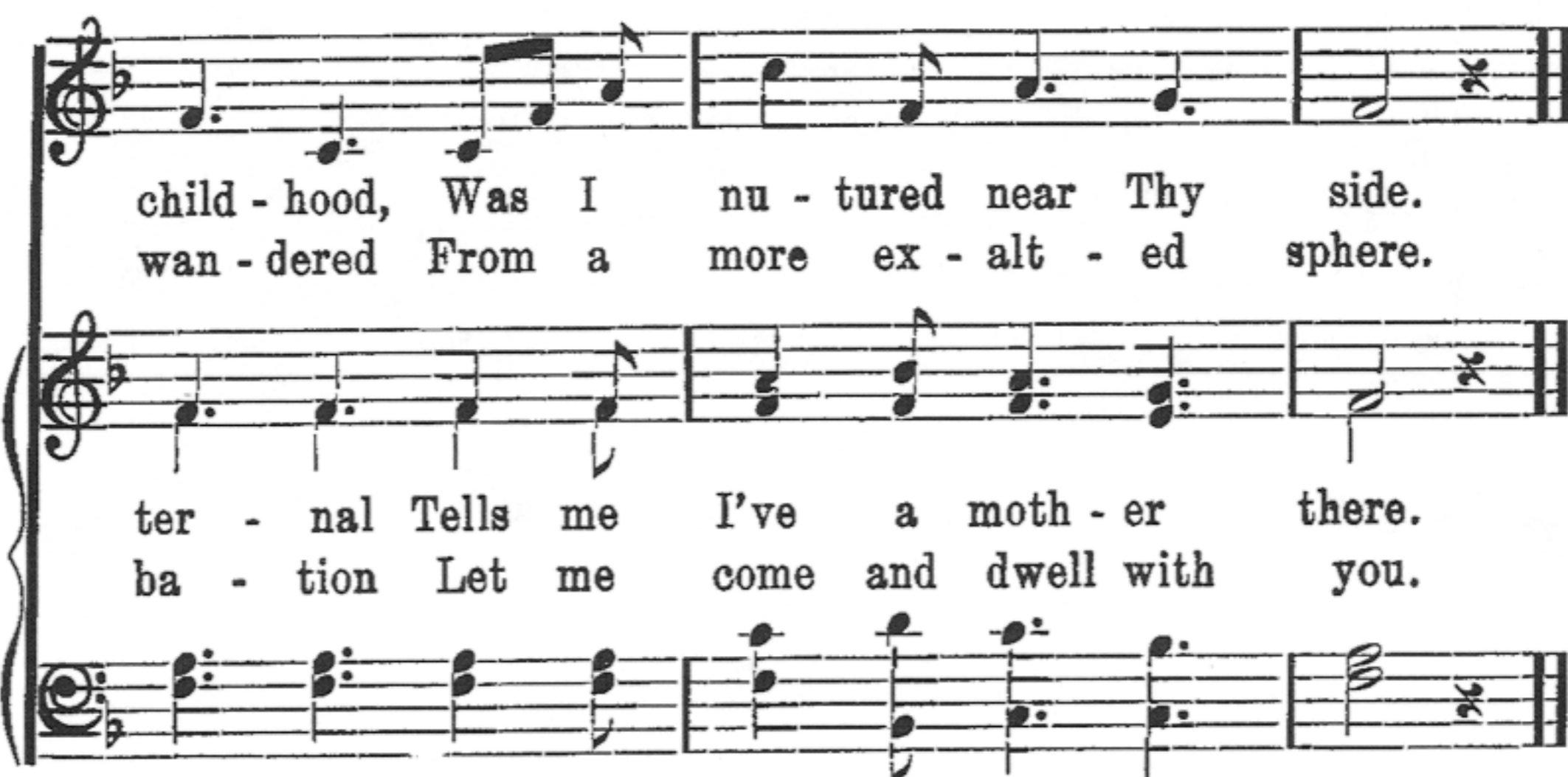
In Thy ho - ly hab - i - ta - tion, Did my
Yet oft - times a se - cret some - thing Whispered,

In the heav'ns are par - ents sin - gle? No; the
Then, at length, when I've com - plet - ed All you



Rit. spir - it once re - side; *A tempo.* In my first pri - me - val
"You're a stran-ger here;" And I felt that I had

Rit. thought makes reason stare! *A tempo.* Truth is rea - son, truth e -
sent me forth to do, With your mu - tual ap - pro -



child - hood, Was I nu - tured near Thy side.
wan - dered From a more ex - alt - ed sphere.

ter - nal Tells me I've a moth - er there.
ba - tion Let me come and dwell with you.

of Friedrich von Flotow's opera *Martha* (see fig. 10). In 1908 the *Deseret Evening News* claimed that Snow's text "beautifully fitted" the "Martha" tune.²⁴ In 1913 the *Improvement Era* published "O My Father" in that form; the following year, President Grant indirectly promoted the von Flotow setting in his article "Favorite Hymns."²⁵ As late as 1939, in *Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns*, George Pyper extolled the effectiveness of this setting.²⁶ But the melody was so plain and unsubtle in its handling of the textual accents that few would have been drawn to use it, especially given the enormous popularity of another 1893 setting.

By the 1890s, "gospel hymns" had become the favorite sacred music among Christians in the United States. Such hymns descended from the old camp-meeting and revival songs; they used dancelike rhythms, immediate repetitions of pitches, and infectious verse-chorus designs to make them instantly memorable. One popular gospel hymn was "My Redeemer" (1877) by James McGranahan. It featured a simple, swaying melody with male responsories in the chorus (see fig. 11).²⁷ In 1893, at a funeral in Logan, Utah, Robert Easton sang the words of "O My Father" to the tune of "My Redeemer."²⁸ The joining of the two produced something akin to the "Nephite Lamentation" setting but even more meditative: the slow, constant repetition of individual pitches or small groups of pitch gave this "O My Father" an almost hypnotic quality it had never before found (see fig. 12).

Easton was a tenor soloist with the Tabernacle Choir, whose director, Evan Stephens, was always looking for ways to showcase the skills of his soloists. Stephens decided to have Easton and the choir sing an arrangement of "O My Father" to the tune of "My Redeemer" at the Salt Lake Temple dedication services in April 1893.²⁹ There, an estimated audience of 50,000 people heard the arrangement. The consensus was almost instantaneous: here was an excellent setting, one that was in an up-to-date style and served the text well. Buoyed by the success of the arrangement, the choir took it on their Midwestern tour that summer (their first major foray outside the Rocky Mountain region), apparently using it to introduce Mormon doctrine to the general public.³⁰

The "My Redeemer" tune spread rapidly throughout the Church. The Tabernacle Choir sang it virtually everywhere they

O my Father

Martha. 8, 7, 8, 7, D

Friedrich von Flotow, 1847

1, O my Father, thou that dwellest In the high and

glor-ious place! When shall I re - gain thy presence, And a -

gain be - hold thy face? In thy ho - ly hab - i -

ta - tion, Did my spir - it once re - side; In my

first pri - me - val childhood, Was I nurtured near thy side.

Fig. 10. "O My Father" set to a tune from Act I of Friedrich von Flotow's opera *Martha*. For the funeral of his first wife (1893), Heber J. Grant asked a quartet to sing "O My Father" to this music. One of the members of that quartet, George Pyper, extolled the effectiveness of this setting in his hymn-book companion, *Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns* (1939).

No. 577.

My Redeemer.

P. P. BLISS.

JAMES McGRANAHAN.

1. I will sing of my Re-deem-er And His won-d'rous love to me;
 2. I will tell the wond'rous sto - ry, How my lost es-tate to save,
 3. I will praise my dear Re-deem-er, His tri - umph - ant pow'r I'll tell,
 4. I will sing of my Re-deem-er, And His heav'n - ly love to me;

On the cru - el cross He suffered, From the curse to set me free.
 In His boundless love and mer - cy, He the ran - som free - ly gave.
 How the vic - to - ry He giv - eth O - ver sin, and death, and hell.
 He from death to life hath brought me, Son of God, with Him to be.

CHORUS.

Sing, oh! sing, of my Re-deem - er, With His

Sing, oh! sing of my Re-deem-er, Sing, oh! sing of my Re-deem-er, With His blood

blood He purchased me, He purchased me, On the blood..... He purchased me,

blood He purchased me, With His blood He purchased me; On the

cross..... He sealed my par - don, Paid the cross He sealed my par - don, On the cross He sealed my par - don, Paid the

debt, and made me free, And made me free, *Repeat pp after last verse.*

debt, and made me free, and made me free.

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Fig. 11. James McGranahan's Protestant gospel hymn "My Redeemer" (1877).

O My Father.

Eliza R. Snow.

Arranged by Frank W. Merrill.

*Andantino con espressione.**rit.*

1. O my Fa - ther, Thou that dwell - est In the high and glo - rious place!
2. For a wise and glo - rious pur - pose Thou hast placed me here on earth,
3. I had learned to call Thee Fa - ther, Thro' Thy Spir - it from on high;
4. When I leave this frail ex - ist - ence, When I lay this mor - tal by,

When shall I re - gain Thy pres - ence, And a - gain be - hold Thy face?
 And with - held the rec - ol - lec - tion Of my for - mer friends and birth.
 But, un - til the Key of Knowl - edge Was re - stored, I knew not why.
 Fa - ther, Moth - er, may I meet you In your roy - al courts on high?

Fig. 12. "O My Father" to the tune of McGranahan's "My Redeemer." This music was first joined to "O My Father" by tenor soloist Robert Easton at a funeral in 1893. The resultant setting of "O My Father" would quickly become the most popular one in the Church and the only one that now appears in all LDS hymnbooks. The setting appears here in the arrangement included with John Hafen's illustrations in a 1909 pamphlet version of Eliza R. Snow's text. (See the article by Dawn Pheysey in this issue.)

appeared. In 1895 the Church magazine the *Contributor* published it.³¹ In 1899 this treatment of “O My Father” showed up in a new edition of the Sunday School hymnal and in LDS hymnbooks for non-English-speaking Saints.³² The popularity of the new setting dismayed Evan Stephens, who in that same year publicly repented of ever having used the “My Redeemer” tune, which he called the “‘Eastern’ tune.”³³ He thought that it was in poor taste to link a text so sublime to a gospel hymn, music he considered the equivalent of “cheese-cloth.” And he believed strongly that LDS composers should set LDS texts. Their settings, he insisted, should bespeak “optimism” (as his “O My Father” did) rather than “gloomy solemnity.”³⁴

But the popularity of the “My Redeemer” tune could not be quelled by Stephens’s opinions. In 1908 the mission presidents of the Church jointly published a new hymnal in English, *The Songs of Zion*. It contained only one tune for “O My Father”—“My Redeemer.”³⁵ The following year, the Sunday School completely revamped its songbook; the new edition, *Deseret Sunday School Songs*, omitted Stephens’s setting altogether and included two other settings instead: “My Redeemer” and the “Austrian Hymn.”³⁶

Meanwhile, the Tabernacle Choir made its first commercial recordings. Among the four songs it recorded in 1908 was “O My Father” in the arrangement that had become so popular. This recording suggests why the choir’s performances of this setting may have been so appealing to the tastes of the era.³⁷ The whole tenor section (not a soloist) sings the melody at a ponderous tempo—so slow that the nearly four-minute recording can contain only two verses (the first and last). And the entire choir sings with scooping *portamenti* that virtually overwhelm the listener with heartfelt sentiment.

In the 1920s, after stepping down as Tabernacle Choir director, Stephens continued to oppose the “My Redeemer” setting that he had popularized. When Victor Recordings asked to record the song for a collection of Mormon hymns in 1923, Stephens made the case to the Church Music Committee that to use the “My Redeemer” tune would be illegal on copyright grounds.³⁸ (But the recording was still made; it features the “Trinity Mixed Quartet” performing verses 1, 3, and 4 of “O My Father.”)³⁹ As a member of the same committee,

Stephens also voted to produce a new hymnbook to replace the *Psalmody*, the only book in the Church that still included his old setting of "O My Father." For the new hymnal, *Latter-day Saint Hymns* (1927), Stephens composed yet another setting of "O My Father," this one even more bombastic than his previous one (see fig. 13). The "My Redeemer" setting also appeared in this hymnbook, a comfortable 361 pages away from Stephens's—not in the form of a congregational hymn, but in Stephens's Tabernacle Choir arrangement.⁴⁰

However, with Stephens no longer in charge, the Tabernacle Choir continued to sing the "My Redeemer" setting for concerts and national radio broadcasts. Most listeners adored it; "O My Father" became one of the choir's most requested songs.⁴¹ Still, not everyone admired it. At a concert in San Francisco in response to a request from President J. Reuben Clark, the Tabernacle Choir sang all four verses of "O My Father." As director Spencer Cornwall recalls, the local newspaper said, "We liked all the numbers except the interminable 'O My Father.'"⁴² And even the Church's president, Heber J. Grant, was quoted as saying that the "My Redeemer" tune is "not majestic enough" for "O My Father." "It is too sentimental," he is quoted as saying, "and it's too secular."⁴³

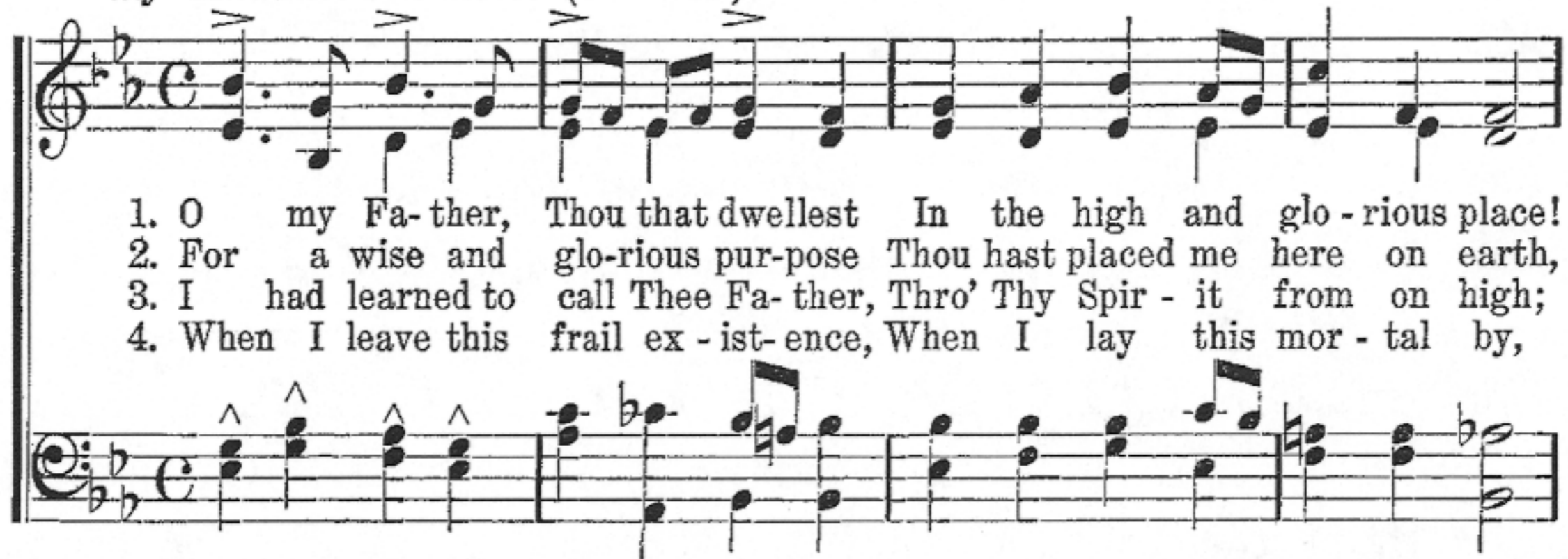
In 1944 the First Presidency (under Grant's direction) directed the Church Music Committee to consolidate the three principal Church songbooks in English—*Songs of Zion*, *Deseret Sunday School Songs*, and *Latter-day Saint Hymns*—into one new volume. All three of those books had included the "My Redeemer" setting. But each of the latter two contained an additional setting: the "Austrian Hymn" version and Stephens's second setting, respectively. Although the committee was not yet ready to make McGranahan's tune the only official one for "O My Father," they voted to remove both of the others. No one sang Stephens's setting (and having died in 1930, he could not argue for its inclusion). The "Austrian Hymn" had become unusable because of its association with Nazi Germany; as "Deutschland über alles," it had become the veritable theme song of the Third Reich. So the new consolidated hymnbook, *Hymns: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1948), included the "My Redeemer" setting (which it subtitled "Familiar

No. 34. O My Father, Thou that Dwellest.

Eliza R. Snow.

(8's & 7's.)

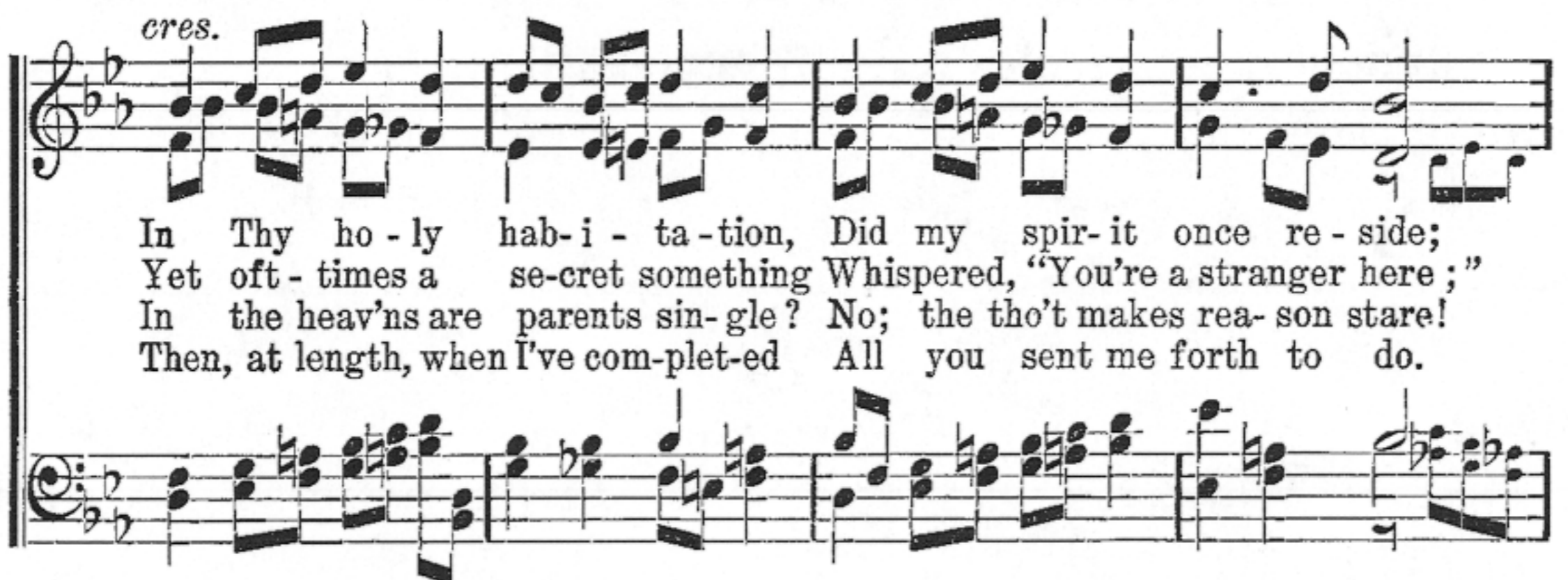
Evan Stephens.

mf Andante con moto. (♩ = 63.)


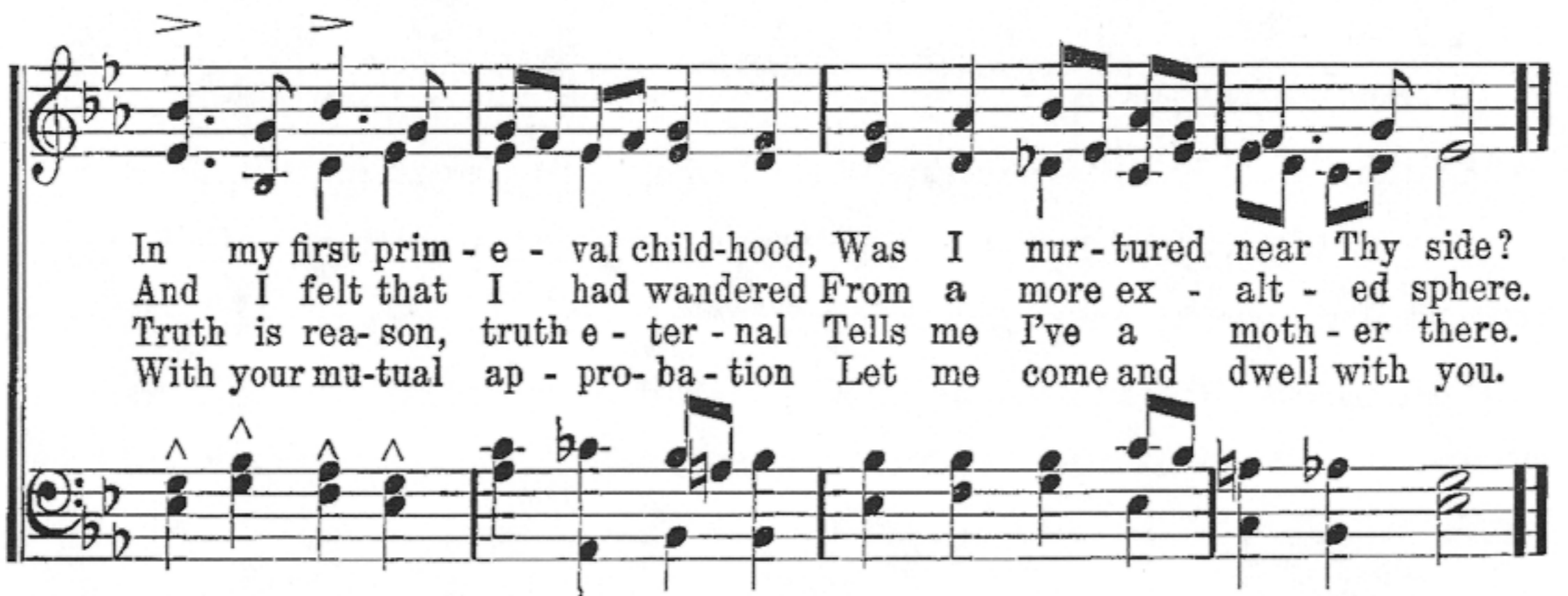
1. O my Fa-ther, Thou that dwellest In the high and glo - rious place!
 2. For a wise and glo - rious pur - pose Thou hast placed me here on earth,
 3. I had learned to call Thee Fa - ther, Thro' Thy Spir - it from on high;
 4. When I leave this frail ex - ist - ence, When I lay this mor - tal by,



When shall I re - gain Thy presence, And a - gain be - hold Thy face?
 And with - held the rec - ol - lec - tion Of my for - mer friends and birth,
 But un - til the Key of Knowledge Was re - stored, I knew not why.
 Fa - ther, Moth - er, may I meet you In your roy - al courts on high?



cres.
 In Thy ho - ly hab - i - ta - tion, Did my spir - it once re - side;
 Yet oft - times a se - cret something Whispered, "You're a stranger here;"
 In the heav'n's are pa - rents sin - gle? No; the tho't makes rea - son stare!
 Then, at length, when I've com - plet - ed All you sent me forth to do.



In my first prim - e - val child - hood, Was I nur - tured near Thy side?
 And I felt that I had wandered From a more ex - alt - ed sphere.
 Truth is rea - son, truth e - ter - nal Tells me I've a moth - er there.
 With your mu - tual ap - pro - ba - tion Let me come and dwell with you.

Fig. 13. Evan Stephens's second setting of "O My Father" as printed in 1927.

Tune") and "Harwell"—which, after all, President Grant had preferred to the other settings.⁴⁴

By the 1970s, "My Redeemer" was the only setting of "O My Father" in most international hymnbooks of the Church. But in 1974, a new committee was appointed to consider revising the current English-language hymnbook and to make the others conform to it. The committee considered both of the then-current tunes for "O My Father" and wrote comments. Of the venerable "Harwell," it said, "This setting has not caught on with the Saints. The music might make a good priesthood hymn." Of the "My Redeemer" tune, the committee wrote: "Of course, this must stay."⁴⁵ Although the hymnbook revision was shelved until the 1980s, subsequent committees concurred with the earlier recommendation and voted to make "My Redeemer" the only tune for "O My Father" in all LDS hymnbooks.

More or less, this setting of "O My Father" has been canonized. And in the canonization, one can learn something of the values that shape the Mormon musical experience. First, Mormons prize familiarity and ease of expression above sophistication and complexity; in Book of Mormon terms, they delight in "plainness" (2 Ne. 31:3). "My Redeemer" has endured not necessarily because it *is* the best setting, according to some aesthetic criterion, but because it *works* the best as a setting that people can sing. Second, when necessary, Latter-day Saints feel free to import plainness from other churches. Even though the pioneer virtue of self-reliance infuses Mormon life, members of the Church happily adopt from others whatever serves their particular religious needs. Third, sacred music—within certain limits—cannot be dictated to the Latter-day Saints but must be embraced by them. The efforts of certain Church musicians notwithstanding, Mormons at large reject any setting but the one they find most pleasing. They will sing only music that wins their hearts. The canonization of the tune for "O My Father" also demonstrates something about the processes of history itself—how, as time unfolds, the seemingly coincidental can lead to aptness, the serendipitous become the inevitable.

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NOTES

¹Eliza R. Snow, "My Father in Heaven," *Times and Seasons* 6 (November 15, 1845): 1039.

²See Heber J. Grant, "Favorite Hymns," *Improvement Era* 17 (June 1914): 777.

³"Gentle Annie," *Golden Wreath*, rev. ed. (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1857), 57.

⁴The first verse of Foster's text is:

Thou wilt come no more, gentle Annie,
Like a flow'r thy spirit did impart;
Thou art gone, alas! like the many
That have bloomed in the summer of my heart. (*Golden Wreath*, 57)

⁵*Deseret News*, June 20, 1855, 120.

⁶Grant, "Favorite Hymns," 777; Augusta Joyce Crocheron, *Representative Women of Deseret: A Book of Biographical Sketches* (Salt Lake City: J. C. Graham, 1884), 2.

⁷Heber J. Grant (b. 1856) recalled that in his "childhood days it was always sung" to this tune ("Favorite Hymns," 777). The *Deseret Evening News* reported in 1908 that "during the early pioneer days . . . and up to a few years since, ['O My Father'] has been most generally linked with the tune known as 'Harwell'" ("The Origin of Some Famous Hymns," *Deseret Evening News*, December 19, 1908, Art Section, 7). The tune had first appeared in Lowell Mason, *Carmina Sacra* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1841), 218, according to Bruce David Maxwell, "Source Book for *Hymns* (1950)," copy of unpublished typescript, 51, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

⁸Eliza R. Snow, *Tune Book for the Primary Associations of the Children of Zion* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1880), 45, LDS Church Archives.

⁹John Tullidge, *The Latter Day Saints' Psalmody* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards [1857]), 13, LDS Church Archives.

¹⁰*Singing Lessons on the Tonic Sol-Fa Method* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Print, 1863), 10-11.

¹¹On the Tonic Sol-Fa system, see Stanley Sadie, ed., "Tonic Sol-Fa," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1980), 19:61-65.

¹²See Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 48-49.

¹³See Minutes of the Union Glee Club (1876-1879), holograph, LDS Church Archives.

¹⁴*The Improvement Association Song Book* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1887), 77.

¹⁵*Utah Musical Times* 2 (August 1, 1877): 69-70.

¹⁶*Juvenile Instructor* 4 (January 15, 1879): 24.

¹⁷For more information about the Sunday School cards, see Hicks, *Mormonism and Music*, 118. Stephens's "O My Father" appeared on the twenty-fourth card (the last one).

¹⁸*Juvenile Instructor* 19 (December 1, 1884): 368. Coincidentally, Smyth had been the editor of the *Improvement Association Song Book*, which used the "Austrian Hymn" setting of "O My Father."

¹⁹See the bass part book (1878), 70, Ebenezer Beesley Papers, Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as BYU Archives). Beesley, however, also considered using yet another setting of "O My Father," a choral arrangement of the song "See the Leaves around Us Falling." See his marked copy of J. R. Thomas, *Thomas' Sacred Music* (New York: Wm. A. Pond, 1866), 40–41, Beesley Papers, BYU Archives.

²⁰Thomas Durham, quoted in "Some of Our Composers," *Juvenile Instructor* 37 (July 15, 1902): 431.

²¹*Relief Society Magazine* 6 (June 1919): 370–72.

²²"Revelation," *Latter-day Saints' Psalmody* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1889), 233.

²³On Stephens's musical work with children, see Ray L. Bergman, *The Children Sang: The Life and Music of Evan Stephens with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir* (Salt Lake City: Northwest Publishing, 1992), 79–100.

²⁴"Origin of Some Famous Hymns," 7.

²⁵"O My Father," *Improvement Era* 16 (October 1913): 1224–25; Grant, "Favorite Hymns," 777. Ironically, a better-known tune from von Flotow's opera, "The Last Rose of Summer," fits Snow's text far better, capturing the same flavor as "Gentle Annie."

²⁶George D. Pyper, *Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1939), 7. Pyper was a member of the quartet that had sung the von Flotow setting at Lucy Grant's funeral (see "Impressive Services," *Deseret Evening News*, January 6, 1893, 8).

²⁷"My Redeemer," *Gospel Hymns* (New York: Biglow and Main, 1894), 577.

²⁸Pyper, *Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns*, 7.

²⁹Pyper, *Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns*, 7.

³⁰See Cornwall, *A Century of Singing: The Salt Lake Mormon Tabernacle Choir* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958), 66.

³¹*Contributor* 16 (February 1895): 263–64.

³²See, for example, *Hymnes a l'usage des branches Françaises de l'Eglise de Jésus-Christ des Saints des Derniers Jours* (Berne: Bureau de la Mission suisse, 1899), which contains both the "Harwell" and "My Redeemer" settings.

³³Thomas C. Griggs, Diary, February 16, 1899, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

³⁴The reference to cheesecloth comes from Griggs, Diary, October 24, 1901: "At choir practice tonight Stephens warned us of the growing taste for wishey-washy [*sic*] 'Cheese-cloth' style of music such as the Moody-Sankey class." For Stephens's related views, see Evan Stephens, "Songs and Music of the Latter-day Saints," *Improvement Era* 17 (June 1914): 760, 765.

³⁵*The Songs of Zion* (Chicago: Northern States Mission, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1908), 83.

³⁶*Deseret Sunday School Songs* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1909), 83, 181.

³⁷Trinity Mixed Quartet Recordings, 1924, LDS Church Archives.

³⁸Church Music Committee Minutes, September 6, 1923, LDS Church Archives.

³⁹Tabernacle Choir Early Recordings, tapes in author's possession.

⁴⁰*Latter-day Saint Hymns* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1927), 34, 395. In the index, Stephens's setting is listed under the title "O My Father, Thou That [Dwellest]"; the "My Redeemer" setting is not listed beside it, but instead appears thirteen lines away, under the (incorrect) title "Oh, My Father."

⁴¹See "Tabernacle Choir Requests," *Church News*, August 28, 1954, 11. See also Cornwall, *Century of Singing*, 308-11.

⁴²J. Spencer Cornwall, Oral History (D), May 3, 1975, typescript of tape recording in LDS Church Archives.

⁴³These quotations are taken from a reminiscence entitled "A Treasured Experience by Bernice J. Manwaring," LDS Church Archives. Manwaring quotes President Grant as saying:

The text of ["O My Father"] is inspired, but I have never been satisfied with any of the musical settings. The familiar McGranahan one is not majestic enough. It is too sentimental and it's too secular. The Lowell Mason is better, but I think it is too martial in spirit. I've heard it sung to other tunes, but none of them are just right. I'm hoping that some day some fine Latter-day Saint musician will write a melody that is as inspired as are Eliza Snow's words.

⁴⁴Pyper, *Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns*, 7. Pyper, referring to the "Harwell" tune, states, "This is President Grant's favorite."

⁴⁵"Proposed Disposition of the Materials in the Present Hymnbook" (ca. 1977); photocopy of manuscript in author's possession.