

Stanfordian Thoughts
A periodical series of reflections on recorded and unrecorded works by Stanford

by Christopher Howell

15. Patriotic Songs

The principal aim of this article is to introduce five patriotic songs – *A Carol of Bells*, *St. George of England*, *The Fair Hills of Ireland*, *St. Andrew's Land* and *Wales for Ever* – which will shortly be appearing on disc¹. It seemed a good opportunity, however, for an overview Stanford's patriotic songs as a whole.

According to his friend and first biographer, Harry Plunket Greene, "Perhaps [Stanford] thought that the *Sea Songs* and the *Fleet Songs* were sufficient testimony to his patriotism"². Mention of Stanford in the context of the patriotic song will very likely bring to mind songs such as *Drake's Drum* and *The Old Superb*, but my concern here is with songs that are written, usually during times of war, with the clear intention of drumming up support for King/Queen and country. *Songs of the Sea* and *Songs of the Fleet* were not written in wartime – they date from 1904 and 1910 respectively. They undoubtedly lend themselves to patriotic occasions, but in the first place they are, as their titles say, songs about the sea and "those that go down to the sea in ships".

A possible response to the First Boer War (1880-1881), which Great Britain lost, was *Hands All Round, a National Song*. The melody by Emily, Lady Tennyson and arranged by C. Villiers Stanford. Tennyson himself altered his original 1852 poem for his wife's setting in 1882. A letter from Stanford to Lady Tennyson, dated 20 February 1882³, shows his sensitivity to vocal means and ranges:

The song is published in two keys, E and F. The latter also because Sankey can't sing it in so low a key. The lie of the notes is (as I think I told you at the time) too low for the ordinary voice to sing with any effect at all – that is if you wish the same voice to sing the high notes as well. I'm afraid that even in the higher key the song won't be as effective when sung as it looks on paper or sounds on the piano; but this we must risk⁴.

Stanford's major response to the Second Boer War (1899-1902) was the choral piece *Last Post*, op. 75, commemorating those who fell in the war. This and Parry's *Thanksgiving Te Deum* were performed during 1900, apparently to celebrate the end of hostilities with the Oath of Neutrality signed on 15th March 1900. Unfortunately, as the history books tell us, this was not the end at all – two years of guerrilla warfare and the invention of concentration camps were yet to come. Stanford published one patriotic song at this time, *Jack Tar* (pub. 1900), for voice and piano but with optional chorus. The text was a *Song for Sailors* that Tennyson wrote, but never published, in 1859, at a time when Louis Napoleon was suspected of anti-British manoeuvres. It surfaced in 1899 in the memoir by

¹ On Da Vinci Classics, sung by Elisabetta Paglia (mezzo-soprano), accompanied by the undersigned.

² Harry Plunket Greene: *Charles Villiers Stanford*, Edward Arnold 1935, p.267.

³ Quoted in Frederick Hudson: *A New Catalogue of the Works of Charles Villiers Stanford 1852-1924, Compiled from the Original Sources*, typescript 1994. Held in the Stanford Collection of Newcastle University and accessible here: https://www.ncl.ac.uk/webtemplate/libraryassets/external/special-collectionsguide/handlists/stanford_charles_villiers_archive.pdf. Retrieved 13.4.2022, M.36.

⁴ The song was published in 1882 by Boosey and reprinted in Hallam Tennyson, *Tennyson and his Friends*, Macmillan, 1911, pp.481-4.

the poet's son⁵. Its companion poem, *Riflemen Form!*, was published in *The Times* in May 1859 and reprinted in Tennyson's last collection, *The Death of Oenone*, in 1892. John Murray Moore, in a book published in 1901 but evidently written before Hallam Tennyson's *Memoir* had become available⁶, felt that the "unpublished" *Song for Sailors* showed that "our Laureate could write a simple song in a rattling metre suitable for a catching tune". The combination of these two books and Stanford's setting of the poem all at about the same time seem more than just coincidence. Maybe Hallam, or Murray, or both, had suggested to Stanford that he might be the man to provide the "catching tune". Moreover, while Stanford wrote plenty of fine tunes, sheer catchiness was not always his line, yet this rollicking piece achieves it. Its relevance to the Boer War, which was fought on land, is somewhat marginal, though, limited to generalized patriotism.

Before moving to the more productive First World War period, a few patriotic effusions not written in times of war need to be mentioned. Back in 1893, Stanford had published *The Old Navy*, to a text by Captain Marryat⁷. Written for Plunket Greene, this seems a prototype for the livelier sea songs to come, and thoroughly enjoyable in its own right⁸.

According to Frederick Hudson⁹, a group of four two-part songs with texts by Conan Doyle were published in 1893 and reprinted in 1907. Hudson also states that the poems were taken from Doyle's *Songs of Action*, published in 1898. Since poems have a way of appearing in magazines before they are collected into volumes, it seemed necessary, before rejecting 1893 as impossible, to investigate the publishing history of the four poems set by Stanford¹⁰.

A Ballad of the Ranks: in *The Speaker: The Liberal Review*, 6 February 1897

The Frontier Line: in *The Speaker*, 12 March 1892, but Stanford set the revised text published in 1898 in *Songs of Action*¹¹

The Old Gray Fox: in *Songs of Action*, 8 June 1898

A Rover Shanty: in *The Speaker, The Liberal Review*, 27 June 1896

Clearly, Stanford's settings could not have been published in 1893. The printed copies have no dates, but the British Library copies have an accession date of 1901, so it is likely they were published in that year, and possibly reissued in 1907. The first two of these songs have a somewhat Kiplingesque patriotic content. The other two, however, are musically more interesting, especially *A Rover Shanty*, a delightful piece in Stanford's nautical vein¹².

In 1908, Stanford issued *Patriotic Songs for Schools, a collection of songs in one, two and three parts, adapted for the use of children, and taken almost entirely from the Song-Book for Schools*¹³. The music arranged and harmonised by C.V. Stanford. The *Song-Book* referred to was published in 1884. I have not seen either publication, so cannot comment further.

⁵ Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred, Lord Tennyson, A Memoir by his Son*, Tauchnitz, 1899, vol. 2 pp.206-7

⁶ John Murray Moore, *Three Aspects of the late Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, Marsden, 1901, p.68.

⁷ The BL copy, and all other known ones, say this is a "new edition", but nothing seems to be known about the previous one.

⁸ An earlier sea song, *A Hymn in Praise of Neptune*, op.19 no. 1 (1882) seems to look back to older models.

⁹ *Ibid.*, K.17.

¹⁰ Information from [https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php/The Poems of Arthur Conan Doyle](https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php/The_Poems_of_Arthur_Conan_Doyle), retrieved 20.8.2022.

¹¹ Both versions can be seen here: [https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php/The Frontier Line](https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php/The_Frontier_Line), retrieved 20 July 2022.

¹² I have also discussed these pieces in article 8 of this series.

¹³ National Society's Depository, London, BL copy dated 1908. Information from Hudson, *ibid.*, M.40.

A mystery surrounds *Britons, guard your own*. The text was again by Tennyson, first published in the *Examiner* of 31 January 1852. As related by Hudson¹⁴, the first page of the score (the first 15 bars) is printed as an advertisement at the end of *The King's Highway*. This latter was published in 1914, but the single page of *Britons* bears a copyright date of 1908. No copy of the complete song, printed or manuscript, is known to exist. It looks as if the type was set for publication in 1908 but put on hold. 1914 could have been a good date to bring it out, but nothing happened then either, perhaps because *The King's Highway* itself was not the roaring success the publishers hoped.

A more straightforward case is the sprightly little unison song *The British Tars*, to a poem by James Hogg, published by the Year Book Press in 1909.

1914 produced the clearly patriotic song *The King's Highway*, with a text by Sir Henry Newbolt, the poet of *Songs of the Sea* and *Songs of the Fleet* and shortly to be the librettist of *The Travelling Companion*. It was sung by Robert Radford at a Queen's Hall Promenade Concert, conducted by Sir Henry Wood, on 25 September 1914. Hudson¹⁵ reproduces a series of letters by Stanford and others concerning this song, from which I quote a part of Stanford's letter to the Prince of Wales' equerry, Lord Stamfordham, dated 27 August 1914:

I have set Newbolt's poem 'The King's Highway' (vide Times of Aug 25¹⁶). I wish to present the royalties on the music to the Prince of Wales' [Relief] Fund for the term of the war. I am enclosing a letter to His Royal Highness to this effect, if you will be so kind as to see that it goes to the proper quarter. ...

I would get it published by the publishers at once, and instruct them to hand all my share of the profits direct to the Fund. These may be large (I hope so) if it is a success performance (sic!).

The best way of securing this is to get a wish from high quarters for its production with a first rate singer (I suggest Radford) at the Queen's Hall Promenade Concerts. I have scored it already. If the desire went direct, it must be done thus. [Private. If it did not, there are German influences there, as you know, which might get in the way.] If His Majesty were so gracious as to accept the invitation, this would, I need not say, greatly help the song and its production capacity.

I have also offered the entire profits to the Fund, but suggest that they wait for the performance before disposing it.

I can only hope that it will hit the nail on the head; one never knows, one can only do one's best.

In terms of dedication, performance and performers, Stanford got his way. As for doing his best, it seems a worthy pendant to the two Newbolt cycles. Was it a success? Wood repeated it on 13 October, sung this time by Ivor Foster, but it did not achieve the popular triumph of Elgar's *Carillon* later the same year. The orchestral score seems not to have survived, so we have only the printed song for voice and piano with optional chorus.

The insinuation, in the above letter, of "German influences" may seem gratuitous in the context. As Plunket Greene relates, Stanford became rather obsessed with conspiracy theories during the war:

¹⁴ Ibid, L.40

¹⁵ Ibid, L.46

¹⁶ The poem was first published in *The Times* of that date

He was an avowed and unashamed believer in the Russian armies which in the early days of the war were supposed to be secreted somewhere in the Highlands, and doggedly stuck to it long after they had been disposed of. He was continually receiving private information from irresponsible people of secret British victories, either already won or in the plotting¹⁷.

Another contribution to the war effort in 1914 was the publication in the *Daily Telegraph* of *But lo! There breaks a yet more glorious day*. Some catalogues have listed this as an independent work, but it is simply the relevant verse of *Engelberg*, Stanford's setting of *For all the Saints*.

On Christmas Day, 1915, he completed a song which achieved some popularity, to judge from the number of second hand copies floating around – *A Carol of Bells*. The words were by Louis N[apoleon] Parker (1852-1944), a prolific dramatist and also a composer. Stanford had provided incidental music for Parker's play *Drake* in 1912. *A Carol of Bells* was issued in 1916 as a solo song, subsequently as a vocal duet in 1918 and as a part-song for SATB in 1919. I have only seen the solo song version. This presents a mystery, since I have two copies with slightly different words. Both bear the copyright date of 1916. The forthcoming recording uses what I believe to be the later version. My grounds for this are that this presumed later version refers, on the cover, to the existence of the duet version. Also, it mentions two songs "by the same composer", *Devon Men*, also published in 1916, and *St. George of England*, published in 1917, while the postulated earlier version lists only *Devon Men*. It would seem that the publisher quietly adjusted the plates without depositing a new copyright.

A Carol of Bells was immediately recorded by Gervase Elwes¹⁸, using the earlier words. The brief piano introduction and postlude are omitted, probably for lack of space, though possibly Elwes was using a manuscript not yet finalized for publication. The song has great verve, while pausing occasionally to recall the plight of the sister bells in Belgium and France. Along the way, it quotes the chimes of Big Ben, alludes to *Oranges and Lemons* without quite citing it and concludes with a snatch of *God save the King*. The final bars are unusually dissonant for Stanford. Here is the poem in what I believe to be the later version, with the variants indicated in footnotes:

*Ring, joyous bells of London,
Swing wildly with a will,
Sing loudly over sea and strand
Until your voices reach the land,
Where all the bells are still.
The carillons of Ypres,
The chimes of Arras town,
They hear you and they throb to you,
But cannot even sob to you
(Toll sadly, bells of London,
Your sister-bells are undone),
The Huns have torn them down.
Swing, joyous bells; ring, London bells;
Sing on without abating,
And tell them we are waiting¹⁹.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.267-8

¹⁸ L 1152, issued April 1917. The pianist was Frederick Kiddle. On the "other side", Elwes sang Handel's *Where'er you walk*.

¹⁹ Earlier version: *Sing through this dark december, / And tell them we remember*.

"Greeting to all!"
 Boom the bells of St. Paul;
 "Our loves never vary,"
 Vow the bells of Saint Mary;
 "Our hearts are aglow,"
 Growls the great bell of Bow;
 "'Tis far you were from us,"
 Clash the bells of St. Thomas;
 "And long you were gone,"
 Add the bells of St. John;
 "Here come the men!"²⁰
 Thunders Big Ben.

Swing gladly, ring devoutly,
 Sing solemnly and say:
 "Wherever British speech is heard,
 Wherever British hearts are stirred,
 There is one thought to-day,
 In palace and in cottage,
 In vicarage and manse,
 Your kindred wait and pray for you,
 And consecrate the day for you;
 Pray gladly, pray devoutly,
 For all who battled stoutly
 In Flanders or in France.
 Swing, joyous bells; ring, London bells;
 Sing on without abating,
 And tell them we are waiting²¹.

"God made us glad,"
 Shout the bells of St. Chad;
 "Hope ever smiles,"
 Laugh the bells of St. Giles;
 "Maid waits for man",
 Say the bells of St. Ann;
 "Come home and meet her,"
 Sigh the bells of St. Peter;
 "In terra pax,"
 Sings Simmery Axe;
 "Here come the men!"
 Thunders Big Ben²².

And all sing in tune,
 "Let flow'rs be strewn!"

²⁰ Earlier version: *Quit you like men!*

²¹ Earlier version: *Sing through this dark December, / And tell them we remember.*

²² In the earlier version, as printed on the inside cover, the words were *"Victory's sartin' " / Roar the bells of St. Martin,* but Stanford replaced these with *Here come the men", / Thunders Big Ben.*

*In tune they all sing,
"God save the King!"²³*

Another patriotic song, in that it extols the virtues of a part of Britain and its people, was *Devon Men*, also published in 1916. The poet, Percy Haselden (1895-1916), was actually from Liverpool and was posted missing in action after the Battle of the Somme on 30 July 1916. The song is attractive enough, but Edward German had rather cornered that share of the market with *Glorious Devon* (published 1905), a glorious song indeed.

St. George of England (published 1917) was to be the first of four songs to poetry by Cicely Fox Smith, each dedicated to one of the countries of the British Isles. The others, *The Fair Hills of Ireland*, *St. Andrew's Land* and *Wales for Ever*, followed in 1918. In the forthcoming recording I have taken the liberty of calling them *Four Patriotic Songs*, which they undoubtedly are. Though not actually issued as a set, they make an enjoyable group.

Cicely Fox Smith (1882-1954) led an adventurous life in which the sea and ships figured largely. In the Scottish song, she imitates dialect forms ably, even excessively. *Wales for Ever* was also provided with a Welsh translation by the Reverend Elvet Lewis. Since these poems are still copyright, I will quote only extracts, according to the principle of fair use.

A text such as that of *St. George of England* might have drawn from Parry or Elgar music in *Jerusalem* or *Land of Hope and Glory* vein. Stanford's treatment is rollicking, even cocky. It is a good tune, nevertheless. All verses have the same music, but the verse itself divides into three distinct sections, avoiding monotony. Here is the third:

*St. George he was a fighting man, he's here and fighting still,
While any wrong is yet to right or dragon yet to kill;
And faith! He's finding work today to suit his warrior sword,
For he's fighting foes in Flanders to the glory of the Lord.
St. George he is a fighting man, but when his fighting's past,
And dead among the trampled fields the dragon lies at last,
The fiercest dragon earth has known beneath his feet laid low,
Oh, his heart will turn to England,
To England, April England,
He'll come home to rest in England,
Where the golden willows blow!*

The Fair Hills of Ireland obviously found Stanford on home turf, a lyrical, flowing song which maybe does not add anything to the several other lyrical, flowing songs he wrote about Ireland. It begins:

*The fair hills of Ireland, they're the sweetest hills I know,
With silver skies above them and the soft rain dropping slow,
And St. Patrick bless'd the little hills, because he lov'd them so,
The fair, green hills of holy Ireland.*

²³ Earlier version: *And they all sing in tune, / "May it be soon!" / And in tune they all sing, / "God save the King!"* Stanford omitted "they" from the first line and "And" from the second.

St. Andrew's Land has a more individual place in Stanford's output. The opening, with its sweeping arpeggios and modal harmonies, evokes vividly the "Cauld winds o' November", while it later relates lovingly how "the pine is aye green on the mountains of hame" and gathers patriotic fervour for the refrain:

*Oh, Scotland's braes are fair, and Scotland's glens are bonnie,
And St. Andrew's land's the land that I lo'e best of ony!*

Wales for Ever is perhaps the least interesting of the four, certainly the least varied. Yet its melodic shapes illustrate well the sweeping Cambrian mountains and Stanford helps it along its way with quotations from *Men of Harlech* and *The Bells of Aberdovey* with a suggestion, maybe, of *Ar Hyd Y Nos* at the end. It also offers the singer a "good sing", in contrast to Stanford's usually more subtle manner.

A further Tennyson setting, *There is no land like England*, published as a unison song in 1919, completes the list of Stanford's patriotic songs. This early poem (1828-9) was recycled in *The Foresters* (1892), with its refrain rewritten to eliminate the original anti-French tirades.

Readers will have noticed that none of the songs discussed in this article have opus numbers. Probably Stanford regarded them as a form of musical journalism. Nevertheless, he was almost incapable of writing a song that was less than attractive. If the aim was "to hit the nail on the head", as he said himself in the letter quoted above, then all these songs achieve at least that, and often much more.

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