Every Soul and Every Nation
by
James Russell Lowell

General
SATB

The music for this anthem is the shape-note hymn JEFFERSON, which I have taken from the 1849 edition of Southern Harmony by William Walker. The words are drawn from the 1844 poem "The Present Crisis" by James Russell Lowell (1819–1891).

Though the music and lyric are thus contemporaneous, matching the words of a Harvard man of letters—an urban, New England Lowell—with the rural tradition of shape-note singing might seem incongruous. In fact, Lowell was a pioneering linguist with a deep and democratic love for rural dialect. In The Biglow Papers of 1846–48 Lowell expresses his abhorrence over slavery and the Mexican-American War through characters speaking what he calls "homely dialect":

   ...I imagined to myself such an upcountry man as I had often seen at anti-slavery gatherings, capable of district-school English, but always instinctively falling back into the natural stronghold of his homely dialect when heated to the point of self-forgetfulness.

Lowell's central character, Hosea Biglow, is an irrepresible moralist:

   Wut's the use of meetin'-goin,
   Every Sabbath, wet or dry,
   Ef it's right to go a-mowin
   Feller-men—like oats and rye?

I think it plausible that Lowell would also value "homely dialect" of a musical kind, as heard in upcountry gatherings of shape-note singers.

"The Present Crisis" is a lengthy poem, comprising 18 stanzas of 5 lines each. Much of its imagery relates specifically to slavery and the Mexican War. All who have undertaken to adapt the poem to a hymn of wider moral application have found it necessary to select lines, dispersed throughout the poem, that are less closely bound to the 1840s. The aggregates that result might displease the poet. Yet the process of selecting and adapting, as I have done here, is unavoidable if church hymnody is to be enriched by what one biographer has called the poem's "sonorous and inspiring expression of moral passion."

Albert Blackwell
March 7, 2012
Every Soul and Every Nation

James Russell Lowell, 1844, alt.

Jefferson, The Sacred Harp, 1849
arr. Albert Blackwell

Melody

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Acc.

Performance suggestion: Let verse 1 consist of the A & T melody only; verse 2 of ATB; and verse 3 of SATB.

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in the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side,
slow to grasp how weak an arm may turn the iron helm of fate.
Truth forever on the scaffold; on the throne forever, Wrong:

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slow to grasp how weak an arm may turn the iron helm of fate.
Truth forever on the scaffold; on the throne forever, Wrong:

in the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side,
slow to grasp how weak an arm may turn the iron helm of fate.
Truth forever on the scaffold; on the throne forever, Wrong:
Some great cause, God's new disclosure, offers each the bloom or blight,
New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth;
yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,

Some great cause, God's new disclosure, offers each the bloom or blight,
New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth;
yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,

Some great cause, God's new disclosure, offers each the bloom or blight,
New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth;
yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
and the choice goes twixt the darkness and the light.
they must upward still, and onward, who would keep a breast of truth.
God is standing in the shadow, till glad truth's full light be shown.

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