

German-American History-

GERMAN MUSIC AND SONG - PART I

If for no other contribution to its culture and development, the American people owe a debt of gratitude to the Germans for having brought into its social life some brightening rays of sunshine.

Whoever studies the social life of the early settlers, in particular that of the Puritans, Quakers and other sectarians, will find that it was dominated by two aims strangely opposed to each other, the one, an intensive striving for material gain, the other, laying up stores for the life hereafter.

The pursuit of these objects rendered the earthly existence of the Anglo Americans so grave and joyless that visitors to this country were repelled by its melancholic monotony. Such was the experience of the British authoress Frances Trollope recorded in her famous book "Domestic Manners of the Americans." Having traveled in this country from 1827 to 1831, she felt herself justified in saying: "I never saw a population so totally divested of gaiety; there is no trace of this feeling from one end of the Union to the other. They have no fetes, no fairs, no merry-makings, no music in the streets."

To have brought a change in this joyless life is the great merit of the Germans, who made America their home. When they emigrated from the beloved fatherland, their cheerfulness, good humor and love for music and song were the most valuable treasures; they brought with them to our shores. With their sunny mind they enriched our nation, while she was in the process of evolution, to such a degree, that the American people should have to the Germans no other feeling but deep gratitude.

There was a great difference in the religious service of the Puritans and Quakers and of that of the Germans. While the first abhorred music and singing the latter enjoyed the wonderful impressive hymns and the great symphonies of Martin Luther, Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart and other composers of the 17th and 18th centuries. Visitors, who heard these songs in Bethlehem and in the Ephrata cloister, confessed that they were overwhelmed by the impressive cadence of the chorals of the combined choirs, of the angelic or celestial quality of the vocal music.

But these musical exercises were not confined to religious meetings exclusively. From the history of the Moravians we know, that they had songs for their daily work as well. Bishop Spangenberg, head of the community during the middle of the 18th century states: "Never since the creation of this world have been invented and used such lovely songs for shepherds, farmers, reapers, threshers, Spinners, seamstresses and other working people than here. It would be easy, to make up a whole volume with these beautiful melodies."

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