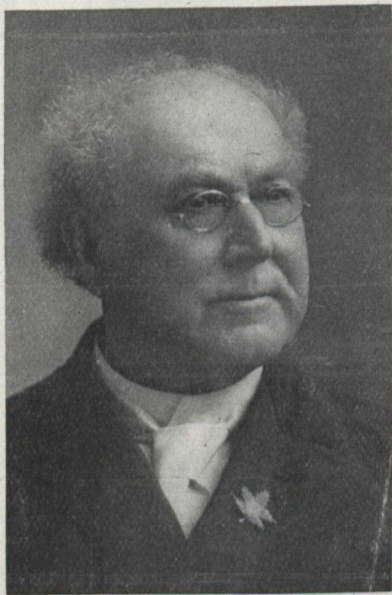


A RED HOT MUSICAL CONTROVERSY

Has Canada an Original National Anthem? Phalanxes drawn up in Wordy Warfare, Discuss the Merits and Demerits of "O Canada," and "The Maple Leaf Forever."

By SEVERAL CRITICS

A RECENT issue of the CANADIAN COURIER contained an interview with Dr. Williams, the leader of the Grenadier Guards' Band, which has just returned to England after a considerable visit to this country. That interview has stirred up much talk and comment. One of the chief points in the discussion is the relative



The late Alexander Muir, who wrote "The Maple Leaf Forever."

faults of the "Maple Leaf Forever" and "O Canada!" An interview which appears in the Toronto Evening Telegram runs in part as follows:

"The Maple Leaf Forever" has done more to keep Canada British than all the speeches and reports of the local leaders and organisations that have sat even here in Toronto, and aided in a musical movement to sterilise every mention

of the flag and Empire of Britain out of the songs of this nation," said an earnest Canadian.

"O Canada" had a great innings at the Montreal Congress. The original words attached to the tune are beautiful in their devout significance, but why should the ultramontane anthem of a church and state enthusiasm be forced upon children who do not want to be divorced from a song that has proved its value in the strengthening of British and Canadian sentiment?

"The 'O Canada' boomers were not content with loving the song they discovered. They must needs hate the good old 'Maple Leaf Forever,' and make war on a song that had fairly sung its way into the hearts of thousands of Canadians. The 'Maple Leaf Forever' had no Mendelssohn choirs to illumine the defects of its nature with the splendours of Dr. Vogt's art. The children at the Provincial Model School were taught that 'O Canada' was a masterpiece and worthy to rank with the great historic songs of the nations. 'The Maple Leaf Forever' was almost run out of the Toronto Public Schools, and nearly dropped from the programme at the Public School concerts."

Just here it may be well to recall the views of Dr. Williams as they appeared in the COURIER. His remarks concerning "O Canada" ran as follows:

"You see," he said critically, "it's by no means quite original with—what's his name again?"

"Calixta Lavallee." I told him the story of how it came to be composed in 1881.

"Listen," he said; and he hummed a military air. "Do you see any resemblance?"

"Quite decidedly. Yes, but—"

"That's Handel's 'Scipio March,' which we play a great deal. I don't say 'O Canada' is a plagiarism on it; perhaps an unconscious similarity. Still 'O Canada' has many of the qualities of a really fine national hymn."

to whether the hymn which first rolled out down in Quebec thirty years ago is original. That is the attitude of Dr. Williams. He sees a similarity between "O Canada" and Handel's "Scipio March." Says Dr. Williams:—

"I don't say 'O Canada' is a plagiarism on it; perhaps an unconscious similarity." Those who hold to the view that "O Canada" is reminiscent of other melodies, allege that on that account it is defective as the national anthem. This allegation does not pass unchallenged. Dr. A. S. Vogt, of the Mendelssohn Choir, to whose efforts must be largely attributed the vocal popularity of the anthem in middle Canada, freely admits Dr. Williams' charge that "O Canada" is suggestive of Handel's "Scipio March." He adds that it also sounds like one of Mozart's marches. But, however, the choir leader sees no great objection in that. Interviewed by the COURIER Dr. Vogt remarked:—

"I take it that there is no work of art, be it music, literature or painting, which does not to some extent borrow from its predecessors. What's new under the sun? 'O Canada' is what I call original. The expression of a strong personality, it is distinct; it's Canadian. Its music is as far removed from that of the other so-called Canadian national anthems as the Poles. You can't forget it."

Another gentleman of the musical profession took up the "Scipio March" point of Dr. Williams.

"I am going to give you three old songs," he said. He hummed over Dunferline, French and Winchester Old. In spots you would think that the song you heard was the previous one. The three have striking similarities. "There you have it! The 'Scipio March' and 'O Canada' is an example of the same thing—just freaky coincidence. Now, who would say that 'Winchester Old' was plagiarised from Dunferline!"

Besides the question of its originality, another criticism is hurled at the music of "O Canada." This introduces the question of taste. There are many Canadians who are impressed by the majesty of the "O Canada" anthem. A citizen, interviewed by the Telegram, commenting as follows, thinks it funeral:

"The whole theory of the 'O Canada' boom was bound up in the belief that there was surpassing musical excellence in the tune, and did you notice that at the Exhibition the dirge-like effect of the massed bands as they groaned out the tune until the spectators were looking out for the gun carriage with the draped casket and the other incidents of a military funeral."

He also complains about the words of "O Canada," and "ultramontane anthem." He enquires indignantly why "O Canada" should be forced upon children. The suggestion of coercion arouses a singing master, well known for his choral work in connection with the public schools of Ontario, to repudiation:

"Why you don't have to push 'O Canada,'" he said. "The youngsters learn it like their A, B, C's. Frequently I have written the words on the blackboard—not a bit of music in sight. The whole class will burst into song as I write. In Ontario scarcely a school concert but 'O Canada' is on the programme, with 'God Save the King.'"

Another editor jumps into the melee and speaks as follows:

Lavallee's noble melody, "O Canada!" has found acceptance from Halifax to Vancouver. It belonged to Quebec until two years ago. Then it became the possession of all Canada. The only thing Canada regrets is that the treasure was discovered so late. The Champlain Tercentenary brought the tune to the front. No sooner was the dust brushed off than musicians, connoisseurs, and, best of all, the great mass of the Canadian people, recognised in it the grand simplicity which makes a national anthem. Earl Grey made it the fashion. Dr. Vogt handed it over to his Mendelssohn Choir and made it a classic. Bandmasters found in it a body of tone that lent itself to great effects with

the brasses and made it a stock piece. The school children all over Canada took it up, sang it, and made it popular in the home. Nowhere else in the world can a national anthem show such growth in two years' time. Lieutenant Williams of the Grenadier Guards band says that "O Canada!" is reminiscent of the "Scipio March." Perhaps. Most national anthems are reminiscent of something or other—some folk tune, some chord in the people's hearts. They would not become national anthems if they were not. Meanwhile, reminiscent or not, "O Canada!" is good enough to keep. It goes everywhere. When Sir Wilfrid Laurier got off the boat at Prince Rupert, just one step from the Arctic Circle, the band played "O Canada!" So far as Canada is concerned, it is like what Kipling says of "God Save the King":

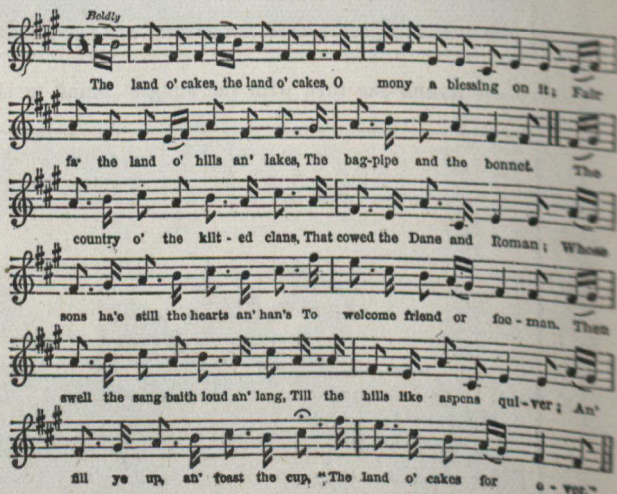
"You can't get away
From the tune that they play
And the bloomin' old rag overhead."

So much for "O Canada." As Dr. Williams said: "I have been also told that 'The Maple Leaf' is the thing." A correspondent writes to the COURIER and throws the searchlight on Alexander Muir's song as the national anthem. He states definitely the original Scotch air to which the words of "The Maple Leaf" have been fitted—"The Land o' Cakes." This Scotch song was written by John Imlah—air "Black Watch," and was known as the march of the gallant Forty-second Royal Highland Regiment. The words of "Land o' Cakes" are these:—

The land o' cakes, the land o' cakes,
O mony a blessing on it;
Fair fa' the land o' hills an' lakes,
The bagpipe and the bonnet
The country o' the kilted clans,
That cowed the Dane and Roman;
Whose sons hae still the hearts an' han's
To welcome friend or foe-man.
Then swell the sang both loud an' lang,
Till the hills like aspens quiver;
An' fill ye up, an' toast the cup,
"The land o' cakes for-e-ver."

Be scorn'd the Scot within whose heart,
Nae patriot flame is burning;
Wha kent nae pain frae hame to part,
Nae joy when back returning.
Nae love for him in life shall yearn,
Nae tears in death deplore him;
He hath nae coronach nor cairn,
Wha shames the land that bore him.
Then swell the sang, etc.

Fair flow'r the gowans in our glens,
The heather on our mountains;
The bluebells deck our wizard dens,
An' kiss our sparking fountains.
On knock an' knowe, the whin an' broom,
An' on the braes the breckan;
Not even Eden's flow'rs in bloom
Could sweeter blossoms reckon.
Then swell the sang, etc.



This reproduction of the music of "The Land o' Cakes" was taken from a rare book entitled "Lyric Gems of Scotland," in the possession of Mr. Wm. Campbell, Toronto.

When flows our quegh within the glen,
Within the hall our glasses,
We'll toast "Auld Scotland's honest men,"
Thrice o'er "Her bonnie lasses";
An' deep we'll drink "The Queen an' kirk,"
"Our country an' our freedom";
Wi' broad claymore, an' Highland dirk,
We're ready when they need them.
Then swell the sang, etc.

Follows the letter containing the references to

The Telegram's article would indicate that there are two ways by which the critic may get his knife into "O Canada." He may slam the music of the piece; or he may attack the words. For instance, in criticising the music of "O Canada" there are some people who boldly express their doubt as