

WILL S. HAYS
HIS LIFE AND WORKS
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ABSTRACT

WILL S. HAYS, HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Will S. Hays was born in Louisville, Kentucky, July 19, 1837, son of Martha Richardson Hays and Hugh Hays. His schooling stopped with his first year in college, during which he tried three different schools. He early started working for newspapers, and for more than forty years he was with the leading papers of Louisville, including the Democrat, the Journal, the Weekly Commercial, and the Courier-Journal.

Hays' fame rests primarily upon his abilities as a song writer. He published more than three hundred songs which sold more than six million copies. These songs are mostly sentimental ballads, but he did more serious work in the form of instrumental solos, orchestral and choral selections. He wrote the words and the music to these songs with very little advanced education and next to no training in music. Hays and his publisher, D. P. Faulds, claimed for him the original version of "Dixie," but there is insufficient evidence to grant him this honor. To have sold two million copies of "Mollie Darling" all over the world is fame enough.

Besides writing the lyrics for his songs, Will S. Hays

published three books of poems dated 1874, 1886, and 1895. His verse is occasional and sentimental for the most part and hardly immortal, but it is homey, appealing, and often musical.

Hays' fame has not persisted with the general public, but he achieved notable success during his lifetime and still gets an occasional periodical or anthology notice today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of Mr. Sam M. Hays, grandson of Will S. Hays, who granted the writer access to private papers and music which had been collected by his grandmother and by his aunt, Mrs. Fauche Warren Samuel. This material is referred to in the footnotes as belonging to the "Hays Collection" and may be found now in the Kentucky Library, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Invaluable assistance was rendered by the Louisville Free Public Library, the Kentucky Library of Western Kentucky State Teachers College, the Filson Club Library, the Joint University Libraries, and the Library of Congress.

Personal correspondence with the writer by persons answering newspaper appeals for information supplied much from personal reminiscence which could not have been gathered otherwise. Individual reference is made to these in the text.

Miss Fannie Elizabeth Stoll of Louisville wrote a master's thesis on Will S. Hays at the University of Kentucky in 1943 to which the present writer had access. It was used in the preparation of this thesis only to furnish titles for the musical compositions list, Appendix A, which contains more than a hundred more titles than does that of

Miss Stoll. Though Miss Stoll worked with Mrs. Samuel (not Samuels, as she spells it) in preparation of her thesis, it contains errors which are pointed out here. Mrs. Samuel apparently did not grant her access to her parents' love letters or to "Leisure Moments," which Mr. Sam Hays generously permitted the writer to refer to after Mrs. Samuel's death. The additional information thus gained provided more detailed and accurate information than was otherwise available. A conclusion regarding Hays' connection with "Dixie" was reached in this thesis different from that of Miss Stoll's as the result of information provided by a librarian of the Library of Congress. Generally speaking, this writer has attempted to investigate more deeply than did Miss Stoll and has produced a work approximately twice the volume of the other.

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Photograph
of
Wall & Chapel

Figure 1

CHAPTER I

HIS LIFE

The man who became known to millions as Will S. Hays was born July 19, 1837, in Louisville, Kentucky, on Main Street just above Market. Whether he was christened ¹William or ²William Shakespeare is uncertain. It is likely the "Shakespeare" came later.

Will's father was Hugh Hays, an enterprising business man who had come to the falls of the Ohio from Pennsylvania in 1832, only forty years after Kentucky became a state. ³ Seeing the opportunities in the new agricultural lands beyond the mountains, he started manufacturing farm implements of various sorts. ⁴ In partnership with Isaac Cooper he later sold the famous "Old Hickory" wagons and "Henry ⁵Clay" plows. Not long after settling in Louisville, Hugh ⁶married Miss Martha Richardson of that town.

Will seems to have been very devoted to his mother for there are numerous references to her in his songs and poems. She died when he was only eleven leaving, besides Will,

1. Louisville Times, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

2. Letter from Howard D. McCullough, nephew of Hays, to writer, June 1, 1947.

3. Wade, John D., in Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), VIII, 464.

4. Louisville Courier-Journal, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

5. Handwritten note by Mrs. F. W. Samuel, Hays' daughter, Hays Collection.

6. Louisville Courier-Journal, loc. cit.

7

Three other sons, E. W., Theodore, and Robert. In April of 1847, realizing that she was on her deathbed, Mrs. Martha Hays addressed a letter to her son, "William Hays," saying that she felt "desirous of leaving...a letter, containing, the sentiments, of my affectionate regard...and my dying advice." She implored him to remember her and to love, honor, and obey his father. Further she admonished him to read the Scriptures, to pray, and to go to church consistently as she had done. In words bespeaking a close familiarity with the Bible and religious thought, she concluded the three page letter with these words:

May you so live, so believe, and so act,
as that when you shall come to die, may
you be received, into everlasting habitations,
through riches of grace, in Christ Jesus,
and unite with me, and your dear little
brother, and sister, who has (Sic) gone before
us, in singing salvation, to him who sitteth,
on the throne, and to the lamb for ever and for
ever, is the fervent prayer of your very
affectionate dying mother, Martha Hays.⁸

Little is known of the boyhood and early life of Will.

When he was old enough he went to a private preparatory school run by a Mrs. Yubank, whose reputation at that time in Louisville was well established.⁹ Early evidencing some interest and ability in music, he was given violin lessons

7. Louisville Times, loc. cit.

8. Letter to William Hays from his mother, April 11, 1847, Hays Collection.

9. Louisville Times, loc. cit.

with Professor William Plato, but these lasted only a few
¹⁰
 weeks, despite the fact that Plato was esteemed in his
 day as one of those "to whom is due, in large degree, the
¹¹
 excellence of musical taste among us." It is not recorded
 which of the parties severed their relations. So far as
 is known, Will had no further musical education than this,
 though he was able to perform on virtually any musical in-
¹²
 strument. Whether more extended musical training would
 have helped or retarded his genius is a matter of interest-
 ing conjecture.

In 1856, when Will was nineteen, he was a member of
 the Junior Class of the Preparatory Department of Hanover
¹³
 College, Hanover, Indiana. For some reason he did not
 stay long there and went to a college in Clarksville,
¹⁴
 Tennessee. He appears as one of eighty-three freshmen at
 Georgetown College, Georgetown, Kentucky, during the school
¹⁵
 year 1856-57 as "W. S. Hays." Though none of these colleges
 could give any clue as to his performance while there, it

10. Temple Bodley and Samuel M. Wilson, History of Kentucky the Bluegrass State (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1928), IV, 607.

11. J. Stoddard Johnston, (ed.), Memorial History of Louisville (Chicago: American Biographical Publishing Company, 1896), II, 96.

12. Biographical Encyclopaedia of Kentucky (Cincinnati: J. M. Armstrong and Company, 1878), p. 174.

13. Letter from Emma May Hill, Assistant Registrar, Hanover College, to writer, June 27, 1947.

14. Wade, loc. cit.

15. Catalogue, Georgetown College, Kentucky, 1856-57.

16
seems evident that he was not a serious student.

Whether Will learned anything in his few college months is not revealed to us, but he was starting himself then on the way to temporary fame. In 1856 while at Hanover he wrote and published his first song, "Little Ones At Home."¹⁷ He had previously written "Evangelizing," but it was not published until 1862.¹⁸ While at Georgetown Hays became known as the "boy poet,"¹⁹ and because of his writing is said to have been nicknamed "Shakespears" by his classmates, a name which he liked and adopted.²⁰ There is no incontrovertible evidence on this point.

Some sources say that Will S. came back to Louisville and immediately went to work for the Democrat as a reporter.²¹ His obituary says that in 1858 he went to work with this newspaper as mailing clerk, being soon transferred to the writing department as local editor.²² The city directories of the period, however, list him in 1858 as clerk in the firm of Hays and Cooper on East Main, his father's store.²³

16. Bess A. Ray, (ed.), Biographical and Critical Materials Pertaining to Kentucky Authors (Louisville: Louisville Free Public Library, 1941, WPA), p. 166.

17. Biographical Encyclopaedia of Kentucky, loc. cit.

18. Ibid.

19. Handwritten note by Mrs. Samuel, Hays Collection.

20. Louisville Times, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

21. John W. Leonard, (ed.), Who's Who In America, 1906-7 (Chicago: A. N. Marquis Company, 1906), p. 806.

22. Louisville City Directory and Business Mirror, 1858-9 (Louisville: Hurd and Burrows), p. 81.

In the next directory he was evidently confused with another William Hays, who later appears alongside Will S.,
²⁴
 as here by himself, as an engineer. In 1861 Will is still
²⁵
 listed as a clerk. It seems certain, at any rate, that
 he was not working during this time for George D. Prentice,
²⁶
 editor of the Democrat, as Miss Stoll says, for Mr. Prentice was editor of the Louisville Journal at this period and was violently at odds most of the time with the editorial staff of the Democrat.
²⁷

There is a definite indication that during the period prior to the outbreak of the Civil War Hays was connected with the Democrat, or at least with some newspaper. On October 1, 1870, a man named Hiram Percy Hawkins wrote him a letter reminding him that ten or twelve years before Hays had taken him into his "printing office" and had given him a place to sleep after finding the boy cold and hungry at the old Louisville post office. The next morning Hays had given this boy, who was from the Kentucky mountains and on his way to an uncle's farm, some clothes, three dollars, and free passage on a steamer to St. Louis which he had

" 24. Henry Tanner, Louisville Business Directory and Advertiser, 1859-60 (Louisville: Maxwell and Company), p. 106.

25. Henry Tanner, Louisville Business Directory and Advertiser, 1861 (Louisville: Maxwell and Company), p. 116.

26. Fannie E. Stoll, "Will S. Hays," (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Kentucky, 1943), p. 7.

27. Johnston, op. cit., p. 67.

14

Managed to arrange. In 1870 the boy was a man, with service in the army behind him, owning his uncle's farm, married, and a recent father. He was writing Hays to tell him that in accord with a four line poem given to him on that cold winter day, he had named his son William Hays Hawkins.²⁸ This is indicative not only of the fact that Hays was by this time a newspaper man of some sort but also that he had some acquaintance on the river and was a man of a sympathetic nature. These discrepancies as to his newspaper service may be only apparent since Hays could have been doing newspaper work simultaneously with his other jobs, work which may have been of little importance compared with his other positions.

City directories did not appear during the Civil War period, and our knowledge of where Will S. Hays was and what he was doing then is rather uncertain. He was reported in the Louisville Weekly Commercial, November 24, 1887, as having been first with the Democrat, and later with the Journal and Prentice. Since he was the editor at this time of the Commercial, this surely is reliable. One of Hays' obituaries says he worked on the Journal for a year or two²⁹ after the War as amanuensis to Prentice. On a poem by

28. Mrs. Will S. Hays, Scrapbook, quoting letter, Hays Collection, pp. 103-5.

29. Louisville Times, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

Hays entitled, "Lines to My Best Girl," written in 1864,
 there is a note to the effect that this was written in the
³⁰
Journal office. A letter written by him August 27, 1864,
³¹
 is datelined the Democrat office, This should establish
 the time of his work with the Journal as well as evidence
 the brevity of it. Since the city directories for the period
³²
 1865 to 1868 list him as working for the Democrat, it
 seems likely that he continued with that paper up until
³³
 its absorption by the new Courier-Journal in 1868.

During the Civil War dispatches and poems signed with
 his name or initials and dated from behind the battlefronts
 appeared frequently in the Democrat, while river news, for
 which he is supposed to have been responsible, ahrank in
³⁴
 volume. There is a poem dated June 1, 1861, written at
 the Hermitage, Nashville, Tennessee, which appeared in the
³⁵
 Sunday Louisville Democrat, called "The American Flag."
 It was decidedly pro-Union, though Hays is thought by some
³⁶
 to have been always pro-Confederate. Such dispatches as

30. Mrs. F. W. Samuel, Her manuscript copies of Hays' poems, Hays Collection.

31. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, August 27, 1864, Hays Collection.

32. Edwards' Annual Directory, City of Louisville (Louisville: Edwards, Greenough, and Deved), 1865-66, p. 314; and 1867-68, p. 238.

33. T. D. Clark, History of Kentucky (New York: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1937), p. 345.

34. Ray, op. cit., p. 167

35. Mrs. F. W. Samuel, Her manuscript copies of Hays' poems, Hays Collection.

36. Ray, loc. cit.

these, though not always of news value, give to Hays the
distinction of being Louisville's first war correspondent. ³⁷

In the same year he had a song published by Trip and Cragg
of Louisville called "The Union Forever," a decidedly anti-
secession number done up in red, white and blue colors. ³⁸

It is difficult to classify Will S. Hays as either
Yankee or Rebel. During the War, in 1863 or 1864 or both,
he piloted the steamboat "Gray Eagle" up and down the
Mississippi between New Orleans and Vicksburg. Though said
to have been often under fire, he was never in serious
trouble. ³⁹ That is, he did not have any trouble until he
composed a song on board the "Gray Eagle". During the time
General Benjamin Butler was Federal Commandant of New Orleans.
Hearing of this song, entitled, "My Sunny Southern Home,"
General Butler ordered the arrest of its author, and he was
placed in jail and not released until all copies of the song
were destroyed. ⁴⁰ Blackmar and Company of New Orleans
were the publishers of this song in 1864, and this is prob-
ably the edition in question, because a note by Mrs. Samuel
on a copy of the words of the song says that its second
publication was after the War. ⁴¹ A slightly different

37. George Waite, "He Wrote Dixie Here," Louisville Courier-Journal, July 18, 1937.

38. See Appendix A.

39. Louisville Times, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

40. Waite, loc. cit.

41. Hays Collection.

version of Hays' arrest and release is that during his stay in jail, which was only three days, he wrote tart epigrams and verses, the wit of which caused General Butler to order his release,⁴² but this does not seem to fit the usual pattern of the General's actions.⁴³ In a letter dated August 19, 1864, to the girl who later became his wife, Will says, "I know you will censure me for not writing you ere this, But I have been captured and paroled, which resulted in a severe spell of sickness."⁴⁴ Hays' handwriting in this letter is not up to his usual standard, being indicative of some sort of indisposition on his part. It is doubtful, However, if this letter refers to the New Orleans incarceration. It was written near Louisville and had been preceded only thirteen days before by another, also written in Louisville,⁴⁵ This would hardly have given him time to make a round trip to New Orleans and spend three days in jail. During this period of the war Kentucky was infested with bands of guerillas, usually stragglers from the Confederate Army after its retreat south,⁴⁶ and it may have been one of these bands that captured Hays, though their

42. Louisville Times, July 24, 1907, p11.

43. Ralph V. Harlow, Growth of the United States (Nes

44. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, August 18, 1864, Hays Collection.

45. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, August 6, 1864, Hays Collection.

46. Clark, op. cit., pp. 464-466.

47

activities were generally farther east.

This young lady, to whom Will addressed fifty letters during the Civil War, was Miss Belle McCullough, daughter of a Louisville furniture store owner. She is said to have been a very beautiful girl. From the letters, which are extant, and a diary Hays kept during the courtship, a rough outline of their acquaintance, friendship, love and marriage can be traced, even with some indications that it was not always a smooth course.

In May, 1863, Hays wrote "Miss Belle McCullough" a very short note in which he said, "I am composing a little ballad to be issued soon by Mr. Faulds. It will afford me no little gratification to have the honor of dedicating it to yourself...Kindly consent to allow me the use of your name in connection with the dedication. I shall be pleased to hear from you and obtain your address." Just what this song was, the present writer could not determine, but the letter shows, at any rate, the degree of formality yet existing between Belle and Will. Months later in February, 1864, Will seems not to have gotten very far in his suit as

47. Ibid.

48. Letter from Mrs. Wilson Summers, Sr., Shepherdsville, Ky., to writer, June 12, 1947.

49. Statement by Miss Martha C. Huber, friend of Hays family, to writer, June 13, 1947, personal interview.

50. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, May 6, 1863.

he still addressed the young lady as "Miss Belle." In flowing and careful script he followed this with, "I will call and accompany you to church tomorrow evening if you have made no previous engagement, and my company will be agreeable and acceptable."⁵¹ This letter is on the letterhead of the "Headquarters Pay District of the Cumberland," but if this indicates any military connection, there is no other evidence of it. A note appended to the latter, apparently in Belle's handwriting, says that he left Louisville soon thereafter for the South, where he remained for several months. Writing from New Orleans, May 3, 1864, Will S. mentions a picture and ring Belle had given him which, along with the salutation, "My dear friend Belle, " indicates a growing friendship. He gives his address as either Vicksburg or New Orleans, so he was undoubtedly shuttling between those two places at this time. It is possible, also, that this was the season of his capture.

The style of letter writing he usually employed really begins with a letter dated May 22, 1864, in which he alternated impassioned prose and verse. He had obviously been spending many of his evenings with Belle since his return from the South. In fact, it seems in a later letter that Belle had persuaded him not to go back to New Orleans. It

51. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, February 6, 1864, Hays Collection.

was just as well, he said, for the fever which affected him was bothering him again, and he was considering going into the music business with Tripp and Cragg, Louisville publishers of some of his songs.⁵²

Subsequent letters are alternately melancholy and happy, with repeated references to his illness. Once he roundly condemned the instigators of the Civil War, but he does not indicate which side of the Ohio River they were on. Will did not think it an inappropriate part of his courting to mention often the other girls he knew and to tell how much he thought of them. In a hurried little note he asked Belle for her copy of "My Sunny Southern Home," the song that had gotten him into prison, "for a lady friend of mine who is going to Europe today."⁵³⁵⁴

In an interview later in life, Hays said that at this period he was a "regular h__ll of a feller."⁵⁵ He gives more detail in a letter to Belle: "And now let me write you in words which emanate from the gushingfountains of pure wells of truth, that I may for a time be happy in theone sweet reflection that I am sober now!" He was humbly begging for-

52. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, May 30, 1864, Hays Collection.

53. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, June 19, 1864, Hays Collection.

54. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, July 18, 1864, Hays Collection.

55. Louisville Courier-Journal clipping, date unknown, Hays Collection.

givenness while blaming his friends for getting him into trouble. On the next Sunday evening he went to the Baptist Church at Fourth and Walnut to hear Dr. George C. Lorimer
56
preach a sermon in his behalf.

Four days later Will again wrote Belle, this time thanking her for some slippers and a watch case she had sent him,
57
indicating things were resolving themselves to his satisfaction. Hardly a month later, however, we find Will in a worse situation than ever. He had received a letter from Belle demanding an apology for some of his actions. "I had almost hoped that I would have been forgotten by you," he answered. "I know and I feel that I have been acting wrong, and had I been sober God knows I should never have so acted toward you....I was not Will S. Hays. No! No! I was drunk, and how my face burns with shame when I write the truth to you.
58
I shall never do so again." Could this have been the "fever" that had been incapacitating him previously? Despite his good intentions and the fact that there were long periods of sobriety during the remainder of his life,
59
Hays never stopped drinking entirely.

56. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, August 27, 1864, Hays Collection.

57. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, August 31, 1864, Hays Collection.

58. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, September 21, 1864, Hays Collection.

59. Statement by Miss Martha C. Huber, personal interview, June 13, 1947.

As Will gradually worked back into the good graces of his beloved, he had the services of a friend named Warner who on one occasion took Belle to the theatre and allowed Will to occupy his seat for a while and talk with the young lady.⁶⁰ This seems to have been before he tried to see her again at her home. In December of 1864 Will made a trip to Lexington and Frankfort and in a subsequent letter made the most of two brushes along the road with guerillas.⁶¹ Matters progressed more and more smoothly until in January of the next year Will, writing to Belle in a facetious third person, said, "You have sealed the bonds of love with a kiss and I am satisfied you will kiss him again."⁶² Having been re-accepted by her family, he was once again seeing her at home.

As was typical of his reporting other narrow escapes, Hays dramatized an incident late in this same month in which someone on top of the stable opposite his office at the Democrat fired a rifle at him narrowly missing him and shattering the window beside which he sat.⁶³

By early February he made bold to ask if he might speak

60. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, September 28, 1864, Hays Collection.

61. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, December 16, 1864, Hays Collection.

62. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, January 8, 1865, Hays Collection.

63. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, January 22, 1865, Hays Collection.

64

of Belle as "mine." Three months later he said, "We will
 65
 soon be man and wife."

Hays' letters of early June indicate he was on a trip to the South, Bowling Green, Kentucky, Nashville, Columbia, Franklin, Knoxville, and Clarksville in Tennessee, and Huntsville, Alabama, being places he visited. The nature of this trip he did not reveal, but referred to it as "dangerous,"
 66
 and told Belle to "watch out for the Democrat." It is
 67
 possible that this trip should strengthen his claim to being a war correspondent.

In this same month Belle's pet canary died. This seems
 68
 a small enough tragedy, but it called forth both a poem
 69
 and a song by Will S. These are representative of the occasional nature of the majority of his works. No doubt he achieved the response he sought whenever he wrote such a poem or song.

By the end of February, 1866, he was writing to his

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64. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, February 3, 1865, Hays Collection.
 65. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, May 18, 1865, Hays Collection.
 66. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, June 6, 1865, Hays Collection.
 67. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, June 4, 1865, Hays Collection.
 68. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, June 18, 1865, Hays Collection.
 69. Will S. Says, "Canary Song" (Louisville: Louis Tripp, 1865).

70

"darling wife," they having been married the latter part

71

of the previous year, and his letters were filled with intense expressions of devotion.

As pure as the sun light of Heaven that
illuminates your pathway this lovely Sabbath
morning is the love that lies deep rooted in my
heart and only escapes through the windows of
my soul whenever your eyes chance to look into
them...See me two years ago when misfortune claim-
ed me as a poor pitiful object of mercy and
pity. See me now..your happy husband.
Had I an ocean of tears swimming in my soul
I would drain it dry with weeping tears of joy
today...My lips are hot with the dewy nectar
of love ready and eager to share with yours
and to give kiss for kiss.⁷²

During the latter stages of his courtship Will kept a sort of diary which he called "Leisure Moments" and which he gave to Belle upon its completion. It covers the period from December 27, 1864, to January 12, 1865,

Enclosed within its one hundred handwritten pages are accounts of his daily tasks, remarks about friends, male and female, and numerous prose and verse expressions of his love for Belle. "What I write," he said in the beginning, "is intended for your perusal and not for the eyes of ascrutinizing public to peep or pry into to search out its faults and censure me because I am its author." On the fly leaf is a paragraph called "The Pledge" which indicates the feeling of the two

70. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, February 25, 1866, Hays Collection.

71. Wade, loc.cit.

72. Ibid.

lovers as of Sunday evening, May 28, 1865.

This isto certify that we Belle McCullough and Will S. Hays, both of the city of Louisville, county of Jefferson, State of Kentucky, do agree and do hereby solemnly swear to be true friends and love each other long as we may live. So help us God.

Signed Will S. Hays
Belle McCullough

There are indications throughout this extended love letter of Will's personal characteristics. Speaking of a friend of his who had gotten drunk, he said, "Sometimes I think I am the only sober boy in town, and often think of how persons used to remark that it would not be long before I would fill a drunkard's grave." At another point one leaf of the book is torn out and this note is pinned to the next: "Two pages taken out here because of strong jealous expressions. I had danced with another partner at the dance at his father's home." However, despite Belle's care, enough is left of his remarks to indicate a violently jealous nature. He continued his references here to several young ladies with whom he seemed quite agreeable. The interspersed verse is unpolished, mostly ballad measure, and effulgent with expressions of love.

Following the war, Will and his wife settled down in a house on Fourth Street between Walnut and Chestnut. He was

73. Will S. Hays, "Leisure Moments," (Unpublished Diary), Hays Collection.

at this time river editor of the Democrat,⁷⁴ a position he later gave up to go into business with Louis Tripp at his music store.⁷⁵ He was engaged here at 110 Fourth Street as a music publisher and music instrument dealer⁷⁶ until 1873⁷⁷ when he became a clerk at the National Hotel. It seems to have been in this year that someone suggested in a letter to the Louisville Ledger that Will S. Hays was a likely candidate for councilman from the Third Ward. Hays' reply is typical of his robust and unrestrained style.

Some highly respectable, responsible, and interested individual...issued a call in your spicy and handsome paper yesterday, asking me to lose what little respectability and character I have by becoming a candidate for Councilman in The Third Ward. Now, I don't know what the ward wants, and if I was elected, I couldn't give it anything more than it has. The fact is, I don't think it can hold anything more. It's full of epizootic, measles, small-pox, sick niggers, barking dogs, dirty alleys, loafers, bad boys, pretty girls, etc., etc., and still isn't satisfied...I suppose the people want a change, but I don't propose to have any man lose a 'good proposition' by taking his place.... So I will stay out, and fill the office I now hold at the National Hotel...Yours Hays-tilly,⁷⁸

In 1874 Hays was working with Mr. D. P. Faulds, one of the publishers of his music, at his music store,⁷⁹ but the next

74. Edwards' Annual Directory, City of Louisville, 1865-6 (Louisville: Edwards, Greenough, and Deved), p. 314.

75. Edwards' Fifth Annual Directory of the City of Louisville, 1869 (Louisville: Edwards, Greenough, and Deved), p. 216.

76. Edwards' Sixth Annual Directory of the City of Louisville, 1870 (Louisville: Edwards, Greenough, and Deved), p. 165.

77. Caron's Annual Directory of the City of Louisville, 1873 (Louisville: Bradley and Gilbert), p. 252.

78. Mrs. Will S. Hays, Scrapbook, quoting newspaper, pp. 106-7, Hays Collection.

79. Caron's Annual Directory of the City of Louisville, 1874 (Louisville: Bradley and Gilbert), p. 269.

year found him once again back in the newspaper world as river editor of the Courier-Journal as well as superintendent of the Public Library Hall,⁸⁰ the forerunner of the present Louisville Free Public Library. This information from city directories is at variance with that of the general biographies which say that he was with the Courier-Journal from the date of its organization in 1868 until his⁸¹ death in 1907. It is possible both sources are correct.

During the period of the late 1860's and early 1870's, however, he was certainly active as a riverman on boats plying between Pittsburgh and New Orleans.⁸² It has been suggested that he was riding the boats in search of river information,⁸³ but when his obituary speaks of him as one of the⁸⁴ best known riverman between these two cities at this period, it probably means he was actually engaged in the operation of the boats. If not at this period, certainly later he held a master's certificate and did serve as captain on several⁸⁵ boats. He was judged by his contemporaries as being more familiar with the history and condition of the Ohio River than⁸⁶ any other man in the West.

Besides being river editor of the Courier-Journal, Hays

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- 80. Caron's Annual Directory of the City of Louisville, 1875 (Louisville: Bradley and Gilbert), p. 272.
 - 81. Louisville Courier-Journal, July 24, 1907, p. 1.
 - 82. Wade, loc. cit.
 - 83. Letter from John P. Elder to writer, May 29, 1947.
 - 84. Louisville Courier-Journal, July 24, 1907, p. 1.
 - 85. Letter from S. M. Carlisle to writer, May 30, 1947.
 - 86. Louisville Commercial, November 24, 1887.

87

became manager of their job rooms, later becoming a partner with R. W. Meredith and Company, who took over the job rooms and bindery. By 1879, in addition to his newspaper

88

duties, Hays was a steamboat, railroad, and steamship agent. He continued this mixture of activities the rest

89

of his life. He told an interviewer in 1898, "Well, I've got to go out and sell a steamboat. I don't know what the h_l's the matter with me that I forgot it."

90

In 1887 Hays left the Courier-Journal to become the editor of the Louisville Commercial. He wrote river news, poems, and songs for this paper during the two years he was connected with it. A part of the plan of the paper was to present each week an original and copyrighted song of his. He left this paper to return to the Courier-Journal in 1889. Until his death he remained river editor of that newspaper.

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94.

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87. Caron's Annual Directory of the City of Louisville, 1876 (Louisville: Bradley and Gilbert), p. 279.
88. Caron's Annual Directory of the City of Louisville, 1877 (Louisville: Bradley and Gilbert), p. 269.
89. Caron's Annual Directory of the City of Louisville, 1879 (Louisville: Bradley and Gilbert), p. 313.
90. Dick Work, Louisville Courier-Journal, December 23, 1898.
91. Caron's Annual Directory of the City of Louisville, 1887 (Louisville: Bradley and Gilbert), p. 421.
92. Louisville Commercial, November 24, 1887.
93. Caron's Annual Directory of the City of Louisville, 1888 (Louisville: Bradley and Gilbert), p. 455.
94. Louisville Courier-Journal, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

95

Hays made very little money out of his writings, and it was probably in an attempt to reap some of the profit from his songs and poems that was going to other publishers that in 1887 he helped organize in Louisville the "Will S. Hays Music and Poetry Publishing Company." Eight other men were listed as incorporators. The general nature of the business, as set forth by the Kentucky General Assembly in granting the charter, was "the publication, sale and distribution of the music, songs, and poetry, produced and arranged by Will S. Hays." Its capital stock was one thousand dollars, and its charter was for a period of twenty-five

96

years unless sooner terminated. A number of Hays' songs carry the name of this publisher, many of them being reprints of those originally issued by other companies.

By 1895 Hays had published three books of poems. The first, The Modern Mettin' House and Other Poems, appeared in 1874. The present writer could locate no extant copies except at the Library of Congress. The second, a mere pamphlet like the first, called Songs and Poems, was published in Louisville in 1886 and is also relatively rare. The last of the three and the only one really a book, was Poems and Songs of Will S. Hays, copyrighted 1895. It is to be found

95. Louisville Courier-Journal, clipping, date unknown, Hays Collection.

96. Acts, Kentucky General Assembly, 1887-88, III, 70-71.

in a number of homes and libraries throughout Kentucky.

How prolific a letter writer Hays was can only be surmised from the few existing samples of those he wrote to Jessamine and Sue Barkley of Greenville, Kentucky, between 1897 and 1899, some forty years before his wife's death. The Kentucky Library of Western Kentucky State Teachers College, Bowling Green, has these letters, and according to Gayle Carver of that library, dozens of other letters from Hays to these ladies were burned several years ago, in Mr. Carver's presence, because they were thought to be too
97
personal.

From the remaining letters one gets a varying impression. Sue was about twenty-one at the time, Jess was four years younger, and Hays was some forty years older than they. Another sister, Mary, to whom the song writer and poet also wrote, was a nurse for his son-in-law, Dr. F. W. Samuel,
98
and the acquaintance developed from this relationship.

In the letters Hays called Sue his "dear little country
99
sweetheart" two weeks after telling Jess, her sister, "You are the only girl I write to...You are the only peach in

97. Statement by Gayle Carver, June 7, 1947, personal interview.

98. Letter from Miss Sue Barkley to writer, June 23, 1947.

99. Letter from Will S. Hays to Sue Barkley, January 22, 1898, Kentucky Library.

the basket." ¹⁰⁰ The elderly gentleman sometimes signed
¹⁰¹ the letters "Billy." "My love, sweetheart, 'tis yours,
¹⁰² yours only, # he told Jess later. We are unprepared,
therefore, when we run into what is perhaps the truth that
he loved her with " a love like that of a father for his
¹⁰³ favorite child." "He was especially fond of my younger
sister," Miss Sue said in a letter to the present writer,
¹⁰⁴ "as he had an eye for beauty wherever he saw it."

The last mentioned letter of Hays' tells of an accident
he sustained that is recorded nowhere else. He spoke of
having fallen backwards down the steps of the bank and hav-
ing received a blow on the back of his head which caused
¹⁰⁵ him a great deal of pain for some time.

Hays was a member of the Presbyterian Church, but
¹⁰⁶ whether it was the First, ¹⁰⁷ Second, or the Fourth is a
matter of confusion. Miss Martha C. Huber, who attended

100. Letter from Will S. Hays to Jess Barkley, January 4, 1898, Kentucky Library.

101. Letter from Will S. Hays to Jess Barkley, April 4, 1898, Kentucky Library.

102. Letter from Will S. Hays to Jess Barkley, September 19, 1898, Kentucky Library.

103. Letter from Will S. Hays to Jess Barkley, April 26, 1899, Kentucky Library.

104. Letter from Miss Sue Barkley to writer, June 25, 1947.

105. Letter from Will S. Hays to Jess Barkley, April 26, 1899, Kentucky Library.

106. Letter from Miss Sue Barkley to writer, June 25, 1947.

107. Louisville Times, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

church with his family, says it was the old Fourth Presbyterian on Hancock between Main and Market. His wife and two children were regular attendants, but Mr. Hays seldom
 108
 went to church. This may account for the obscurity of his membership.

Though not a church attendant, Hays recognized its
 109
 value and wrote verses urging others to go. A great number of his poems concern religion, generally, and its value to mankind. Even though, as already reported, Hays never did quit his habit of drinking--in fact it nearly broke up
 110
 his married life --he was for a period of time a lecturer on the temperance platform, having become a convert to that movement in the 1870's. He seems to have had an instability in his character, however, which would not hold him to his
 112
 course.

The pictures of Will S. Hays show him with a mustache and goatee in later years. He wore nose glasses and a wing tipped collar, dressing with the dignity befitting the Ken-

108. Statement by Miss Martha C. Huber, June 13, 1947, personal interview.

109. Will S. Hays, "Go," and "The Sabbath," Hays Collection.

110. Statement of Miss Martha C. Huber, June 13, 1947, personal interview.

111. Louisville Times, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

112. Letter from Mrs. Nellie Wilder Craik, friend of the Hays family, to writer, June 21, 1947.

tucky colonel that he was. He was rather a dapper man of medium size whose clothes were always neat but often well-worn, for he was never a rich man. ¹¹³ In his dressy fashion, however, he wore scarf pins, rings, and a heavy watch chain ¹¹⁴ on which was suspended a gold pilot wheel given to him by Captain Harry Brown of Pittsburgh in 1882, ¹¹⁵ Mr. Hays had a brusque manner often punctuated by profanity, but he "has a heart in him as large as a church debt, and no one in distress has ever applied to him for assistance and gone away empty handed." ¹¹⁶ He was usually full of life but was sad at times. ¹¹⁷ His interest in the unfortunate is shown by the fact that every year at Christmastime he wrote a special poem which was printed by the Courier-Journal ¹¹⁸ and sold by the newsboys as a benefit for them.

After turning down the race for councilman in 1873, Hays continued to have very little to do with politics except for a period as member of the Louisville Board of Education. "He cared nothing for political prominence," said

113. Letter from George C. Durham, friend of Hays family, to writer, June 9, 1947.

114. Letter from Mrs. Nellie Wilder Craik to writer, June 21, 1947.

115. Mrs. F. W. Samuel, Handwritten note, Hays Collection.

116. Work, op. cit.

117. Letter from Mrs. Portia Fullenlove Wilcox to writer, June 13, 1947.

118. Mrs. F. W. Samuel, Handwritten note, Hays Collection.

119
 his obituary, but the Courier-Journal of November 11, 1892, carried this paragraph: "Col. Will S. Hays has been spoken of for the post of Supervising Inspector for this district. It is said he holds a cinch, that he recently wrote to Mr. Stevenson, and that gentleman promised to do what he could for him." The newly elected vice president must not have done very well for Hays, for it seems that when the application was presented to president Cleveland, he rather contemptuously asked who this post was who was seeking such an important job. Hays suffered a good bit of embarrassment and humiliation when the whole matter was aired in the press and stated that to be the author of "Mollie Darling" was better than to be President. As a
 120
 post he considered himself the equal of the President.

Mr. and Mrs. Will S. Hays had two children, Sam Brown, named
 121
 for a steamboat friend, and Mattie Belle, who be-
 122
 came Mrs. Fauche Warren Samuel. They are both deceased now. The fact of their births having been some distance apart is said to be an indication of domestic troubles the
 123
 Hayeses had.

119. Louisville Times, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

120. Letter from George O. Durham to writer, June 9, 1947.

121. Letter from Mrs. Nellie Wilder Craik to writer, June 21, 1948.

122. Louisville Courier-Journal, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

123. Statement by Miss Martha C. Huber, June 13, 1947, personal interview.

Hays was a natural entertainer, playing the piano, and being an excellent singer. It was reported in the press in 1887 that "most flattering offers have been made to him by numerous companies, which have been declined. The Colonel has appeared at numbers of private concerts and picnics, however, and always scored the most pronounced success."¹²⁴ One of his favorite numbers was done with his friend Colin Alfriend. "There was never a benefit entertainment that the song 'Twenty Years Ago' was not sung by Alfriend's heavy voice with accompaniment ~~nm~~ piano by HaysCrowds would gather to hear them, for they both were popular, full of fun."¹²⁵ Mr. J. S. Middleton of Aberdeen, Maryland, recalls a program in the basement of the old Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville when Hays was his accompanist for a violin solo. He recalls, also, that the Colonel told a story or two during the evening.¹²⁶ Though never going into it on a large scale, Hays always dabbled in black-face comedy.¹²⁷ On the back of the 1886 edition of his poems is an advertisement of "Will S. Hays' Great Southern Minstrels, The Creme de la Creme of Negro Minstrelsy, Season 1886-1887."¹²⁸

124. Louisville Commercial, November 24, 1887.

125. Hays, Mrs. Will S., Scrapbook, Hays Collection.

126. Letter from J. S. Middleton to writer, June 15, 1947.

127. Wade, loc. cit.

128. Hays, Will S., Songs and Poems (Louisville: Courier Journal Job Printing Company, 1886), cover.

Hays was a great story teller, but sometimes children were sent from the room by cautious parents when he brought up a new story. On the trips he made in later life to and from New Orleans he was usually the center of interest on the boat as he told stories to the crowd aboard. It seems Hays spent a number of seasons at French Lick Springs, Indiana, as professional host to the guests on the strength of his popularity and ability to entertain. A letter from the concern owning the resort on Hays' fifty-fourth birthday gives a good idea of his value to them.

It is the wish of this company to manifest to you its appreciation of your valuable services in contributing to the pleasure of its guests, in popularizing the springs, and in advancing the interests of the French Lick Springs Company generally.

The rare versatility of genius with which nature has endowed you is seldom the heritage of any man, and rarer still is the power you so eminently possess of utilizing such rare gifts. You have, with inimitable grace, welcomed the coming guests and speeded the parting one.

Your presence here is an additional inducing charm to the many winning attractions of this resort.

Horace immortalized in verse the Fons Brundasiae (Sic), Virgil the Fons Manbrae, while it has been reserved for the Poet Laureate of old Kentucky to commemorate in song the virtues of our own Fons Pletonis splendidior vitro.

Inclosed you will find our testimonial and we

June 21, 1947. 129. Letter from Mrs. Nellie Wilder Craik to writer,

May 29, 1947. 130. Letter from John P. Elder, Louisville, to writer,

trust you will accept this inadequate token of our appreciation of your services.¹³¹

July 14, 1907, Will S. Hays became ill for the last time. He had had two strokes of apoplexy within the last three years which had left him far from a well man during that period. For five days he lay in a semi-conscious state, seldom recognizing anyone. On July 23 he died, with his wife and two children at his bedside.¹³²

The funeral was conducted at his home, 1021 Fourth Avenue, by the Rev. J. S. Lyon, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, with interment following in Cave Hill Cemetery. A quartet sang two of Hays' religious songs, "Come Unto Me," and "Enter In," with Professor George Selby, his life-long friend, playing the organ.¹³³

Following the news of Mr. Hays' death, dozens of telegrams poured in from all up and down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.¹³⁴ All steamers leaving St. Louis and elsewhere flew their flags at half mast.¹³⁵ There was hardly a newspaper printed along the rivers that did not carry an editorial comment on the death of the man whose sentimental

131. Letter from French Lick Springs Company to Will S. Hays, July 19, 1891, copy, Hays Collection.

132. Louisville Courier-Journal, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

133. Newspaper clipping, source and date unknown, Hays Collection.

134. Louisville Times, July 24, 1907, p. 1.

135. Newspaper clipping, source and date unknown, Hays Collection.

songs, wit, and friendliness had become known to millions.

Mrs. Hays, active in river affairs in her own right
with the National Rivers and Harbors Committee, died in
136
Louisville October 13, 1935,

CHAPTER II
HIS MUSIC

When Will S. Hays was seven years old the first negro minstrel troupe ever formed was organized in a New York boarding house. These, the immortal "Big Four," included Dan Emmett, generally conceded to be the author of "Dixie" and the man who was a party to the great controversy that¹ involved Hays over that song.

The negro minstrel caught on quickly in the days before the Civil War. Besides negro numbers it soon included in its repertory Irish and Dutch songs, and even yodelling,² all done, of course, in black face. The minstrels traveled not only all over America but to England and Australia,³ where they had great successes. From the formation of the Virginia Minstrels in 1843 until the turn of the twentieth century, numerous black-face troupes appeared regularly in all the towns of any size in America. They were in their⁴ prime in the 70's and 80's. And so was Hays.

Practically everything written by Hays shows the influence of the minstre.. This appears in his songs written

1. Dailey Paskman, and Sigmund Spaeth, Gentlemen, Be Seated! (Garden City: Doubleday Doran and Company, Inc., 1928), p. 15.

2. Ibid., p. 17.

3. Ibid., p. 155.

4. Ibid., p. 174.

for the general public as well as in those written especially for the stars of the stage with the semi-circle of chairs.

That he had a good deal of acquaintance with minstrel shows is evidenced by the references he made in "Leisure Moments" to shows he attended. That he must have had some qualms about their gentility is indicated by his care in⁵ going to see them first Before he took Belle.

From the nature of his songs, from his acquaintance with minstrel men and their shows, and from the period in which he lived, it seems probable that it was this type of entertainment that set the style for his musical works.

Persons travelling in England and in India have reported hearing Hays' songs being sung there. Writing in the Madison, Indiana, Democrat, following Hays' death, A. S. Chapman tells of hearing when a boy in England during the Civil War, a song being sung by a group of song peddlers that fascinated him. Upon being told it was written by an American, he bought it and learned it. This was Hays' biggest seller, "Mollie Darling." Later in Calcutta Mr. Chapman was surprised to find that this same song had preceded⁶ him there among the English and Americans.

All told, Hays said he wrote the words and music to 354

5. Will S. Hays, "Leisure Moments," Hays Collection.

6. A. S. Chapman, Madison (Ind.) Democrat, July?, 1907.

41

songs which were published, not one of which ever lost money for its publisher, but most of which he sold too cheaply or gave away.⁷ Since the present writer has been able to list over three hundred of these, it seems likely that his figure is not exaggerated. The total sales of these songs cannot be computed accurately, but it was in excess of four million⁸ in 1878,⁹ and by Hays' death had exceeded six million⁹ copies. Of this number "Mollie Darling" accounted for some two million.¹⁰ "Evangeline," another of the top favorites, sold 145,000 copies in its first fourteen months of life, for which Hays would have realized normally over four thousand¹¹ dollars, but he did not receive a penny for it. This is typical of what happened to Hays with regard to payment for his work. He wrote so prolifically and so popularly that he should have been a rich man instead of the poor one he¹² remained all his life.

Hays' songs, by the very nature of their occasional and topical inspiration, are more descriptive of the age in which he lived than would have been more classical and last-

7. Work, loc. cit.

8. Biographical Encyclopaedia of Kentucky, loc. cit.

9. James G. Wilson, and John Fiske (eds.), Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887), III, 147.

10. Work, loc. cit.

11. Louisville Courier-Journal, clipping, date unknown, Hays Collection.

12. Letter from George O. Durham to writer, June 9, 1948.

ing work, had he been able to produce it. He wrote of the river and riverman; of the Civil War as a Northerner and as a Southerner, as a pacifist and as a war monger; of love, sometimes happy, often sad; of politics, though rarely; and of sewing machines, pianos, and insurance as advertisements. He wrote sacred songs, songs advocating temperance, piano solos, and minstrel song-and-dance numbers. His dialect might be formal English, Irish brogue, Dutch guttural, Scottish burr, Negro "Africanese," or Kentucky illiteracy. He might eulogize the death of George D. Prentice--or of Belle's canary. He might be serious of funny¹³ or he might combine the two. He might make musical love to dozens of girls and swear fidelity to each or turn his attention to "wife, little ones, and home." He could compose a violin solo for the people of Hodgenville or an anthem for the Hopewell Church. There was no occasion too small for his notice, no moment so profound but that he would attempt to memorialize it in verse.

As a river editor, writer of a river news column for many years, and as friend of many rivermen, it would seem inevitable that Will S. should write in this vein. Among the song titles listed, however, only "The Guiding Star,"¹⁴ used to advertise that boat, was directly influenced by the

13. See Appendix A.

14. Ibid.

river. Hays' familiarity with the river is more evident in his poetry and in his columns.

Of Civil War songs something has been said already, but they are worthy of closer study. "The Refugee" and "The Wandering Refugee" are pitiful tales of the unfortunates of the war period. At the very outset of the war, in 1861, appeared "The Union Forever," but by 1864 Hays had written the Yankee-baiting "My Sunny Southern Home." "The Drummer Boy of Shiloh" is more pathetic than partisan. Following the turn of the tide of battle, Hays wrote in 1865 "Sherman and His Gallant Boys in Blue," though by 1872 he felt it safe to pen "God Bless Robert Lee." His true sentiments, if his actions may be taken as a guide, were told in the two songs entitled "Let Us Have Peace," and
15
"Oh, I Wish This War Was Over."

Politically inept, or at least unfortunate, Hays nevertheless participated in campaigns, through his songs. "Cleveland Is the Man" speaks for itself, as does "Tilden and Reform." Though no copies could be found, "We've a Man For Our Leader," written in 1868, and "Put the Right Man at the Wheel" seem to be of a political nature.

Mention has already been made of the two religious songs of Hays sung at his funeral, "Come Unto Me" and "Enter In,"

15. Ibid.

but there are others. "Save One Bright Crown For Me," "Angels Meet Me at the Crossroads," "God Helping Us We Will," "Is Mother There?" "The Sinner's Soul," "When I am Gone," and the unpublished "Hopewell Hymn" indicate his ability in other than secular work. Concerning the first rendering of two of the above numbers are stories that are quite different. "Enter In" was introduced by Professor C. C. Case in the Moody Tabernacle in Louisville with the assistance of a choir of three hundred voices.¹⁶ "The Hopewell Hymn," which exists today only as a poem, was composed extemporaneously by Hays when he and Colonel Jeff Burne, whom he was visiting in Henry County, Kentucky, went to a nearby small church called "Hopewell." By special request the man from Louisville composed and sang this song, accompanying himself on the organ, the music not being written down either then or later.¹⁷

During the 1870's particularly, when Hays was engaged in temperance lecturing, he wrote several songs dealing with that subject. With a direct significance are the titles "Goodbye To Drink" and "Don't Drink Any More." "Listen to My Prayerful Pleading," "Out in the Snow," "Papa, Stay Home, I'm Motherless Now," and "What Will I Do When My Mother

16. Will S. Hays, "Enter In," (Louisville: Will S. Hays Publishing Company, 1888), Cover.

17. Allan M. Trout, "Greetings," Louisville Courier-Journal, September 13, 1941.

Is Dead?" deal with situations brought about or aggravated by drunkenness.

These latter songs are akin to other sad ones Hays turned out in greater number. Even the titles are sad: "Down by the Deep Sad Sea," "Nobody's Darling," "The Lone Grave by the Sea," "The Last Trip," "Dead but not Forgotten," "Call Me No More, Mother," "Heaven Claims Her," "The Crape on the Door," and "Baby's Gone." The works to "The Lone Grave by the Sea" are typical.

I'm sitting in the cottage door,
Where oft' in days gone by,
We've watch'd the wild waves kiss the shore,
My Mother and I,
But now I'm left sad and alone,
All that was dear to me
My Mother dear! I'm weeping by
The lone grave by the sea,
Alone at night I'm kneeling
By the lone grave by the sea.

The flowers that Mother planted there,
Are fading fast away,
They ne'er again will bloom so fair,
The cottage will decay;
But let that cottage be my home,
No other give to me,
For I can watch by day and night,
The lone grave by the sea,
And when I die, oh! let me lie, 19
Near the lone grave by the sea.

Will S. Hays sentimentalized the newly freed negro of the days following the Civil War. He wrote poems about him

18. See Appendix A.

19. Will S. Hays, "Lone Grave By The Sea, " (Louisville: Louis Tripp, 1862).

and composed songs in his vernacular. In such songs as "Dem Good Ole Days," "Down in de Co'n Fiel'," "Keep in de Middle ob de Road," "Hannah, Is You Dar?" and many others he pictured something of the wistfulness and humor of the confused negro. "Keep in de Middle ob de Road" was written while Hays was in Bowling Green, Kentucky, on one of his river trips. He said he witnessed a negro woman trying to get her drunken husband home by half carrying him and constantly admonishing him with the words he used for the song title.²⁰ It is not unusual for him that here he took a commonplace, lowly incident and turned its inspiration to a religious theme.

I hear dem angels a callin' loud,
 Keep in de middle ob de road.
 Day's a waitin' dar in a great big crowd,
 Keep in de middle ob de road.
 I see dem stand roun' de big white gate,
 We must trubble along 'fore we git too late,
 Fo' t' aint no use fo' to sit down and wait,
 Keep in de middle ob de road.²¹

Besides the already mentioned song, "The Guiding Star," Hays wrote at least two others used as advertisements. "My Fischer Piano" was published by D. H. Baldwin and Company and distributed free. A handwritten note on a copy of this

20. Work, loc. cit.

21. Will S. Hays, Poems and Songs (Louisville: Charles T. Dearing, 1895), pp. 26, 27.

music in the Hays Collection says that "This piano was built special for Colonel Hays and put on exhibition at Fourth and Chestnut." "Song of the Sewing Machine" extroos the virtues of the Florence Machine, but its publication was by J. L. Peters of New York, as were so many of Hays' other songs.²² It may have been that in 1869 the sewing machine was still so much of a novelty that a music publisher was glad to put out a song about it. (Could it be that Will S. Hays was the father of the present day radio singing commercial?)

It was stated in the beginning of this chapter that Hays' music shows the influence of black-face minstrelsy. This is evident not only in a general way but in specific songs. For instance, the cover of "Will You Remember Me?" carries the information that this song had been sung by Con. T. Murphy of Arlington, Kelly and Leon's Minstrels. "Barney Machree" was dedicated to Dan Bryant, Jr., of the famous Bryant minstrel family, whose father was the one for whom Dan Emmett wrote "Dixie," according to the popular story.²³ One of the most famous of the minstrel men was "Happy" Cal Wagner,²⁴ and for him Hays wrote "I'm A-Gwine Down

22. Will S. Hays, "Song of the Sewing Machine," (New York: J. L. Peters, 1869).

23. Paskman and Spaeth, op. cit., p. 185

24. Carl Wittke, Tambo and Bones (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930), p. 232.

South" and had the pleasure of knowing he used it in

²⁵
his show. "Nigger Will be Nigger," written when Hays was

only twenty-seven, was sung by W. Arlington, according to

²⁶
the cover. This was the man who became famous as Billy Arlington

and who headed his own company besides being connected

with other outstanding minstrels such as Leon, Kelly,

²⁷
Donniker, and Cotton. "Sing Darkies Sing" was dedicated

²⁸
to Dan Frohman, dean of the theatrical profession in

²⁹
1875, when the song was written. Other songs by Hays are

labelled "end song" or "dance song."

It was in connection with a minstrel show that the well known song "Evangeline" was popularized. Hays had been unable to sell this song and took it to Campbell of Campbell's Minstrels who were playing at the time in Cleveland. Campbell used it that night and was encored five times. Brainerd, music publisher of Cleveland, had previously offered Hays ten dollars for this song and had been turned down. How with it a success, he became more interested. Hays, however, said, "I up and told him that John Howard Payne had died in a poor house, that Keyes, who wrote

25. Will S. Hays, "I'm A-Gwine Down South" (New York: J. L. Peters Company, 1874), cover.

26. Will S. Hays, "Nigger Will Be Nigger" (Louisville: Tripp and Cragg, 1864), cover.

27. Paskman and Spaeth, op. cit., p. 156

28. Will S. Hays, "Sing Darkies Sing" (New York: J. L. Peters Company, 1875). cover.

29. Paskman and Spaeth, op. cit., p. 175.

the Star Spangled Banner, had died in destitution, and that the publishers in America were determined to starve the composers out; but I would make him a present of 'Evangeline' to show him how little publishers know of the value of compositions...Three months later he offered me five hundred dollars for another song like it, but I re-³⁰fused it, and have never written anything for him."

The story of the composition of this particular song is of more interest perhaps than is that of its publication. There are several versions of the story, but in the main they agree. Hays was visiting in the home of Colonel John Fible, "Woodland," in Oldham County, Kentucky, about the time he left to go to college. With a party of young people he attended a dance at the home of Congressman Robert Mallory nearby. On the way home from the dance they stopped³¹ beside a small stream and engaged in singing. One of the girls Will had previously nicknamed "Evangeline" because of her resemblance to the ideal pictures of Longfellow's heroine.

"I'll write you a song," Hays said to 'Evangeling,' "if you'll promise to sing it before we go home." Taking up

30. Louisville Courier*Journal, clipping, date unknown.
 "I Am Dying, Mother, Dying," 1865, was also published by Brainerd, despite Hays' statement.
 31. Louisville Times, December 1, 1906.

some charred sticks from near an old fire, Hays started writing the words of a song on a new plank fence across the road. Beneath the words he said he wrote four part ³² harmony for them to sing there in the moonlight. The next day one of the young ladies copied down the words and ³³ Hays polished and revised them. It was some time before he tried to sell it as a song.

Hays' songs of the hearth and home run into scores. There is a nostalgia about many and nearly always a touch of sadness. They concern young babies, old fathers, mothers, and grandmothers, and the place itself. A few of the titles are indicative of the rest: "Old Gate on the Hill," "Why Don't You Come Home?" "Songs My Grandmother Sung (sic)," "My Father's Growing Old," "How Much does the Baby Weight?" "Kiss Papa Goodnight," "Cow Bells in the Lane," and "Wife, Little Ones and Home." In many of them there is a longing for the pleasures and simple joys of days that were no longer.

Sigmund Spaeth has said in one of his book titles, "They ³⁴ Still Sing of Love," and Hays certainly did his share. A mere glance at the names of girls he used in his titles

32. Louisville Courier-Journal, clipping, date unknown, Hays Collection.

33. Louisville Times, December 1, 1906.

34. ~~Quoted in~~ John T. Howard, Our American Music (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1931), p. 581.

reveals something of the vast number of such songs he wrote. He indicated interest, musical or personal, in Lennie, Madelaine, Maggie, Marian, Mary, Maud, Maudie, Minnie May, Susie, Mollie, Nellie, Nora, Annie, Belle, Ada, Julia, Katie, Katy, Kitty, Linnie, Josephine, Ella Bell, Jessie, Eily, Evangeline, Genevieve, and Liza Jane.

Of all Will S. Hays' songs none has been so popular as "Mollie Darling," published in 1866 by J. L. Peters. Contradictory stories are told of the composition of this song, also, and the fault seems attributable to the author for not always giving the same account. The one quoted in The Musician differs, for instance, from the one he told James Tandy Ellis. They differ principally in locale, however, not in main features. The fact that they vary is demonstrative of the privilege of a good story teller to alter his tales, and Hays was a good story teller.

According to the account which has the song composed in Pittsburgh, Hays said he was ill in a hotel and overheard the chambermaid, Mollie, talking to an Irish boy in the hall outside his room. They were seated in a deep bay window

35. See Appendix A.

36. Will S. Hays, "Mollie Darling" (New York: J. L. Peters, 1866), cover.

37. The Musician, XI (1906), 491.

38. James Tandy Ellis, "Savor of the Soil," Louisville Courier-Journal, clipping, date unknown, Hays Collection.

The Drummer Boy of Shiloh

Figure 2

across the hall, apparently thinking Hays was asleep. He heard the boy whisper, "Do you love me, Mollie, darling?" When she did not answer, the boy said, "Let your answer be a kiss." Hays said that all night those words kept running through his mind. The next morning he sat down at a piano in the presence of the other hotel guests and played and sang the first version of what later became his most celebrated song. Mollie, lingering on the edge of the crowd of listeners, stayed behind after the others had left to ask the composer, "An' did yez hear th' answer I gev him?"³⁹

Won't you tell me, Mollie, darling,
That you love none else but me?
For I love you, Mollie, darling--
You are all the world to me.
O, tell me, darling, that you love me,
Put your little hand in mine;
Take my heart, sweet Mollie, darling,
Say that you will give me thine.

Chorus

Mollie, fairest, sweetest, dearest,
Look up, darling, tell me this.
Do you love me, Mollie Darling?
Let your answer be a kiss.

The story of this song does not end here, however. Hays said later that he was talking to a publisher in New York about it when an old lady came in begging money to bury her dead child. Moved by the story, as he always was by misfortune, he suggested to the publisher that he give him

39. The Musician, loc. cit.

40. Will S. Hays, Songs and Poems (Louisville: Courier-Journal Job Printing Company, 1886), p. 4.

twenty-five dollars for the song. The other agreed, and
 the composer handed the woman the money.^{41.} "Nothing ever
 gave me as much satisfaction as those two tears that rolled
 down that poor woman's cheeks," Hays said later.⁴²

The musical publications of Will S. Hays were not limited entirely to vocal arrangements. Among the numbers he composed for the piano were "Ray of Love, Polka," "Carrie Maxurka," "Clint McClarty Polka," "Cooing Doves" (six hands), "Josephine Mazurka," "Lotta Mazurka," and "Lula May Mazurka." Late in life he put on a performance at Kenyon College at Hodgenville, Kentucky, before a large and appreciative audience. Besides relating some amusing stories and recounting the composition of "Mollie Darling", Hays played on the violin the "Kenyon College Waltz," which he had composed for the occasion and had dedicated to Miss Ella Pope,⁴³ who accompanied him.

When the Louisville Courier-Journal formally entered its new building on May 16, 1876, part of the ceremony was the unveiling of a statue of George D. Prentice. "This act performed, the orchestra rendered with fine effect the requiem composed for the occasion by Mr. Will S. Hays. The music was exceedingly refined in sentiment, chaste in ex-

41. The Musician, loc. cit.

42. Hodgenville, Kentucky, newspaper clipping, date unknown, Kentucky Library.

43. Ibid.

pression, fully realizing the reverent spirit of the
44 theme." So far as can be determined, "The Prentice
Requiem" was never published.

It is remarkable that the composer of so much music,
particularly of so much that sold, should have been unable
to write that music down, but that was the case with Hays.
Because of his limited background in music theory, it was
necessary to have Professor George Selby, organist of Calvary
Episcopal Church, write down the music which Hays played on
45 the piano. The number of songs he thus wrote down has been
46 estimated at at least five hundred. Even more remarkable
than this ability to compose ballads was the ability of Hays
to compose piano solos, violin solos, and the orchestra num-
ber just mentioned with his slight knowledge of harmony.

Copies of three contracts Hays made with music pub-
lishers have been preserved. They are handwritten, signed
by Hays and the respective publishers and reveal the amount
of remuneration and the tribulations of the song writer. On
the letterhead of J. L. Peters of New York is a contract
dated August 1, 1867.

44. Louisville Courier-Journal, May 17, 1876.

45. Statement by Sam M. Hays, grandson of Will S.,
April 17, 1947, personal interview.

46. St. Louis newspaper clipping, date and source un-
known, Hays Collection.

It is mutually agreed between Will S. Hays of Louisville Ky and J. L. Peters of New York, that the following contract shall exist between them, the same to commence from this date and to end on the last day of July 1870--a period of three years.

J. L. Peters agrees to receive of Will S. Hays all the manuscripts of songs that he may compose or arrange, and to publish such as he may think profitable, with the understanding that Will S. Hays is to write for no other party or parties, during the time above mentioned, and in consideration of his writing solely for J. L. Peters, the said J. L. Peters agrees to pay Will S. Hays two cents and a half per copy on any piece they may print of his compositions so furnished.

This contract to cease to exist at the end of six (sic) years from this date--after which time J. L. Peters shall have the sole right and title to any piece so published during the period above mentioned.

Settlements and payments to be made quarterly.

(Signed) J. L. Peters
Will S. Hays⁴⁶

Whether this contract was meant to continue for three or six years is hard to tell, but a little more than a year later, December 1, 1868, these same two parties entered into a new contract, obviously construed more in Hays' favor.

I agree to write and compose songs exclusively for J. L. Peters New York for the term of two years from this date for twelve hundred dollars per year payable quarterly. I am to write for him one of more songs per month during that time.

(Signed) Will S. Hays
J. L. Peters⁴⁸

The third contract extant is on the letterhead of George

47. Original Contract, Hays Collection.

48. Original Contract, Hays Collection.

Figure 3--Contract between Willis S. Hays and
J. L. Peters, Music Publisher.

D. Newhall Company of Cincinnati and is dated September 25, 1884.

I hereby agree to write music for the Geo. D. Newhall Co. On all peices accepted by them they are to pay me in cash twenty five dollars per month and credit my account with Geo D. Newhall personally, twenty five dollars until my indebtedness to Geo D Newhall is cancelled. The Geo D Newhall Co to own all music written under this contract

(Signed) Will S. Hays⁴⁹
G. D. Newhall

Just what the circumstances were under which Hays had gotten in debt to Mr. Newhall is not revealed, but this is added proof of his inability to accumulate any fortune.

Hays' publishers in America were numerous and his popularity here is obvious, but there is evidence as well that his songs sold abroad with great success. "Mollie Darling"⁵⁰ was printed in six languages. A statement in a Louisville paper some seventy years ago said that "Peters of New York, the great music publisher has received from England a lengthy list of the songs of Will S. Hays reproduced in that Country. The publication in England of Mr. Hays' popular songs is statement goes on to say that at the time Hays had produced more songs than any other five men in America, his sales

49. Original Contract, Hays Collection.

50. Waite, loc. cit.

51

being even then some three and a half million.

In an interview late in life Hays is quoted as saying, "Long ago I wrote a collection of Scotch songs under the name of Allan Percy and they had a great sale. But I like the negroes and the Irish, and the sunny South, and the pretty girls and the river."⁵² No other evidence of

this collection could be discovered. We have here, however, a concise summary of the topics which appealed to Hays, the song Writer.

51. Louisville Courier-Journal, May 17, 1876.

52. Work, loc. cit.

CHAPTER III

"DIXIE"

The song "Dixie" is synonymous with the South that Hays lived in and loved. "It is conceded by all hands that 'Dixie' is the most popular of the songs of the South."¹ "Yet, in spite of its Southern associations, Dixie has come to be something more than a song of just one section of the country. There is something indefinably American about the tune...it represents a state of mind common to all parts of the nation."²

This popularity has not been just of late. The song became the war song of the South in 1861 when it was used as a quickstep for the Confederate regiments from Louisiana.³ That a song of such popularity should have a number of claimants to its authorship is, perhaps, natural. Cichter and Shapiro list fourteen versions that appeared.⁴ To Daniel Decatur Emmett, however, has long been attributed its authorship. Since there was a good deal of controversy during Emmett's lifetime as to the originator of the song,

1. Nicholas Smith, Stories of Great National Songs (Milwaukee: The Yong Churchman Company, 1899), p. 179.

2. Howard, op. cit., p. 267

3. Wittke, op. cit., p. 208.

4. Harry Dichter and Elliott Shapiro, Early American Sheet Music (New York: R. Bowker Company, 1941), pp. 105-8.

and since Hays was one of those who claimed the original version, an examination of the various claims is in order.

In an interview with Edward W. Bok, Emmett said that he wrote the song in 1859 while a member of the celebrated Bryant's Minstrels. After a performance of the show one Saturday night he was asked by Jerry Bryant to write a "hooray" or "walk-around" for rehearsal on Monday. He composed the song on Sunday as we now know it. Wittke gives a little more detail. He said Emmett looked out the window on that dreary, rainy Sunday and sighed, "I wish I were in Dixie," a phrase customary with showmen in the winter time. From this suggestion, Emmett hummed a tune, played it on his violin, added the words, and the song was born. Firth Pond and Company of New York published this song, which was copyrighted June 21, 1860.

In spite of this and other evidence, the friends of Will S. Hays, indeed the Colonel, himself, claimed the original composition of the words for him. Josiah Combs says, "He was probably the first man to write the words of 'Dixie,' (in 1857) notwithstanding the long-accepted theory that Emmet [sic] composed both words and music, in 1859." He

5. Quoted in Smith, op. cit., pp. 181-2.

6. Wittke, op. cit., pp. 205-6.

7. Dichter and Shapiro, op. cit., p. 105.

8. Josiah Combs, All That's Kentucky (Louisville: John P. Morton and Company, 1915), p. 44.

says that when Hays was sixteen years old, he heard an old darkey pick this tune on a banjo in the deep South. This was, of course, before Emmett's version. "This leaves the impression that 'Dixie' is an old plantation song, sung by the negroes in honor of a benevolent old slaveholder named Dixie."⁹

Professor Thomas J. Firth took up the cudgel in behalf of Hays in 1922 in a pamphlet entitled "The Origin of Dixie." Styling himself the only surviving band master of the War Between the States, he vigorously denied that Emmett was the originator of this song. As to the melody, he said it was a tune written by an English composer named Charles Dibbins with words starting, "If I was a soldier, wouldn't I go," etc. The song was brought by sailors to New Orleans where some former slaves of Dixy, the aforementioned slaveholder, "involuntarily" sang:

I wish I was at Dixy's,
I ho, I ho, etc.¹⁰

A musician of that city wrote the melody from hearing it sung and sent it to D. P. Faulds in Louisville in 1858 with the name "Dixie" attached. Mr. Firth quotes from the Memphis Commercial Appeal of June 5, 1908, which carried these words

9. Ibid.

10. Thomas J. Firth, The Origin of Dixie, fifteenth edition, Pamphlet, 1922.

of Mr. Faulds, the music publisher:

One afternoon in my mail I received from a New Orleans house a single sheet of music, entitled "Dixie." It was a kind of a dance. When Ward came down stairs the next morning about 6 o'clock I gave him the music and asked him to try it on the piano...While Ward was playing the air, Hays (sic) came in..."Will," said I, "here's a new tune that has just come in. I want you to write me some Southern nigger words for it." The piano was a square on, and as Ward went over the air, Hays wrote the words...In a short time, an hour, probably, he had written four or five verses ...In about two hours time "Dixie" was written, arranged and sung.

I at once sent the song upstairs to my engravers.

Shortly after the song was published Joe H. McCann, a negro minstrel, dropped into my store, which was always a lounging place for players and musicians. He heard the air "Dixie."

"It's an old nigger air they's been singing in the South to almost any words. The negro roustabouts on the steamboats load and unload their cargoes to it," said he.

I had given the song the title "Way Down South in Dixie," and had 5,000 copies printed...The words I copyrighted, but the music was common property.

I had sold 30,000 copies of my song before the war--all in the South.

After the song had attracted some attention, and about the time the Southern troops were being mobilized for the Civil War, Col. Hays rewrote the words (this was his second version) making a marching song for the famous Buckner Guards of Louisville. These were the words that were considered treasonable. The first stanza was as follows:

We gwan down to delan' of cotton,
Simmons seeds an' sandy botton,
Away, away, we gwan down to Dixie.

We gwan to take our guns along,
 We gwan to fight and sing dis song,
 Away, away, away down South in Dixie.

This version of Hays was copyrighted under the laws of the Confederate States in 1861.¹¹

As further supporting evidence, Professor Firth published affidavits from men who said they had heard this tune played as early as 1858. In fact, he said he was a member of a band that year in LaGrange, Tennessee, that played the song from an arrangement by their band leader. A facsimile copy of the music for Eb trumpet is reproduced in this pamphlet as additional proof.¹²

A slightly different story is that the first writing of the song was done by Hays and Ward on request of the Buckner Guards. The tune used was a Scotch air, "If I had a beau, for a soldier would go." It was given to the glee club of the Guards, published, and Major Depph, the military mayor of Louisville, tried to suppress it. Dan Bennett, being in the South at the time, wrote a different set of words and claimed authorship.¹³ This version was the one told by Mrs. Samuel, Hays' daughter.¹⁴

The Filson Club, historical society of Louisville, became interested in this controversy just prior to the death

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Johnston, op. cit., p. 87.

14. Waite, loc. cit.

of Hays, and before a meeting of that body he presented his claims, which are substantially those given by Professor Firth.

"The original words were changed," said Col. Hays. "During the war Gen. Anderson had charge of the military operations by the Federal troops in Kentucky, and he required me to change the words. The original composition was as follows:

When you hear those Rebels yell,
You will see those Yankees run like hell,
Way down South in Dixie.

"The song was first sung by a glee club in Louisville....When Gen. Anderson heard the song evidently he was not taken with it. He sent Henry Dent, his provost marshall for me, and I was taken into his presence. Anderson asked me if I was the author of the song and I told him I was. He then sent me to prison, Fifth and Green streets, telling me that I was guilty of treason against the Government. Finally he released me on condition that I would change the words of the song, which I did, to-wit:

The damn fool Yankees need not run,
But watch us and you'll see fun,
Away down South In Dixie.¹⁵

The Filson Club appointed a committee at this meeting
16
to settle the matter once and for all. The newspaper report of the next meeting states that the evidence was thought to be conclusive in favor of the prior authorship of the Louisville man. The chairman of the committee was said to be receiving soon a copy of the Faulds editio of "Dixie,"

¹⁵. Louisville Herald, clipping, May (?), 1907, Hays Collection.

¹⁶. Ibid.

66

which would be presented at the next meeting of the club.¹⁷

A search of the club minutes, however, by its librarians¹⁸
disclosed no definite conclusion, only further talk,

The question of who was first with the copyright could be settled if the records could be found to show these dates. Since at that time copyrights were registered with the local District Court, the Library of Congress may not have the last word, but a letter to the writer from the reference librarian of the Library's music division comes as close as does any information found to settling this confusion. He points out certain errors in Professor Firth's treatise. The English song that Hays purportedly took the tune of "Dixie" from "is clearly Henry Rowley Bishop's march and song, used until quite recently at West Point as a 'March On.' The title is The Dashing White Serjeant (sic), and the opening words go:

If I had a beau
For a soldier who'd go
Do you think I'd say no?
No, not I!

the tune for this runs as follows. Obviously it has no close¹⁹
connection with 'Dixie.'



17. Louisville Herald, June 4, 1907.

18. Statement by Miss Ludie J. Kinkead, July 17, 1947, personal interview.

19. Letter from Richard S. Hill, Library of Congress, to the writer, June 26, 1947.

There is no documentary evidence, says the librarian, for the 1858 date. In the Library of Congress there is a copy of a song called "Away Down in Dixie's Land" said to have been sung by Hooley's and Campbell's Minstrels, words by "Jerry Blossom" and music by "Dixie, Jr." D. P. Faulds of Louisville was the publisher. Across the title page is written the date July 21, 1860.²⁰ This date, it will be noted, is exactly one month later than that of the Firth Pond edition. There is no evidence that Hays wrote as "Jerry Blossom," but if he was working with Faulds in 1860, he may have used such a nom de plume.

Hays' words, however, "could not be counted in any case as the 'original words' of Dixie, but merely one of the earliest parodies. They are quite different from Emmett's words.²¹ Hays' (or Jerry Blossom's) words were as follows:

Away Down In Dixie's Land

Oh Dixie am de Paridise
 Whar de raise de cotton and de rice,
 Come away, Poy'a away boy's away, Down in Dixie
 Whar de Gal's grow tall and de Babies small,
 And some folks dey don't grow at all,
 Come away boy's away, boy's away down in Dixie.

Chorus

Then, come let's go to Dixie,
 Yah! ho!
 We'll sing dis song, de whole night long,

20. See Figure 3, p. 61.

21. Letter from Richard S. Hill, loc. cit.

When we get down in Dixie.
 Away, away, We'll all be off for Dixie,
 Away, away, We'll soon be off for Dixie.

2

Dar was a girl in Dixie's land,
 I ax'd her for her head and hand,
 Come away boys away, boys away Down in Dixie
 Then she smiled an' gib me her consent
 I got de Gal away we went,
 Come away boys, away, boys away down in Dixie

3

And when she went to bed one night,
 She couldn't see for want of light,
 Away! boys, away! away down in Dixie,
 She lit de lite, as any one mout,
 She put it in bed and blowed her sef out,
 Away! boys, away! away down in Dixie.

4

De boy's down dar dey live on chicken;
 And de babies like lasses--dey want a lickin,
 And away! boys, away! away down in Dixie,
 Dar face's am, as broad as a farm in de Souf,
 Like de Mississippi riber got snag's in de Mouf,
 Then away boys, away down in Dixie.

5

Oh come now boys, since you've heard our story,
 To de land of light and glory,
 Come away, boys, away! away down in Dixie,
 O! our hearts am gay! we're a happy band,
 Good bye! folks now for Dixie's land, 22
 Away! boys, away! away down in Dixie.

The dedication of this song is to Captain J. B. O'Bannon
 of Tywopita, Kentucky. Diligent but vain search supports
 the belief that this is a fictitious town name. Captain
 O'Bannon, however, was an exceedingly prominent man in Louis-
 ville at that time, his home being fourteen miles east of

22. Jerry Blossom, "Away Down South in Dixie's Land"
 (Louisville: D. P. Faulds, 1860), photostat.

Away Down in
Dixie's Land

23

there, a general area with which Will was well acquainted.

Circumstantial evidence, but little more, would make

Will S. Hays and Jerry Blossom one and the same.

This dispute broke out soon after the publication of these two songs when Pond wrote to Faulds claiming an infringement of his copyright. Faulds, is said to have "proved" to Pond that Hays' version was first published in 1857 or 1858.

To avoid controversy, however, Mr. Faulds agreed to print no more copies and Col. Pond agreed to buy from him at the market price all the copies he had on hand. The arrangement was carried out and all the copies secured by Pond were destroyed. Mr. Faulds claimed at the same time that Col. Pond had no right to copyright the music, as it was not original with either Hays or Emmett. This controversy was left to the National Association of Music Publishers to settle. When it came up at a meeting in New York, six different pieces of published music were presented, all bearing the title "Dixie," and the music of all being similar, though not altogether alike, showing that all had been adapted from something else.²⁴

From this conflicting evidence there must be a lot of eliminating to get at the facts. There is no way to do this, however, after these many years. It does seem entirely probable "that perhaps Emmett adapted his song from earlier Negro sources."²⁵ As to the words, there seems to be no

23. Letter from Miss Ludie J. Kinkead, Curator and Librarian, The Filson Club, Louisville, to writer, July 17, 1947.

24. Our Country (magazine), III (1907), 9.

25. Dichter and Shapiro, op. cit., p. 105.

question but that the version sung today is Emmett's. It is altogether possible that Will S. Hays and Jerry Blossom were one and the same, but even if they were, the copyright dates do not bear out Hays' and Faulds' claims of priority. Even if this date had been earlier, it is doubtful if Emmett's words could be called a revision of those of Hays because of their differences. There seems to be no reason to challenge seriously the position of Daniel Decatur Emmett as the original writer at least of the words of the present day "Dixie," unless new evidence should come to light. To Will S. Hays it seems safe to attribute the authorship of the words of a song similar to "Dixie" but so different as to be considered original.

CHAPTER IV

HIS POETRY

Will S. Hays was born into the tradition of Southern poets, where to write a poem was a thing of a few moments on and for a certain occasion and not to be taken too seriously. Consequently, most of the verse thus turned out¹ was mediocre. Here, too, Hays was of his age.

He seems to have started writing verse simultaneously with his music, and he continued until the last few weeks of his life. Just when he wrote his first poem is not known, but while he was at Georgetown College, he wrote enough to acquire the appellation "the boy poet" and perhaps to pick up the name² "Shakespeare." at this time he was only nineteen years old.

Other than the lyrics for the songs "Little Ones At Home," "Dear Ones at Home," and "Evangeline," no poem has been found written prior to 1861 when Hays wrote the "Orphan Boy's Home" and the lyrics of "The Union Forever." In the next year he wrote a poem called "The Dance" following a party³ near O'Bannon's Station. Its form indicates that he was able to write something besides the ballad measure which

1. Edd W. Parks, Southern Poets (New York: American Book Company, 1936), Introduction, pp. lxxxiii-xcii.

2. See page 4.

3. Manuscript copies, Hays Collection. All these manuscript copies are copies seemingly made by either Mrs. Will S. Hays or Mrs. Samuel from newspaper and other sources.

was his preferred pattern.

O! the fun that we had at the dance last night,
In the school-room in the grove,
And the faces there, they were fair and bright,
And the hearts that were filled with love.

There was Nannie and Mary,
And Johnny and Harry,
And ever so many who danced in the hall,
And Bina and Annie,
Indeed there were many,
But Mollie--my Mollie, the fairest of all.

O! her eyes are so bright, and her teeth are so white,
And her lips set my heart in distress,
For like grapes just plucked from the vine at night
In deed they should go to the "Press."

And love's sparkling wine
Would flow sweet to mine,
Were the four pressed together in bliss,
And happiness would fly
From her beautiful eye, 4
When Mollie would give me a kiss.

That Hays did little revising and that he forced his meter
and rhyme is evident here.

Lines "To Mary," written in the same year for the Sunday Democrat, are in a form which he adopted for many of his poems, quatrains of rhymed iambic heptameter, written so that often there is a break between the fourth and fifth feet, thus giving him the same rhythm pattern he had in the ballad verses with their alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines.

You may forget--but do you think that I can
e'er forget?
The words of hope you kindly spoke, live, in my
memory yet;

But tell me, as you were a friend, and answer, I implore;
 Since we were friends together then, say, are we
 friends no more? ⁵

Of the same period as the above is "Just for the Old
 Love's Sake," which shows some originality in versification
 both as to stanza length and as to type of feet used.

Do you ever think of those last sweet words?
 Their memory lingers yet.
 Do you wonder how you could have said them,
 And wonder if I forget?
 No, dearest, my heart will remember them long,
 As I swore that eve by the lake;
 And whenever I think, it is loving you still,
 Just for the old love's sake. ⁶

Aside from fugitive newspaper poems Hays' verse did not
 see publication until his first volume appeared in 1874. ⁷

Prior to that date, however, he had fallen in love and had
 married Belle McCullough, ⁸ and his poetic knack had the in-
 spiration it needed. His love letters were often more verse
 than prose as he seemed to find the prosaic medium too lim-
 ited for his purposes. One of his earliest letters to Belle,
 written May 22, 1864, covers four pages and contains some
 fifty lines of rhymed verse. This, so far as is known, was
 his first venture at putting verse in his letters, and he
 did it with a little trepidation, if exuberance. "I will
 compose you a little piece of 'Rime,'" he said, "for I feel

5. Manuscript copy, Hays Collection.

6. Manuscript copy, Hays Collection.

7. Will S. Hays, The Modern Mettin' House and Other
 Poems (Louisville: Courier-Journal Job Rooms, 1874).

8. See page 15.

as if I could write for a month, provided you will not
⁹
 show it to any one."

The golden eye of day, whose rosy light
 Hath looked upon us from its world of space,
 Now wraps its sparkling folds around it tight
 As if to find some secret hiding place.

But 'ere that eye hath closed in blissful rest,
 In all its beauty nature to adorn,
 It seeks the sunlit bosom of the west,
 To be the brighter on tomorrow morn,

Good night! Thou friend of friends! a fond Good night!
 May all the orbs of heav'n upon you shine.
 And may the fairest angels robed in white,
 E'er watch above that faultless form of thine.¹⁰

Before the close of this letter Hays switched from the
 tranquility of the foregoing iambic pentameter to the more
 acid tetrameter as he thinks of what may happen to their
 relationship if others carry gossip about him to Belle.

When slanderous tongues are stilled in death,
 And time will snatch away each liar's pen,
 And throw them--ink and all--in hell,
 May you and I be happy then.
 And when the day of Judgement comes,
 A sorry day to them, Alas!
 May you and I in Heaven stand
 That we may see them as they pass.¹¹

Some of Will's letters are in a happy mood, and his
 Poetry is in like vein, though he was unpredictable and
 might the next moment be melancholy. The following lines

9. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough,
 May 22, 1864, Hays Collection.
 10. Ibid.
 11. Ibid.

typify his happier expressions.

There's not a murky cloud of doubt
That shades my happy heart,
For Friendship mounts my inner soul
And bids dull care depart,
And through the windows of that heart,
Oh! Belle, your eyes can trace
The beauties of a love so bright
And genial as your face!¹²

Belle was at Bellewack Seminary near Anchorage, Kentucky, at the time of the writing of the above and was demanding reassurances that she had not been forgotten.¹³ He reassured her thus:

The Southern sun ne'er closed its eye at eve
But what my memory like some swift winged bird
Flew back to Bellewood, and built its nest
Upon the branches of the tree of Friendship;
And, when the morning woke, I found the sweet
Bird Memory had returned with good intelligence
And nestled in my bosom, weary with its mission.
Again and oftentimes I thought of you when you,
As if I were a stranger, had perhaps forgotten,
I am happy now! For from your own true lips
The words have entered the depths of a heart
That is now full of hope, joy, love, and friendship.
It seems to me the sweetest words you ever spoke
Were these: "I am your friend."¹⁴

Typical of the tetrameter quatrains he used frequently in his letters is the following. It illustrates, too, his fondness for inserting his own name into the lines.

And if my lips can give you praise,
O! Let mine be the first to do it;

12. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, May 30, 1864, Hays Collection.

13. Ibid., marginal note.

14. Ibid., text of letter.

Then tell the world that Will S. Hays
Was ever faithful and you knew it.¹⁵

This is not great poetry, certainly, but as spontaneous,
unrevised verse, it surpasses the usual love letter doggerel.

In the dark days when Hays was in disfavor with Belle
and her parents because of his misdemeanors,¹⁶ he wrote piti-
ful letters, but there is no verse in them, only prose.
Such real and personal misery did not serve to move him to
poetry. When matters were straightened out, however, we
find him in the early part of 1865 overflowing with confi-
dence in a shared love.

The birds were made to go in pairs,
Be happy and be free.
Since God so constituted them,
Then why not you and me?¹⁷

Could I but see your smiling face
Or sit beside you for a while,
Each clasped in one long sweet embrace
The world might frown--but let us smile.¹⁸

Sometimes in order to finish a stanza or to make a
rhyme, Will distorted his meaning or said things he had to
spend paragraphs of prose trying to explain away. A quatrain
from "Leisure Moments," that long love letter to Belle, is

15. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough,
June 30, 1864, Hays Collection.

16. See pages 12, 13.

17. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, Jan-
uary 28, 1865, Hays Collection.

18. Letter from Will S. Hays to Belle McCullough, Feb-
ruary 3, 1865, Hays Collection.

illustrative.

They like to have a lover tell,
As to how to her he will be true,
But most of them all love because 19
Like me--they've nothing else to do.

In these pages Will wrote not only of his love for Belle but of the aged, the infirm, and other girls. He reported meeting a former girl friend, now married, who, he believed, still loved him. He read in her unhappy face her disappointment.

Your cheeks were pale, your lips were thin,
Your voice was soft and low,
You seemed to be the ghost of what
You were two years ago.
I almost wept that we had met
Or ever met before.
But no! Poor Girl! I am still yet
A friend, but nothing more.²⁰

The last quatrain in this little volume turns back to the girl he loves, however.

She knows each impulse of my heart,
And more, but she alone
Can know me, for to know my heart
Is but to know her own.²¹

The pamphlet Hays published in 1874 contains five poems, four of which are in the dialect of the uneducated white people of his day and which fall into rhyming couplets of iambic heptameter. They are nostalgic and philosophic, in

19. Will S. Hays, "Leisure Moments," (Unpublished diary).

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

tone, upholding and yearning for the old virtues and the old customs. The title piece, "The Modern Meetin' House," concerns the changes the years have brought in places and modes of worship. The matter of elaborate dress, rented pews, paid organists, and fine churches he castigates before closing with these lines:

Thar ain't no use o' foolin' 'long the road to the
grave;
Thar is no use o' dodgin' when you've got your
soul to save,
Fine churches, organs, carriages, clothes, rented
pews, an' pelf;
Don't count that day--it lays between yer
Maker an' yerself.²²

"Ben Wilkins' Fall" in the same volume tells of the dangers of fashion and drink. "Then and Now" contrasts the fast living of his day with the way things were in days gone by. It ends:

Well, Nancy, I'll tell you what's a fac, the Lord
is good to us,
Let's you an' me be good to Him, an' in Him
put our trust,
We'll pray to Him--that he will make our pathway
one of flowers.
Ef white-washed Christians go to Hell, it's no
consarn of ours.²³

The other dialect poem in this collection is called "Women Vs. Whisky" and concerns the attempts of women to break up the drinking in the whiskey shops by going there

22. Will S. Days, The Modern Meetin' House and Other Poems (Louisville: Courier-Journal Job Rooms, 1874), p. 4.

23. Ibid., p. 6.

to pray. While sympathizing with their cause, he thought they should be at home trying to get the farmers to plant more wheat in place of rye and corn and in getting lawmakers elected who would outlaw liquor.

Ah! Jedge, I'd like ter know one thing--what good
kin whimmin do,
When men that make it go to church an' Christian
lives pursue.
They'll pray thar prayers an' sing thar songs,
an' when the Sunday's o'er,
They'll make an' sell that whiskey, sir, an' kill
'em by the score.²⁴

Hays' other two volumes, the 1886 and 1895 editions, are composed of song lyrics and of poems never set to music. As to poetic worth, the lyrics do not equal the others. Since these latter are on a variety of subjects they will be discussed along with his fugitive verse under the appropriate topic.

Most of the verse Hays wrote appeared in newspapers, either in his own column or as a special contribution. There are in existence, also, many verses he wrote for autograph books,²⁵ but most of these are short and insignificant.

During the Civil War Hays had difficulty in deciding on his stand. His poems of this period show a sympathetic attitude toward those the war caused to suffer, whether

24. Ibid., p. 14.

25. Letter from Mrs. James R. Leach, formerly Antiques Editor, Courier-Journal, to writer, May 30, 1947.

Nothern or Southern. They show at times a desire for the preservation of the Union and at others a sentimental attachment to the South which makes the Union seem not so important. These interests he brought together in poems such as "Sauct Sue" and "A Burning Shame" by having the Yankee soldier fall in love with the beautiful Rebel girl. 26
Of the poems speaking of the dead of the War none is perhaps better than the one called "Virginia's Dead."

Proud Mother of a race that reared
The brave and good of ours,
Lo! on thy bleeding bosom lie
Thy pale and perished flowers.
Where'er upon her own bright soul
Hosts meet their blood to shed,
Where brightest gleams the victor's sword,
There lie Virginia's dead.

And where upon the crimson field
The canon loudest roars,
And hero blood for liberty
A streaming terrent pours;
Where fiercest glows the battle's rage,
And Southern banners spread,
Where minions crouch and vassals kneel,
There lie Virginia's dead.

Where bright Potomac's classic wave
Flows softly to the sea,
And Shenandoah's valley smiles
In her captivity;
Where sullen Mississinpi rolls,
By foaming torrents fed,
And Tennessee's smooth ripple breaks,
There sleep Virginia's dead.

And where mid dreary mountain heights
The frost-king sternly sate,

As Garnett cheered his followers on,
 And nobly met his fate;
 Where Johnston, Lee, and Beauregard
 Their gallant armies led,
 Through winter snows and tropic suns
 There sleep Virginia's dead.

And where through Georgia's flowery meads
 The proud Savannah flows,
 And soft o'er Carolina's brow
 Atlantic's pure breeze blows,
 Where Florida's sweet tropic flowers
 Their dewy fragrance shed,
 And night winds sigh through orange groves,
 There sleep Virginia's dead.

Where sad Louisiana's eye
 Looks darkly on her chains,
 And proud New Orleans' noble street
 The despot heel profanes;
 Where virtue shrinks in dread dismay,
 And beauty bows her head,
 Where courage spurns the oppressor's joke
 There lie Virginia's dead.

'Neath Alabama's sunny skies,
 On Texas' burning shore,
 Where blooming prairies brightly sweep
 Missouri's bosom o'er;
 Where bold Kentucky's lion heart
 Leaps to her Morgan's tread,
 And tyrants quail at Freedom's cry,
 There sleep Virginia's dead.

And where the ocean's trackless waves
 O'er pallid corraes sweep,
 As, 'mid the cannon's thunder peal,
 "Deep calleth unto deep;"
 Wherever Honor's sword is drawn.
 And Justice rears her head,
 Where heroes fall and martyrs bleed,
 There rest Virginia's dead.²⁷

Hays had no love for the war and said so in a poem he

27. Mrs. Will S. Hays, Scrapbook, pp. 140-2, Hays
 Collection.