

Settings of the Anglo-American Folk Hymn *BOURBON*, 1814-1902

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Versions of the minor pentatonic folk hymn *BOURBON* appeared, starting in 1814, in nineteenth-century shapenote tunebooks under several titles and arrangements and are in print in hymnals today. Settings of *BOURBON* illustrate a modernizing trend that “corrected” folk polyphony by replacing it with so-called scientific harmony, or triadic functional harmony imported from Europe. Accompanying changes include shifting the melody from the tenor to the soprano line, removing sonorities considered dissonances, and positioning parts on the staff for the convenience of piano accompaniment rather than a cappella singing. Later arrangements demonstrate that minor modality fell out of favor to the point that the tune was reharmonized in the relative major key with the final note falling on the third degree of the subdominant. Theoretical writings of the late 1800s speculate that the disappearance of the minor mode, and minor chords in general, was due to two factors: the greater emphasis on cheerful messages in worship and the use of instruments, which clashed with the sung interpretation of the minor mode in oral tradition. Analysis of the SWASMIS database (Pappas 2015) confirms that the features observed in these settings of *BOURBON* were examples of widespread trends in nineteenth-century Anglo-American sacred music.