AWAY IN A MANGER
Away in A Manger

Words: ANONYMOUS

Moderately \( (\text{\textit{b}} = 100) \)

Music: JAMES RAMSEY MURRAY

1. Away in a manger, no crib for His bed, the
   lit - tle Lord Je - sus laid down His sweet head; the
   lit - tle Lord Je - sus a - sleep on the hay.

2. The cat - tle are low - ing the Ba - by a - wakes, but
   lit - tle Lord Je - sus no cry - ing He makes. I
   stay by my cra - dle 'til morn - ing is nigh.

3. Be near me, Lord Je - sus, I ask Thee to stay, close
   by me for - ev - er, and love me, I pray. Bless
   all the dear chil - dren in Thy ten - der care, and
   take us to heav - en to live with Thee there.

stars in the sky looked down where He lay, the
love Thee, Lord Je - sus, look down from the sky and
The words of this popular Christmas song are often attributed to Martin Luther. However, after doing extensive research, Richard Hill, distinguished head of the reference section of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., discovered that the first two verses of the song were recorded without authorship in an 1885 American Lutheran publication called *Little Children’s Book for Schools and Families.*

The erroneous attribution to Luther appears to have come from James Murray (likely the author of the tune we know today). In 1887, Murray published *Dainty Songs for Little Lads and Lasses* in which he titled the song “Luther’s Cradle Hymn” and noted that it was “composed by Martin Luther for his children, and still sung by German mothers to their little ones.” Interestingly, German mothers knew nothing of the song at this time. Murray probably confused “Away in a Manger” with another hymn that Luther wrote for his own family celebration of Christmas Eve. The hymn is titled, “Von Himmel hoch, da komm’ ich her” (“From highest heaven, I come to tell”). Here are three of the 15 verses in the hymn:

“Awake, my soul! my heart, behold
Who lieth in that manger cold!
Who is this lovely baby boy?
‘Tis Jesus Christ, our only joy.

“Ah, Lord, who all things didst create,
How cam’st thou to this poor estate,
To make the hay and straw thy bed,
Whereon the ox and ass are fed?

“Ah, Jesu, my heart’s treasure blest,
Make thee a clean, soft cradle-nest
And rest enshrined within my heart,
That I from thee may never part.”

Hill believes that “Away in a Manger” most likely had its origin in one of the many dramatic presentations performed by American Lutherans in 1883 to mark the 400th anniversary of the birth of their founder. Perhaps “Away in a Manger” was written as a “simplified” version of Luther’s hymn and was presented, for dramatic purposes, as a song (or poem) that was written by Luther for his children to recite.

Though Luther penned lovely verses for his children, and though he may have inspired the stanzas of “Away in a Manger,” he did not write them. Hill’s research concluded that we must put
to rest “once for all the legend that Luther wrote a carol for his children, which no one else knew anything about, until it suddenly turned up in English dress four hundred years later in Philadelphia. Luther can well afford to spare the honor.”

The third verse of “Away in a Manger” did not appear until 1892 in a Lutheran collection called Gabriel’s Vineyard Songs. Ironically, even this later verse has questionable authorship. At one point, the secretary of the Lutheran Board of Education gave credit to John McFarland. However, this attribution is possibly the result of confusion between the man who supplied the verse for publication and the person who actually wrote it.

Music “Mueller” by James Ramsey Murray (1841/2-1905)

As noted above, James Murray is held responsible for erroneously attributing the words of “Away in a Manger” to Martin Luther. Ironically, Murray’s own authorship of the tune would be mistakenly assigned as well. In part, Murray was to blame for the confusion. He “signed the setting with his initials, thus giving the impression that he had merely arranged a melody by Luther.” On the other hand, as Murray’s tune rapidly grew in popularity (more so than the other 40+ tunes to which the song has been set), publishers were careless about researching the copyright.

The tune came to be called “Mueller,” because at some point, publishers credited a Carl Mueller with its authorship. However, it appears that no such person existed. Hill writes that evidence makes it look “like the desperate hoax of an editor who, knowing full well that the melody was not composed by Luther, preferred to put down just any name, so long as it was vague enough, rather than attempt to establish the correct composer.” Murray himself claimed authorship, and unless evidence reveals the contrary, it is reasonable to assume that he truly composed the tune.

Murray was certainly a capable musician. He studied under many legendary teachers at the Musical Institute in North Reading, Mass. One of them was Lowell Mason who arranged the music for “Joy to the World.” But Murray lived at a time of political unrest, and he ended up serving as an army musician in the American Civil War. During his time in the army, Murray became nationally famous for a sentimental song called “Daisy Deane”; he composed it in a Virginia camp in 1863. After the war, Murray taught and published music in a variety of positions.

By 1881, Murray began working for an Ohio publishing company, the John Church Company. He published several books of songs for Sunday schools and Gospel meetings. He also wrote a book on the basics of music and compiled a music dictionary. It was during his time at the John Church Company that he discovered the song “Away in a Manger” and had it published in 1887. It appears that Murray spent the remainder of his life working for this company and had the opportunity to see the song sweep across the nation.

Though Murray left behind a wonderful legacy with his music for “Away in a Manger,” it is interesting to note that his life and musical activities are often overlooked in reference books on music and musicians. Additionally, little is known about his personal life and faith. He, like the author of the words, is left in obscurity.
It seems fitting that no real honor is given to either the author or the composer of “Away in a Manger.” After all, the song is meant to turn attention to the God who humbly entered the world without honor or glory or even a “crib for a bed.”

3 Keyte, Hugh and Parrott, Andrew, editors, pp. 201-202.
4 Hill, Richard S. Not So Far Away In A Manger, Forty-one Settings of an America Carol.
5 Keyte, Hugh and Parrott, Andrew, editors, p. 361.
6 Keyte, Hugh and Parrott, Andrew, editors, p. 361.
7 Hill, Richard S. Not So Far Away In A Manger, Forty-one Settings of an America Carol.