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ARTICLE V.

THE HYMNS OF MARTIN LUTHER: THEIR PREDECESSORS, AND THEIR PLACE IN HISTORY.[1]

By Professor Edward Dickinson.

The science of hymnology has never yet received the attention which it deserves at the hands of students of church history. It is a necessary branch of the subject of religious art, and yet while architecture, painting, and music have been examined with considerable thoroughness in respect to their ecclesiastical relations, the voice of the church in hymns and spiritual songs has been but slightingly regarded. So far as hymns have been studied at all, it has been mainly upon the æsthetic side, and in individual instances; not by groups, or with reference to their expression of certain general types of piety. But it is in this latter particular that their historic value lies. The student of church history soon comes to realize that the ultimate object of his search is the enduring

[1] The following works are the most important sources of information upon the subject treated in this article: *Wackernagel*, Das deutsche Kirchenlied, von der ältesten Zeit bis zu Anfang des XVII. Jahrhunderts; *Koch*, Geschichte des Kirchenliedes und Kirchengesangs der christlichen, insbesondere der deutschen evangelischen Kirche; *Winterfeld*, Der evangelische Kirchengesang; *Hoffmann von Fallersleben*, Geschichte des deutschen Kirchenliedes bis auf Luther's Zeit; *Bäumker*, Katholische deutsche Kirchenlied in seinen Singweisen von der frühesten Zeit bis gegen Ende des XVII. Jahrhunderts; *Liliencron*, Deutsches Leben im Volkslied um 1530: *Koestlin*, Geschichte des christlichen Gottesdienstes. Translations: The Hymns of Martin Luther set to their original melodies, with an English version, edited by *L. W. Bacon* assisted by *N. H. Allen*; The Chorale Book for England, compiled and edited by *William Sterndale Bennett* and *Otto Goldschmidt*; Lyra Germanica, translated by *Catherine Winkworth*.

spiritual elements which underlie doctrinal systems and antagonistic policies. Clearing away the vast multitude of phenomena which tell only of political ambition, the lust of aggrandizement, and the delight in the exercise of mere intellectual subtlety—facts which make the annals of the church so bewildering and often so sad—we perceive that below all these there has been a persistent and constantly deepening current of conscientious spiritual endeavor. There is a history of piety, as well as a history of dogma and of conduct. This religious consciousness, this spirit of piety, has taken manifold forms, it has passed through many phases, often issuing in results of divine beauty and perfection, often led by erroneous conceptions into strange vagaries; yet the ultimate ground purpose has been a sincere longing to enter into right relations with God and to obtain his favor. This impulse has revealed itself in the mystical temper, the ascetic, the practical. In actual conduct it has at one time insisted upon obedience to authority, at another it has deferred to the spirit of individualism; it has absorbed the mind in contemplation, or it has neglected contemplation in favor of philanthropic activities; it has sometimes derived aid from the disciplined enjoyment of the good things of this world, again it has sought the annihilation of temporal satisfactions as hindrances to spiritual growth. All these aspects of the religious motive are the outcome of one common basic principle, acted upon by different conditions and diffracted through various types of mind.

These we study with an especially absorbing interest, for they lead us as far as we can go into the deepest and most sacred arcana of the human soul. We study them not simply as they have manifested themselves in conduct, but with a more penetrating insight and fuller comprehension as we scrutinize the forms of art expression which they have assumed. Religious conceptions, in their primary activity as emotion—love, reverence, aspiration—not deliberately formulated in dogma,

have never failed to embody themselves in some kind of artistic form. Art in its historic aspects is the utterance of typical minds when acted upon by ideas that are especially potent in certain epochs and localities. Religious art is at all times particularly truthful as a witness. For here the artist is most really himself, most free from the bias of fashion or the temptation of the market; he feels most urgently the demand that he be sincere, for his reference is not so much to the favor of men as to that of a divine Patron and Judge, who cannot be deceived by superficial charm, or gratified by anything but a desire for absolute truth. Religious art is not, however, entirely unconstrained, for while it may disclose the thought of men of genius who are sincere seekers after the heavenly vision, they are also, as a rule, adherents of some particular ecclesiastical institution, which they believe has in its keeping the essential body of truth. Their art is therefore not universally religious, it is definitely ecclesiastical. It is colored by the modes of thought and of devotional exercise which are especially nurtured by the confession to which they adhere. National traits also come into play, and these two elements, the doctrinal and the racial, give to religious art its various distinctive features, developing schools and styles which are the counterparts and reflections of historic creeds, polities, and disciplines.

Every form of religious art gives instruction in regard to the special type of piety that underlies it—but this is most universally the case with the arts of poetry, music, and ceremonial. Only in a few of the branches of the Christian church have painting and sculpture been systematically employed for religious uses. In many sects architecture has no other purpose than to furnish shelter and material convenience for the worshiping assembly. But poetry, music, and some form of symbolic ceremony, if it be no more than the bowing of the head in prayer, are, with but very few exceptions, essential accompaniments of religious service everywhere. In

the large sense they are not the creation of individuals, but of the church which they serve; and the church cherishes them, not only as a means of edification, but still more as her most appropriate form of speech in addressing the ear of her Lord and Master.

No phase of Christian art is more attractive from the standpoint which I have stated, than hymnology. Here we find every possible shade of devotional feeling. That hymns have not proved the highest form of poetry, judged by artistic standards, does not lessen but rather increases their significance. They have been written, not by the lofty poetic geniuses, but by men not ambitious of literary fame, willing to sink their own personality in the office of contributing that which would answer universal needs and be taken into the mouths of the people at large. As hymns have entered into the common everyday life, so are they most intimately the outflowing of the heart of the church. They are not the expression of exceptional experience, but of the common faith. Although not classed as folk song by technical definition, they are essentially such; they must be studied in the mass, be grouped in schools, with constant reference to large religious movements around which they gather and whose vital motives they always plainly reveal.

Among the great historic groups of hymns that have appeared since Clement of Alexandria and Ephraëm the Syrian set in motion the tide of Christian song, the Lutheran hymnody has for us the greatest interest. In sheer literary excellence it is undoubtedly surpassed by the Latin hymns of the mediæval church and the English-American group; in musical merit it no more than equals these; but in historic importance the Lutheran song takes the foremost place. The Latin and the English hymns belong only to the history of poetry and of inward spiritual experience; the Lutheran have a place in the annals of politics and doctrinal strifes as well. Protestant hymnody dates from Martin Luther; his

lyrics were the models of the hymns of the Reformed church in Germany for a century or more; the principle that lay at the basis of his movement gave them their characteristic tone; they were among the most efficient agencies in carrying this principle to the mind of the common people, and they also contributed powerfully to the enthusiasm which enabled the new faith to maintain itself in the conflicts by which it was tested. The melodies to which the hymns of Luther and his followers were set became the foundation of a musical style which is the one school worthy to be placed beside the Italian Catholic music of the sixteenth century. This hymnody and its music afforded the first adequate outlet for the poetic and musical genius of the German people, and established the pregnant democratic traditions of German art as against the aristocratic traditions of Italy and France. As we cannot overestimate the spiritual and intellectual force that entered the European arena with Luther and his disciples, so we must also recognize the analogous elements which asserted themselves at the same moment and under the same inspiration in the field of art expression, and gave to this movement a language which helps us in a peculiar way to understand its real import.

The ultimate consequences of this poetic and musical impulse do not come within the scope of this article. Our object will be simply to show in what the importance of the hymns of Luther himself consisted. The method must be that of comparison. The first questions are: What was the origin of the Lutheran hymnody? Had it models, and if so, what and where were they? In giving a store of congregational songs to the German people was Luther original or only an imitator? In this matter does he deserve the honor which Protestants have given him?

Protestant writers have, as a rule, bestowed unstinted praise upon Luther as the man who first gave the people a voice with which to utter their religious emotions in song.

Most of these writers are undoubtedly aware that a national poesy is never the creation of a single man, and that a brilliant epoch of national literature or art must always be preceded by a period of experiment and fermentation; yet they are disposed to make little account of the existence of a popular sacred song in Germany before the Reformation, and represent Luther almost as performing the miracle of making the dumb to speak. Even those that recognize the existence of a preëxisting school of hymnody usually seek to give the impression that pure evangelical religion was almost, if not quite, unknown in the popular religious poetry of the centuries before the Reformation, and that the Lutheran hymnody was composed of altogether new elements. They also ascribe to Luther creative work in music as well as in poetry. Catholic writers, on the other hand, will allow Luther no originality whatever; they find, or pretend to find, every essential feature of his work in the Catholic hymns and tunes of the previous centuries, or in those of the Bohemian sectaries. They admit the great influence of Luther's hymns in disseminating the new doctrines, but give him credit only for cleverness in dressing up his borrowed ideas and forms in a taking popular guise. As is usually the case, the truth lies between the two extremes. Luther's originality has been overrated by Protestants, and the true nature of the germinal force which he imparted to German congregational song has been misconceived by Catholics. It was not new forms, but a new spirit, which Luther gave to his church. He did not break with the past, but found in the past a new standing-ground. He sought in the Scriptures, in the writings of the fathers and the mediæval theologians, for ideas which satisfied his cravings; he rejected what he deemed false or barren in the mother church, adopted and developed what was true and fruitful, and molded it into forms which in style were already familiar to the people. In poetry, music, and the several details of church worship Luther recast the old models, and gave

them to his followers with contents purified and adapted to those needs which he himself had made them to realize. He understood the character of his people; he knew where to find the nourishment suited to their wants; he knew how to turn their enthusiasms into practical and progressive directions. This was Luther's achievement in the sphere of church art, and if, in recognizing the precise nature of his work, we seem to decry his reputation for creative genius, we do him better justice by honoring his practical wisdom.

The singing of religious songs by the common people in their own language in connection with church services did not begin in Germany with the Reformation. The German folk and popular song is of ancient date, and the religious lyric always had a prominent place in it. The Teutonic tribes before their conversion to Christianity had a large store of hymns to their deities, and afterward their musical fervor turned itself no less ardently to the service of their new allegiance. Wackernagel, in the second volume of his monumental collection of German hymns from the earliest time to the beginning of the seventeenth century, includes fourteen hundred and forty-eight religious lyrics in the German tongue composed between the years 868 and 1518. This collection, he says, is as complete as possible, but we must suppose that a very large number written before the invention of printing have been lost. About half the hymns in this volume are of unknown authorship. Among the writers whose names are given we find such notable poets as Walther von der Vogelweide, Gottfried von Strassburg, Hartmann von Aue, Frauenlob, Reinmar der Zweter, Kunrad der Marner, Heinrich von Loufenberg, Michel Behem, and Hans Sachs, beside famous churchmen like Eckart and Tauler, who are not otherwise known as poets. A great number of these poems are hymns only in a qualified sense, having been written not for public use, but for private satisfaction; but many others are true hymns, and have often

resounded from the mouths of the people in social religious functions.

Down to the tenth century the only practice among the Germans that could be called a popular church song was the ejaculation of the words *Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison.* These words, which are among the most ancient in the Mass and the litanies, and which came originally from the Eastern church, were sung or shouted by the German Christians on all possible occasions. In processions, on pilgrimages, at burials, greeting of distinguished visitors, consecration of a church or prelate, in many subordinate liturgical offices, invocations of supernatural aid in times of distress, on the march, going into battle,—in almost every social action in which religious sanctions were involved the people were in duty bound to utter this phrase, often several hundred times in succession. The words were often abbreviated into *Kyrieles, Kyrie eleis, Kyrielle, Kerleis,* and *Kles,* and sometimes became mere inarticulate cries.

When the phrase was formally sung, the Gregorian tones proper to it in the church service were employed. Some of these were florid successions of notes, many to a syllable, as in the "Alleluia" from which the Sequences sprung,—a free impassioned form of emotional utterance which had extensive use in the service of the earlier church, both East and West, and which is still employed, sometimes to extravagant lengths, in the Orient. The custom at last arose of setting words to these exuberant strains. This usage took two forms, giving rise in the ritual service to the "farced Kyries" or Tropes, and in the freer song of the people producing a more regular style of hymn, in which the *Kyrie eleison* became at last a mere refrain, at the end of each stanza. These songs came to be called *Kirleisen,* or *Leisen,* and sometimes *Leiche,* and are the origin of the German congregational hymn.

Sacred songs in the national dialects multiplied in the centuries following the tenth almost by geometrical progres-

sion. The tide reached a high mark in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under that extraordinary intellectual awakening which distinguished the epoch of the Crusades, the Stauffen emperors, the Minnesingers, and the court epic poets. Under the stimulus of the ideals of chivalric honor and knightly devotion to woman, the adoration of the Virgin Mother, long cherished in the bosom of the church, burst forth in a multitude of ecstatic lyrics in her praise. Poetic and musical inspiration was communicated by the courtly poets to the clergy and common people, and the love of singing at religious observances grew apace. Certain heretics, who made much stir in this period, also wrote hymns and put them into the mouths of the populace, thus following the early example of the Arians and the disciples of Bardasanes. To resist this perversion of the divine art, orthodox songs were composed, and, as in the Reformation days, schismatics and Romanists vied with each other in wielding this powerful proselyting agent.

Mystics of the fourteenth century—Eckart, Tauler, and others—wrote hymns of a new tone, an inward spiritual quality, less objective, more individual, voicing a yearning for an immediate union of the soul with God, and the joy of personal love to the Redeemer. Poetry of this nature especially appealed to the religious sisters, and from many a convent came echoes of these chastened raptures, in which are heard accents of longing for the comforting presence of the Heavenly Bridegroom.

Those half-insane fanatics, the Flagellants, and other enthusiasts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, also contributed somewhat to the store of pre-Reformation hymnody. Hoffmann von Fallersleben has given a vivid account of the barbaric doings of these bands of self-tormentors, and it is evident that their singing was not the least uncanny feature of their performances.

In the fourteenth century appeared the device which played so large a part in the production of the Reformation

hymns—that of adapting secular tunes to sacred poems, and also making religious paraphrases of secular ditties. Praises of love, of out-door sport, even of wine, by a few simple alterations were made to express devotional sentiments. A good illustration of this practice is the recasting of the favorite folk song, "Den liepsten Bulen den ich han," into "Den liepsten Herren den ich han." Much more common, however, was the transfer of melodies from profane poems to sacred, a method which afterward became an important reliance for supplying the Reformed congregations with hymn tunes.

Mixed songs, part Latin and part German, were at one time much in vogue. A celebrated example is the—

"In dulce jubilo
Nu singet und seyt fro,"

of the fourteenth century, which has often been heard in the Reformed churches down to a recent period.

In the fifteenth century the popular religious song flourished with an affluence hardly surpassed even in the first two centuries of Protestantism. Still under the control of the Catholic doctrine and discipline, it nevertheless betokens a certain restlessness of mind; the native individualism of the German spirit is preparing to assert itself. The fifteenth was a century of stir and inquiry, full of premonitions of the mighty upheaval soon to follow. The Revival of Learning began to shake Germany, as well as Southern and Western Europe, out of its superstition and intellectual subjection. The religious and political movements in Bohemia and Moravia, set in motion by the preaching and martyrdom of Hus, produced strong effect in Germany. Hus struck at some of the same abuses that aroused the wrath of Luther, notably the traffic in indulgences. The demand for the use of the vernacular in church worship was even more fundamental than the similar desire in Germany, and preceded rather than followed the movement toward reform. Hus was also a prototype of Luther in that he was virtually the founder of

the Bohemian hymnody. He wrote hymns both in Latin and in Czech, and earnestly encouraged the use of vernacular songs by the people. The Utraquists published a song-book in the Czech language in 1501 and the Unitas Fratrum one, containing four hundred hymns, in 1505. These two antedated the first Lutheran hymn-book by about twenty years. The Bohemian reformers, like Luther after them, based their poetry upon the Psalms, the ancient Latin hymns, and the old vernacular religious songs; they improved existing texts, and set new hymns in place of those that contained objectionable doctrinal features. Their tunes also were derived, like those of the German reformers, from older religious and secular melodies.

These achievements of the Bohemians, answering popular needs that exist at all times, could not remain without influence upon the Germans. Encouragement to religious expression in the vernacular was also exerted by certain religious communities known as Brethren of the Common Life, which originated in Holland in the latter part of the fourteenth century, and extended into north and middle Germany in the fifteenth. Thomas à Kempis was a member of this order. The purpose of these Brethren was to inculcate a purer religious life among the people, especially the young, and they made it a ground principle that the national language should be used so far as possible in prayer and song. Particularly effective in the culture of sacred poetry and music among the artisan class were the schools of the Mastersingers, which flourished all over Germany in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries.

Standing upon the threshold of the Reformation, and looking back over the period that elapsed since the pagan myths and heroic lays of the North began to yield to the metrical gospel narrative of the Heliand and the poems of Otfried, we can trace the same union of pious desire and poetic instinct which, in a more enlightened age, produced the four hundred

thousand evangelical hymns of Germany. The pre-Reformation hymns are of the highest importance as casting light upon the condition of religious belief among the German laity. We find in them a great variety of elements,—much that is pure, noble, and strictly evangelical, mixed with crudity, superstition, and crass realism. In the nature of the case they do not, on the whole, rise to the poetic and spiritual level of the contemporary Latin hymns of the church. There is nothing in them comparable with the "Dies Irae," the "Stabat Mater," the "Hova Novissima," the "Veni Sancte Spiritus," the "Ad Perennis Vitae Fontem," the Passion Hymns of St. Bernard, or scores that might be named which make up the golden chaplet of sacred Latin verse from Hilary to Xavier. The latter is the poetry of the cloister, the work of men separated from the world, upon whom asceticism and scholastic philosophizing had worked to refine and subtilize their conceptions. It is the poetry, not of laymen, but of priests and monks, the special and peculiar utterance of a sacerdotal class, wrapt in intercessory functions, straining ever for glimpses of the Beatific Vision, whose one absorbing effort was to emancipate the soul from time, and discipline it for eternity. It is poetry of and for the temple, the sacramental mysteries, the hours of prayer, for seasons of solitary meditation; it blends with the dim light sifted through stained cathedral windows, with incense, with majestic music. The simple layman was not at home in such an atmosphere as this, and the Latin hymn was not a familiar expression of his thought. His mental training was of a simpler, more commonplace order. He must particularize, his religious feeling must lay hold of something more tangible, something that could serve his childish views of things, and enter into some practical relation with the needs of his ordinary mechanical existence. The religious folk song, therefore, shows many traits similar to those found in the secular folk song, and we can easily perceive the influence of one upon the

other. In both we can see how receptive the common people were to anything that savored of the marvelous, and how their minds dwelt more upon the external wonder than upon the lesson that it brings. The connection of these poems with the ecclesiastical dramas, which form such a remarkable chapter in the history of religious instruction in the Middle Ages, is also apparent, and scores of them are simply narratives of the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension, told over and over in almost identical language. These German hymns show in what manner the dogmas and usages of the church took root in the popular heart, and affected the spirit of the time. In all other mediæval literature we have the testimony of the higher class of minds, the men of education, who were saved by their reflective intelligence from falling into the grosser superstitions, or at least from dwelling in them. But in the folk poetry the great middle class throws back the ideas imposed by its religious teachers, tinged by its own crude mental operations. The result is that we have in these poems the doctrinal perversions and the mythology of the Middle Ages set forth in their baldest form. Beliefs that are the farthest removed from the teaching of the Scriptures, are carried to lengths which the Catholic Church has never authoritatively sanctioned, but which are natural consequences of the action of her dogmas upon untrained superstitious minds. There are hymns which teach the preëxistence of Mary with God before the creation; that in and through her all things were created. Others, not content with the church doctrine of her intercessory office in Heaven, represent her as commanding and controlling her Son, and even as forgiving sins in her own right. Hagiolatry, too, is carried to its most dubious extremity. Power is ascribed to the saints to save from the pains of hell. In one hymn they are implored to intercede with God for the sinner, because, the writer says, God will not deny their prayer. It is curious to see in some of these poems that the attributes

of love and compassion, which have been removed from the Father to the Son, and from the Son to the Virgin Mother, are again transferred to St. Ann, who is implored to intercede with her daughter in behalf of the suppliant.

All this, and much more of a similar sort, the product of vulgar error and distorted thinking, cannot be gainsaid. But let us, with equal candor, acknowledge that there is a bright side to this subject. Corruption and falsehood are not typical of the German religious poetry of the Middle Ages. Many Protestant writers represent the mediæval German hymns as chiefly given over to Mariolatry and much debasing superstition, and as therefore indicative of the religious state of the nation. This, however, is very far from being the case, as a candid examination of such a collection as Wackernagel's will show. Take out everything which a severe Protestant would reject, and there remains a large body of poetry which flows from the pure undefiled springs of Christian faith, which from the evangelical standpoint is true and edifying, gems of expression not to be matched by the poetry of Luther and his friends in simplicity and refinement of language. Ideas common to the hymnody of all ages are to be found there. One comes to mind in which there is carried out in the most touching way the thought of John Newton in his most famous hymn, where in vision the look of the crucified Christ seems to charge the arrested sinner with his death. Another lovely poem expresses the shrinking of the disciple in consciousness of mortal frailty when summoned by Christ to take up the cross, and is comforted by the Saviour's assurance of his own sufficient grace. A celebrated hymn by Tauler describes a ship sent from Heaven by the Father, containing Jesus, who comes as our Redeemer, and who asks personal devotion to himself and a willingness to live and die with and for him. Others set forth the atoning work of Christ's death, without mention of any other condition of salvation. Others implore the direct guidance and protection of Christ, as in

the exquisite cradle hymn of Heinrich von Loufenberg, which is not surpassed in tenderness and beauty by anything in Keble's "Lyra Innocentium," or the child verses of Blake. This mass of hymns covers a wide range of topics: God in his various attributes, including mercy and a desire to pardon,—a conception which many suppose to have been absent from the thought of the Middle Ages; the Trinity; Christ in the various scenes of his life, and as Head of the church; admonitions, confessions, translations of Psalms, poems to be sung on pilgrimages, funeral songs, political songs, and many more which touch upon true relations between man and the Divine. There is a wonderful pathos in this great body of national poetry, for it makes us see the dim but honest striving of the heart of the noble German people after that which is sure and eternal, and which can offer assurance of compensation amid the doubt and turmoil of that epoch of strife and tyranny. The true and the false in this poetry were alike the outcome of the conditions of the time and the authoritative religious teaching. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in spite of the abuses which made the Reformation necessary, contained many saintly lives, beneficent institutions, much philanthropy, and inspired love of God. All these have their witness in many products of that era, and we need look no farther than the mediæval religious poetry to find elements that show that on the spiritual side the Reformation was not strictly a moral revolution, restoring a lost religious feeling, but rather an intellectual process, establishing an hereditary piety, upon reasonable and scriptural foundations.

We see, therefore, how far Luther was from being the founder of German hymnody. In trying to discover what his great service to religious song really was, we must go on to the next question that is involved, and ask, What was the status and employment of the folk hymn before the Reformation? Was it in a true sense a *church* song? Had it a recognized place in the public service? Was it at all liturgical,

as the Lutheran hymn certainly was? This brings us to a definitive distinction between the two schools of hymnody.

The attitude of the Catholic Church to congregational singing has been frequently discussed, and is at present the object of a great deal of misconception. The fact of the matter is, that she ostensibly encourages the people to share in the Latin offices of the service, but the very spirit of the liturgy and the development of musical practice have in course of time, with now and then an exception, reduced the congregation to silence. Before the invention of harmony all church music had more of the quality of popular music, and the priesthood encouraged the worshipers to join their voices in those parts of the service which were not confined by the rubrics to the ministers. But the Gregorian chant was never really adopted by the people,—its practical difficulties, and especially the inflexible insistence upon the use of Latin in all the offices of worship, virtually confined it to the priests and a small body of trained singers. The very conception and spirit of the liturgy, also, has by a law of historic development gradually excluded the people from active participation. Whatever may have been the thought of the fathers of the liturgy, the eucharistic service has come to be simply the vehicle of a sacrifice offered by and through the priesthood for the people, not a tribute of praise and supplication emanating from the congregation itself. The attitude of the worshiper is one of obedient faith, both in the supernatural efficacy of the sacrifice and the mediating authority of the celebrant. The liturgy is inseparably bound up with the central act of consecration and oblation, and is conceived as itself possessing a divine sanction and an objective sanctity. The liturgy is not in any sense the creation of the people, but comes down to them from a higher source, the gradual creation of men believed to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit, and is accepted by the laity as a divinely authorized means in the accomplishment of the supreme sacerdotal func-

tion. The sacrifice of the Mass is performed for the people, but not through the people, nor even necessarily in their presence. And so it has come to pass, that, although the Catholic Church has never officially recognized the existence of the modern mixed choir, and does not in its rubrics authorize any manner of singing except the unison Gregorian chant, nevertheless, by reason of the expansion and specialization of musical art, and the increasing veneration of the liturgy as the very channel of descending sacramental grace, the people are reduced to a position of passive receptivity.

As regards the singing of hymns in the national languages, the conditions are somewhat different. The laws of the Catholic Church forbid the vernacular in any part of the eucharistic services, but permit vernacular hymns in certain subordinate offices; as, for instance, vespers. But even in these services the restrictions are more emphasized than the permissions. Here also the tacit recognition of a separation of function between the clergy and the laity still persists; there can never be a really sympathetic coöperation between the church language and the vernacular; there is a constant attitude of suspicion on the part of the authorities, lest the people's hymn should afford a rift for the subtle intrusion of heretical or unchurchly ideas.

The whole spirit and implied theory of the Catholic Church is therefore unfavorable to popular hymnody. This was especially the case in the later Middle Ages. The people could put no heart into the singing of Latin. The priests and monks, especially in such convent schools as St. Gall, Fulda, Metz, and Reichenau, made heroic efforts to drill their rough disciples in the Gregorian chant, but their attempts were ludicrously futile. Vernacular hymns were simply tolerated on certain prescribed occasions. In the century or more following the Reformation, the Catholic musicians and clergy, taught by the astonishing popular success of the Lutheran songs, tried to inaugurate a similar movement in their

own ranks, and the publication and use of Catholic German hymn-books attained large dimensions, but this enthusiasm finally died out. Both in mediæval and in modern times there has virtually remained a chasm between the musical practice of the common people and that of the church, and in spite of isolated attempts to encourage popular psalmody, the restrictions have always had a depressing effect, and the free hearty union of clergy and congregation in choral praise and prayer is essentially unknown.

The new conceptions of the relationship of man to God which so altered the fundamental principle and the external forms of worship under the Lutheran movement, manifested themselves most strikingly in the mighty impulse given to congregational song. The explanation of the musical outburst is here. The love of song and the practice of song in the church had existed for centuries, but hampered by lack of clerical sympathy and by constant suspicion. Luther set the national impulse free, and taught the people that in singing praise they were performing a service that was well pleasing to God and a necessary part of public communion with him. It was not simply that Luther charged the popular hymnody with the energy of his world-transforming doctrine, —he also gave it a dignity which it had never possessed before, certainly not since the apostolic age, as a part of the official liturgical song of the church. Both these facts gave the folk hymn its wonderful proselyting power in the sixteenth century,—the latter gives it its importance in the history of sacred music.

Luther's work for the people's song was in substance a detail of his liturgical reform. His knowledge of human nature taught him the value of set forms and ceremonies, and his appreciation of what was universally true and edifying in the liturgy of the mother church led him to retain many of her prayers, hymns, responses, etc., along with new provisions of his own. But in his view the service is constituted

through the activity of the believing subject; the forms and expressions of worship are not in themselves indispensable—the one thing necessary is faith, and the forms of worship have their value simply in defining, inculcating, stimulating, and directing this faith, and enforcing the proper attitude of the soul toward God in the public social act of devotion. The liturgy is not, as in the Catholic view, divinely inspired and regulated, itself of objective efficacy, the channel of descending grace by virtue of priestly mediation. The Lutheran conception recognized the entire body of believers as a universal priesthood, the offices of worship were restored to them, in theory and in fact, as their voluntary initiative act, certain functions, indeed, to be delegated to others, but these others their representatives, not their spiritual superiors. It will easily be seen what an unprecedented importance was given to congregational singing by this view, and how the whole theory of church music was altered by it. The congregational song both symbolized and realized the principle of direct access of the believer to the Father, and thus exemplified in itself alone the whole spirit of the worship of the new church. That this act of worship should be in the native language of the nation was a matter of course, and hence the popular hymn, set to familiar and appropriate melody, became at once the characteristic, official, and liturgical expression of the emotion of the people in direct communion with God.

The immense consequence of this principle was seen in the mighty outburst of sacred song that followed the founding of the new church by Luther at Wittenberg. It was not that the nation was electrified by a poetic genius, or by any new form of musical excitement; it was simply that the old restraints upon self-expression were removed, and that the people could celebrate their new-found freedom in Christ Jesus by means of the most intense agency known to man, which they had been prepared by inherited musical temperament and ancient habit to use to the full. No wonder that

they received this unhampered privilege with thanksgiving, and that the land resounded with the lyrics of faith and hope.

Luther himself led the way and furnished the model. In connection with his work of reconstructing the ancient liturgy for use in the Wittenberg churches, as set forth in the "Formula Missae" of 1523 and the "Deutsche Messe" of 1526, he turned his attention to the need of suitable hymns and tunes. He took up this work, not only out of his love of song, but also from necessity. He wrote to Nicholas Haussmann, pastor at Zwickau: "I would that we had many German songs which the people could sing during the Mass. But we lack German poets and musicians, or they are unknown to us, who are able to make Christian and spiritual songs, as Paul calls them, which are of such value that they can be used daily in the house of God. One can find but few which have the appropriate spirit." The reason for this complaint was short-lived; a crowd of hymnists sprang up as if by magic, and among them Luther was, as in all things, chief. His work as a hymn writer began soon after the completion of his translation of the New Testament, while he was engaged in translating the Psalms. Then, as Koch says, "the spirit of the psalmists and prophets came over him." Several allusions in his letters show that he took the Psalms as his model, that is to say, he did not think of a hymn as designed for the teaching of dogma, but as the sincere, spontaneous outburst of love and reverence to God for his goodness.

The first hymn-book of evangelical Germany was published in 1524 by Luther's friend and coadjutor, Johann Walther. It contained four hymns by Luther, three by Paul Sparatus, and one by an unknown author. Another book appeared in the same year containing fourteen more hymns by Luther in addition to the eight of the first book. Six more from Luther's pen appeared in a song-book edited by Walther in 1525. The remaining hymns of Luther (twelve

in number) were printed in five song-books of different dates, ending with Klug's in 1543. Four hymn-books contain prefaces by Luther, the first written for Walther's book of 1525, and the last for one published by Papst in 1545. Luther's example was contagious. Other hymn writers at once sprang up, who were filled with Luther's spirit, and who took his songs as models. Printing-presses were kept busy, song-books were multiplied, until at the time of Luther's death no less than sixty collections, counting the various editions, had been issued. There was reason for the sneering remark of a Romanist that the people were singing themselves into the Lutheran doctrine. The principles of worship promulgated by Luther and implied in his liturgical arrangements were adopted by all the Protestant communities; whatever variations there might be in the external forms of worship (and Luther expressly declared that the "Deutsche Messe" was not intended as a law to the church), yet in all of them the congregational hymn held a prominent place, and it is to be noticed that almost without exception the chief hymn writers of the Lutheran time were theologians and preachers.

Luther certainly wrote thirty-six hymns. A few others have been ascribed to him without conclusive evidence. By far the greater part of these thirty-six are not entirely original. Many of them are translations or adaptations of Psalms, some of which are nearly literal transfers. Other selections from Scripture were used in a similar way, among which are the Ten Commandments, the *Ter Sanctus*, the song of Simeon, and the Lord's Prayer. Similar use, that is close translation or free paraphrase, was made of certain Latin hymns by Ambrose, Gregory, Hus, and others, and also of certain religious folk songs of the pre-Reformation period. Five hymns only are completely original, not drawn in any way from older compositions. Besides these five many of the transcriptions of Psalms and older hymns owe but little to their models. The chief of these, and the most celebrated of all Luther's

hymns, the "Ein' feste Burg," was suggested by the forty-sixth Psalm, but nothing could be more original in spirit and phraseology, more completely characteristic of the great reformer. The beautiful poems, "Aus tiefer Noth" (Ps. cxxx.), and "Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh' darein" (Ps. xii.), are less bold paraphrases, but still Luther's own in the sense that their expression is a natural outgrowth of the more tender and humble side of his nature.

No other poems of their class by any single man have ever exerted so great an influence, or have received so great admiration, as these few short lyrics of Martin Luther. And yet at the first reading it is not easy to understand the reason for their celebrity. As poetry they disappoint us; there is no artfully modulated diction, no subtle and far-reaching imagination. Neither do they seem to chime with our devotional needs; there is a jarring note of fanaticism in them. We even find expressions that give positive offense, as when he speaks of the "Lamb roasted in hot love upon the cross." We say that they are not universal, that they seem the outcome of a temper that belongs to an exceptional condition. This is really the fact; here is the clue to their proper study. They do belong to a time, and not to all time. We must consider that they are the utterance of a mind engaged in conflict, and often tormented with doubt of the outcome. They reveal the motive of the great pivotal figure in modern religious history. More than that—they have behind them the great impelling force of the Reformation. Perhaps the world has shown a correct instinct in fixing upon "Ein' feste Burg" as the typical hymn of Luther and of the Reformation. Heine, who called it "the Marseillaise of the Reformation"; Frederick the Great, who called its melody (not without reverence) "God Almighty's grenadier march"; Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, who chose the same tune to symbolize aggressive Protestantism, and Wagner, who wove its strains into the grand march which celebrates the military triumphs of

united Germany—all these men had an accurate feeling for the patriotic and moral fire which burns in this mighty hymn. The same spirit is found in other of Luther's songs, but often combined with a tenderer music, in which emphasis is laid more upon the inward peace that comes from trust in God, than upon the fact of outward conflict. A still more exalted mood is disclosed in such hymns as "Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein," and "Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her"—the latter a Christmas song said to have been written for his little son Hans. The first of these is notable for the directness with which it sets forth the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone. It is in this same directness and homely vigor and adaptation to the pressing needs of the time that we must find the cause of the popular success of Luther's hymns. He knew what the dumb, blindly yearning German people had been groping for during so many years, and the power of his sermons and poems lay in the fact that they offered a welcome spiritual gift in phrases that went directly to the popular heart. His speech was that of the people—idiomatic, nervous, and penetrating. He had learned how to talk to them in his early peasant home, and in his study of the folk songs. Coarse, almost brutal at times, we may call him, as in his controversies with Henry VIII., Erasmus, and others; but it was the coarseness of a rugged nature, of a son of the soil, a man tremendously in earnest, blending religious zeal with patriotism, never doubting that the enemies of his faith were confederates of the devil, who was as real to him as Duke George or Dr. Eck. No English translation can quite do justice to the homely vigor of his verse. Carlyle has succeeded as well as possible in his translation of "Ein' feste Burg," but even this masterly achievement does not quite reproduce the jolting abruptness of the meter, the swing and fire of the movement. The greater number of Luther's hymns are set to a less strident pitch, but all alike speak a language fitted to become the appropriate speech of those who formed

the bone and sinew of the race. In philological history these hymns have a significance equal to that of Luther's translation of the Bible, in which scholars agree in finding the virtual creation of the modern German language. And the elements that should give new life to the national speech were to be found among the commonalty. "No one before Luther," says Bayard Taylor, "saw that the German tongue must be sought for in the mouths of the people—that the exhausted expression of the earlier ages could not be revived, but that the newer, fuller, and richer speech, then in its childhood, must at once be acknowledged and adopted. With all his scholarship Luther dropped the theological style, and sought among the people for phrases as artless and simple as those of the Hebrew writers." "The influence of Luther on German literature cannot be explained until we have seen how sound and vigorous and many-sided was the new spirit which he infused into the language." All this will apply to the hymns as well as to the Bible translation. In this was one great element in the popular effect which these hymns produced. Their simple, homebred, domestic form of expression caught the public ear in an instant. Those who have at all studied the history of popular eloquence in prose and verse are aware of the electrical effect that may be produced when ideas of pith and moment are sent home to the masses in forms of speech that are their own. Luther's hymns may not be poetry in the high sense; but they are certainly eloquence, they are popular oratory in verse, put into the mouths of the people themselves by one of their own number.

In spite of the fact that these songs were the natural outcome of a period of spiritual and political conflict, and give evidence of this fact in almost every instance, yet they are less dogmatic and controversial than might be expected, for Luther, bitter and intolerant as he often was, understood the requirements of church song well enough to know that theological and political polemic should be kept out of it. Never-

theless these hymns are a powerful witness to the great truths which were the corner-stone of the doctrines of the Reformed church. They constantly emphasize the principle that salvation comes not through works or sacraments or any human mediation, but only through the merits of Christ and faith in his atoning blood. The whole perverted machinery of Mariolatry, hagiolatry, priestly absolution, personal merit, and what not, which had so long stood between the individual soul and Christ, was broken down. Christ is no longer a stern, hardly appeasable Judge, but a loving Saviour, yearning over mankind, stretching out hands of invitation, asking not a slavish submission to formal observances, but a free, spontaneous offering of the heart. This was the message that thrilled Germany. And it was through the hymns of Luther and those modeled upon them that the new evangel was most widely and quickly disseminated. The friends as well as the enemies of the Reformation asserted that the spread of the new doctrines was due more to Luther's hymns than to his sermons. The editor of a German hymn-book published in 1565 says: "I do not doubt that through that one song of Luther, 'Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein,' many hundred Christians have been brought to the faith who otherwise would not have heard of Luther." An indignant Jesuit declared that "Luther's songs have damned more souls than all his books and speeches." We read marvelous stories of the effect of these hymns; of Lutheran missionaries entering Catholic churches during service and drawing away the whole congregation by their singing; of wandering evangelists standing at street corners and in the market places, singing to excited crowds, then distributing the hymns upon leaflets so that the populace might join in the pæan, and so winning entire cities to the new faith almost in a day. This is easily to be believed when we consider that the progress of events and the drift of ideas for a century and more had been preparing the German mind for Luther's message, that as a peo-

ple the Germans are extremely susceptible to the enthusiasms that utter themselves in song, and that these hymns carried the truths for which their souls had been thirsting in language of extraordinary force, clothed in melodies which they had long known and loved. Take such a stanza as this:—

"Dear Christians, one and all rejoice,
With exultation springing;
And with united heart and voice
And holy rapture singing,
Proclaim the wonders God hath done,
How His right arm the victory won;
Right dearly it has cost Him."

Or this:—

"But love and grace with Thee prevail,
O God, our sins forgiving;
The holiest deeds can naught avail
Of all before Thee living.
Before Thee none can boast him clear:
Therefore must each Thy judgment fear,
And live on Thy compassion."

Still another:—

"Into hell's fierce agony
Sin doth headlong drive us;
Where shall we for succor flee.
Who, oh, who will hide us?
Thou only, blessed Saviour.
Thy precious blood was shed to win
Peace and pardon for our sin.
Holy and gracious God!
Holy and mighty God!
Holy and all-merciful Saviour!
Let us not, we pray,
From the true faith's comfort
Fall in our need away."

Imagine the effect of such words as these upon a deeply religious and dissatisfied people! Let us not be surprised at the seeming magical effect of these hymns. It is not that the Germans are a volatile people, easily carried off their feet by a wave of excitement, for exactly the opposite is the

case. Schuré has hit the fact of the matter when he says: "Since the fifteenth century the church had its religion and the people theirs, the former to rule, the latter to satisfy the needs of their hearts, and in this consisted the strength of this nation. Remarkable enough, a church jealous for its own unlimited dominion has always more power over a frivolous, superficial, and skeptical nation than over one that is uncorrupted, credulous, but inwardly serious. The first mocks, but obeys, the other considers and revolts; the first is restive, but yields, the second at first follows, then mutinies, and no power on earth can bring it again under the old yoke, since it is free in its conscience."

We must now briefly consider the tunes to which the hymns of Luther and his imitators were sung. What was the nature and origin of these melodies? Were they original, or borrowed? Were they a new or old style? We find that throughout the Middle Ages the method of musical composition was in one respect radically different from that prevailing to-day. A composer now invents his themes and melodies, as well as the harmonies. But down to about the year 1600 the scientific musician always borrowed his themes from older sources—the Gregorian chant, or popular songs—and worked them up into choral movements according to the laws of counterpoint. He was, therefore, a tune *setter*, not a tune *maker*. The same custom prevailed among the German musicians of Luther's day. In this way were produced the early German Chorales, or congregational hymn tunes. The task of Luther and his musical associates was to take melodies from music of all sorts with which they were familiar, alter them to fit the meter of the new hymns, and add the necessary harmonies. In course of time the enormous multiplication of hymns, each demanding a musical setting, and the requirements of simplicity in popular song, brought about a union of the functions of the tune maker and the tune setter, but this was not until after Luther's day.

Down to a very recent period it has been universally believed that Luther was a musician of the first sort, i. e., a tune maker, and that the melodies of many of his hymns were of his own production. Among writers on this period no statement is more frequently made than that Luther wrote tunes as well as hymns. This belief is as tenacious as the myth of the rescue of church music by Palestrina. Dr. L. W. Bacon, in the preface to his edition of the hymns of Luther with their original melodies, assumes, as an undisputed fact, that many of these tunes are Luther's own invention. Even Julian's "Dictionary of Hymnology," which is supposed to be the embodiment of the most advanced and exhaustive scholarship in this department of learning, makes similar statements. But this is altogether an error. Luther composed no tunes. Under the patient investigation of a half-century, the melodies originally associated with Luther's hymns have all been traced to their sources. The tune of "Ein feste Burg" was the last to yield; Bäumker finds the germ of it in a Gregorian melody. Such proof as this is, of course, decisive and final. The hymn tunes called Chorales, which Luther, Walther, and others provided for the Reformed churches, were drawn from three sources, viz., the Latin song of the Catholic Church, the tunes of German hymns before the Reformation, and the secular folk song.

1. If Luther was willing to take many of the prayers of the Catholic liturgy for use in his German Mass, still more ready was he to adopt the melodies of the ancient church. In his preface to the Funeral Hymns (1542), after speaking of the forms of the Catholic Church, which in themselves he did not disapprove, he says: "In the same way have they much noble music, especially in the abbeys and parish churches, used to adorn most vile, idolatrous words. Therefore have we undressed these lifeless, idolatrous, crazy words, stripping off the noble music, and putting it upon the living and holy word of God, wherewith to sing, praise, and honor the same,

that so the beautiful ornament of music, brought back to its right use, may serve its blessed Maker, and his Christian people." A few of Luther's hymns were translations of old Latin hymns and sequences, and these were set to the original melodies. Luther's labor in this field was not confined to the Chorale, but, like the founders of the musical service of the Anglican church, he established a system of chanting, taking the Roman use as a model, and transferring many of the Gregorian tones. Johann Walther, Luther's co-laborer, relates the extreme pains which Luther took in setting notes to the Epistle, Gospel, and other offices of the service. He intended to institute a threefold division of church song—the choir anthem, the unison chant, and the congregational hymn. Only the first and third forms have been retained. The use of chants derived from the Catholic service was continued in some churches as late as the end of the seventeenth century. But, as Helmore says, "the rage for turning creeds, commandments, psalms, and everything to be sung, into meter, gradually banished the chant from Protestant communities on the Continent."

2. In cases in which pre-Reformation vernacular hymns were adopted into the song-books of the new church the original melodies were often retained, and thus some very ancient German tunes, although in modern guise, are still preserved in the hymn-books of modern Germany.

3. The secular folk song of the sixteenth century and earlier was a very prolific source of the German Chorale. After Luther's day, however, for it does not appear that any of his tunes were of this class. Centuries before the great age of artistic German music began, the common people possessed a large store of simple songs which they delighted to use on festal occasions, at the fireside, at their labor, in love-making, at weddings, christenings, and in every circumstance of social and domestic life. Here was a rich mine of simple and expressive melodies from which Chorale tunes might be

fashioned. In some cases this transfer involved considerable modification, in others but little, for at that time there was far less difference between the sacred and the secular musical styles than there is now. The associations of these tunes were not always of the most edifying kind, and some of them were so identified with unsanctified ideas that the strictest theologians protested against them, and some were weeded out. In course of time the old secular associations were forgotten, and few devout Germans are now reminded that some of the grand melodies in which faith and hope find such appropriate utterance are variations of old love songs and drinking songs. There is nothing exceptional in this borrowing of the world's tunes for ecclesiastical uses. We find the same practice among the French, Dutch, English, and Scotch Calvinists, the English Wesleyans, and the hymn-book makers of America. The same has been true of the modern Jews. This method is often necessary when a young and vigorously expanding church must be quickly provided with a store of songs, but in its nature it is only a temporary recourse.

One who studies the German Chorales in the German hymn-books of the present day must not imagine that he knows the sacred songs of the Reformation. They have been greatly modified in rhythm, harmony, and in many cases even in melody. The mediæval Gregorian scale and harmonic system was the only one then in existence. The present Chorale, moreover, is usually written in notes of equal length. The meter is in most cases double, rarely triple. This manner of writing gives the Chorale a singularly grave, solid, and stately character, often amounting to monotony and dullness. There was far more variety and life in the primitive Chorale, more vigor of accent as compared with the steady, even flow of the modern. The transformation of the Chorale into its present shape was completed in the latter part of the eighteenth century, a result, some say, of the relaxation of spiritual energy in the church of Germany in the period of Rational-

ism. A party has been formed among German churchmen for the restoration of the primitive rhythmic Chorale. Some congregations have adopted the reform, but there is as yet no sign that it will ultimately prevail.

Thus the German hymn, revitalized by Luther, clothed in fitting music, assumed its active *rôle* in the momentous spiritual, intellectual, and political awakening of the sixteenth century. No other example is to be found in history of a popular poesy so efficient in promoting the movement that produced it, or so instructive a reflex of the temper of a people in the moment of revolutionary activity. It is not that they were a new phenomenon. Luther simply availed himself of a principle which had existed among the Germans almost from the hour of their conversion, a principle which had always been recognized by the mediæval church, but held in abeyance, and virtually repressed by the very conditions of her rule. Luther gave it free play, a more practical and pregnant form, and adapted it to the conditions of the new age. With but little that was original in externals, there was at the heart of the Lutheran hymnody that which made an epoch. Like all great artificers in the world of thought, Luther builded better than he knew. Upon the course he laid was reared the work of Paul Gerhardt and the thousand evangelical hymnists of Germany, of Johannes Eccard, Sebastian Bach, Felix Mendelssohn, and the scores of composers who stored the treasure-house of Protestant religious song. We study the hymns of Luther, therefore, to find the germ from which sprang such magnificent results. We shall not find it if we merely apply æsthetic canons of style and form. The abrupt, rough-hewn lines of Luther must not be compared with the balanced rhythms, the ingenious rhymes, the melting cadences, the glowing fancies, the subtle turns of thought that appear in the hymns of Bernard of Cluny and Adam of St. Victor, or those of Newman, and Faber, and Heber, and Palmer, and

many Christian bards in whose ardent lyrics devotion finds divine nourishment. Luther's songs were not the product of conscious art: they were sparks struck from a steadfast mind by the shock of strenuous circumstance. We cannot make these songs our own, in the sense that we appropriate the hymns of those later poets whose vision takes a more comprehensive sweep, and whose consolations touch upon every need of the heart. They are not for our age, they are monuments to conditions and modes of feeling which can never return. But they are stern and imposing monuments, more durable than brass, and upon them, if we have eyes to see, are carved memorials of a great soul and a great age.