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ARTICLE IV.

TWO GERMAN HYMNS: A STUDY IN GERMAN
HYMNODY OF THE REFORMATION.

BY PROFESSOR EDWIN W. BOWEN, PH.D.

GERMAN hymnody had its origin in the Reformation. Prior to this great religious revolution of the sixteenth century, the hymns which the Germans used were of course the mediæval hymns of the Romish Church, the Missals and Sequences. Though many of these are among the finest specimens of hymnography and still retain a place in our modern hymn-books, they were yet exotics, written in Latin, not in the vernacular of the people. For this reason the sentiment of these hymns, apart from their association with worship, was not readily comprehended by the people; and not being part of their mental furniture, so to say, they did not influence them as indigenous hymns, written in the mother-tongue, would have done.

The German people had songs of their own. The popular ballads which were lisped in infancy and still sung in old age appealed much more forcibly to the people, as a nation, than did the hymns imported by the church, however excellent these might be. For the Germans are, and always have been, preëminently a music-loving nation, and song has been honored by them from a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. The historian Tacitus, in his monograph on Germany, which gives us the first methodical account we have of the Teutonic tribes, informs us of the characteristic passion of the ancient Germans for song, and adds that they were accustomed to sing even on going into battle, and that by the

singing of these battle-songs they aroused the spirit and courage of their soldiers to the highest pitch. This same passionate love of song has manifested itself all along through the history of the people down to the present day; and Germany offers a list of musicians, from Bach and Händel to Liszt and Wagner, which no other country can surpass, and few, if any, equal. But behind this list of illustrious musicians lay a deep and abiding national passion for song, a native instinct; just as, behind those superb fragments of the Parthenon frieze from the chisel of Phidias, and behind those soul-stirring tragedies of Sophocles, lay an exquisite innate appreciation in the Greek character for art and literature.

Martin Luther recognized this fact, and it was his knowledge of the appreciation of the people for their own native songs that led him, in the very beginning of the Reformation, to compose sacred songs and set them to the well-known tunes of the old, familiar ballads. This was a happy stroke of genius on his part, and this fact serves, in a large measure, to explain the early success of the great movement which Luther fathered. Viewed from this point, there is then much truth, though not so much as the statement implies, in the hyperbolic saying of Coleridge, that "Luther did as much for the Reformation by his hymns as by his translation of the Bible." These hymns, when once published, were on the lips of every one. Not only were they sung in the churches, but also in the streets and in the fields, in the workshop and in the palace, "by children in the cottage and by martyrs on the scaffold." Expressing as they did the sentiments of the new movement, they became the means of educating the people and giving them correct views upon theology and religion.

German hymnody may be said to date from 1522, the year in which Luther published his first volume of hymns.

This small collection he afterwards enlarged to the number of one hundred and twenty-five, and published in 1545. In the preface to this edition of his hymns, he said that he desired that this "beautiful ornament should in a right manner serve the great Creator and his Christian people." Not all of these hymns, however, were Luther's own production. The collection was the joint product of the "house choir," to use his own words, a company of Luther's musical friends, including Weiss, Justus Jonas, Eber, and others, whom the great Reformer had associated with him as collaborators in the work of compiling his hymn-book. Luther's individual contribution numbered thirty, one-third of which was made up of translations or adaptations from Latin originals. The remaining two-thirds, dealing with such subjects as the sacraments, the church, grace, death, etc., include paraphrases of the psalms and other parts of the Bible, of the commandments, the creed, the Pater Noster and the Te Deum, which is one of the oldest, the most catholic, and widely diffused hymns in the entire Western Church.

The most celebrated of all of Luther's hymns, and the one by which he is best known to the English-speaking world, is his famous battle-song of the Reformation, "Ein Feste Burg ist Unser Gott." Of this I shall speak in detail because of its history. Ranke said of this hymn, which Heinrich Heine called "the Marseillaise of the Reformation," that "it was the production of the moment in which Luther, engaged in conflict with a world of foes, sought strength in the consciousness that he was defending a divine cause which could never perish." There is an eminent fitness of things in the fact that the first verse of this remarkable hymn was chosen as a suitable inscription upon the monument of Luther in Wittenberg. For this hymn represents, as no other of his hymns does, the noble spirit of the great Reformer in his heroic struggle to

liberate his fellow-men from the traditional superstition and corruption of the church, which, like a dire disease, was undermining and destroying the moral life of the nation. From this strong hymn even the author himself, in times of deepest peril and gloom, was used to draw comfort and inspiration. "Come, Philip," he used to say to Melancthon, his collaborator, when the world seemed to him to be out of joint, "let us sing the forty-sixth psalm." By this he meant his own "characteristic version" of that psalm as given in his famous hymn.

This psalm, as Mr. Stead says in his "Hymns that have Helped," has always been a favorite with fighting men. "The Huguenots and Covenanters used to cheer their hearts in the extremity of adverse fortunes by the solemn chant,

'God is our refuge and our strength,
In straits a present aid;
Therefore, although the earth remove,
We will not be afraid.' "

"It will be noted," continues he, "that although Luther's hymn is suggested by the forty-sixth psalm, it is really Luther's psalm, not David's. Only the idea of the stronghold is taken from the Scripture, the rest is Luther's own, 'made in Germany,' indeed, and not only so, but one of the most potent influences that have contributed to the making of Germany."

This hymn, which Frederick the Great with soldierly instinct once described as "God Almighty's Grenadier March," was composed by Luther for the Diet of Spires, when the German princes, on the 20th of April, 1529, made their formal protest against the revocation of their liberties and consequently became known as Protestants. The song spread like wild-fire over the land. It was caught up by prince and peasant, old and young alike, and wafted throughout the fatherland. It soon became the battle-

hymn of the country, and was sung by the soldiers on the field, just as "Die Wacht am Rhein" was sung on the French frontier in the late Franco-German war. It cheered the heart of Melancthon and his friends when, after Luther's death, they were driven into exile, and heard it sung by a little girl in the street as they entered Weimar. "Sing on, my dear daughter," said the banished Reformer; "thou knowest not what comfort thou bringest to our hearts." It was sung well-nigh a century later by the army of Gustavus Adolphus, just before the battle of Leipsic, in which he gained that brilliant victory over the Catholic forces; and the brave warrior and Christian hero thanked God that He had verified to him the promise, "The field He will maintain it." It was sung again by the army of the same noble king when, on the memorable morning of the battle of Lützen, his forces stood in battle-array, facing those of Wallenstein, and prayed to the God of victory, after which he heard it sung no more. It was sung in recent times by the German army on the eve of a notable battle in the Franco-Prussian war, as it will be sung again whenever the heart of the German nation is so profoundly stirred as it was in those trying days, and the army won a glorious victory.

The text of this wonderful hymn, so rich in historic associations, as given by Julian in his monumental "Dictionary of Hymnology" as the earliest High German form now accessible to us, is as follows:—

"Ein' feste burg ist unser Gott,
 ein gute wehr und waffen.
 Er hilfft unns frey aus aller not
 die uns ytz hat betroffen,
 Der alt böse feind
 mit ernst ers ytz meint,
 gros macht und viel list
 sein grausam rüstung ist,
 auf erd ist nicht seins gleichen.

“Mit unser macht ist nichts gethan,
 wir sind gar bald verloren:
 Es streit fur uns der rechte man,
 den Gott hat selbs erkoren.
 Fragstu, wer der ist?
 er heist Jhesu Christ
 der Herr Zebaoth,
 und ist kein ander Gott,
 das felt mus er behalten.

“Und wenn die welt vol Teuffell wehr
 und wolt uns gar vorschlingen,
 So fürchten wir uns nicht zu sehr
 es sol uns doch gelingen.
 Der Fürst dieser welt,
 wie sawr er sich stellt,
 thut er unns doch nicht,
 das macht, er ist gericht,
 ein wörtlin kan yhn fellen.

“Das wort sie sollen lassen stahn
 und kein danck dazu haben,
 Er ist bey unns wol auff dem plan
 mit seinem geist und gaben.
 Nemen sie den leib,
 gut, eher, kind unnd weib
 las faren dahin,
 sie habens kein gewin,
 das reich mus uns doch bleiben.”

I subjoin the English translation of this hymn by Car-
 lyle, which of the numerous versions is generally regarded
 as the best:—

“A sure stronghold our God is he.
 A trusty shield and weapon;
 Our help he'll be; and set us free
 From every ill can happen.
 That old malicious foe
 Intends us deadly woe;
 Armed with might from hell,
 And deepest craft as well,
 On earth is not his fellow.

- "Through our own force we nothing can,
 Straight were we lost forever;
 But for us fights the proper Man
 By God sent to deliver.
 Ask ye who this may be?
 Christ Jesus named is he.
 Of Sabaoth the Lord;
 Sole God to be adored;
 'Tis he must win the battle.
- "And were the world with devils filled,
 All eager to devour us,
 Our souls to fear should little yield,
 They cannot overpower us.
 Their dreaded Prince no more
 Can harm us as of yore;
 Look grim as e'er he may,
 Doomed is his ancient sway;
 A word can overthrow him.
- "God's word for all their craft and force
 One moment will not linger;
 But spite of hell shall have its course,
 'Tis written by his finger.
 And though they take our life,
 Goods, honor, children, wife,
 Yet is their profit small:
 These things shall vanish all;
 The city of God remaineth."

Luther's hymns are not models of smoothness and finish. Their form sometimes leaves much to be desired. As the Earl of Selborne truly observes, they are sometimes homely and rugged, yet they are full of fire, manly simplicity, and strong faith. Born of the storm and stress of the Reformation, they reflect the spirit of the times, and show the strong, dominant force of the master mind of that great movement.

The hymns produced during the Thirty Years' War have a decidedly different character from those written during the preceding century, and in this respect offer a sharp contrast to those of Luther. His hymns, as we have just seen, breathe a spirit of conflict and of a triumphant faith

in the successful issue of this conflict. Not so the hymns of the seventeenth century. These are the expression of the individual soul longing for peace and reconciliation; impassioned expression, it is true, but lacking the fire and vigor and triumphant faith of the Reformation hymns. It was during this unhappy period, when German life and treasure were so ruthlessly poured out, that Gustavus Adolphus' famous battle-hymn, "Verzage nicht, du Häuflein klein" (Fear not, O little flock, the foe), was composed. Another product of those sad days was Rinckhart's "Chorus of God's faithful children," introduced by Mendelssohn into his "Lobgesang," which has been called the "Te Deum" of Germany.

The most noteworthy hymn-writers of the first half of the seventeenth century were Hermann and Rist, both of whom belonged to the first "Silesian school" of German poetry, founded by Martin Opitz. The best known productions of Hermann are his "Song of Tears" and his "Song of Comfort." These are rather subjective, but still quite popular at home. Rist was by far the most prolific hymnographer of those times, having published, it is said, six hundred hymns, which were "pressed out of him," to use his own phrase, "by the cross." To him Miss Winkworth, in her "Christian Singers of Germany," assigns a high place "for the sweetness of form, and depth of tender, contemplative emotion to be found in his verses."

But the renown of these writers was dimmed by the glory of the illustrious trio Gerhardt, Franck, and Scheffler, who represent the best traditions of German hymnody during the latter half of the century under discussion. Of these, attention is drawn to one only, Gerhardt, who is by far the most important as well as the most representative of his age. He is "by universal consent the prince of Lutheran poets."

It is the fashion in some quarters to disparage the poetry

of hymns. Without doubt the poetry of many of our popular songs, sacred as well as secular, is open to criticism on the score of violating almost all of the canons of good taste. This stricture applies to Gerhardt's poems only to a very limited extent, but yet it does apply, just as it applies to the hymns of Cowper. Even Homer sometimes nods, the adage reminds us. It is rare that a religious poet maintains himself throughout at a high key of interest and passion. The very intensity of his passion is apt to make him transcend the limits of good taste; and if he is rather copious, his muse occasionally deserts him, and he becomes quite prosaic. This also is true of Gerhardt.

But Gerhardt, however, was not simply a religious singer. He was a poet as well as a hymnographer, and a poet who helped to keep alive in those sad, gloomy days of the 'Thirty Years' War the native German lyric which had blossomed out so beautifully under the fostering care of Walter von der Vogelweide and the other minnesingers of his day. Indeed, Gerhardt's work may be said to be the beginning of modern German lyric poetry. Scherer, the eminent critic of German literature, remarks pertinently, "What Gerhardt did in the religious sphere was completed by Goethe in the secular, and it is by no mere chance that we find these words of Gerhardt echoed again by Goethe: 'How long shall I be sorrowful, and eat my bread with tears?'"

But the poems of Gerhardt did not simply preserve the lyric spirit and hand it down to Heine and Goethe. His religious songs did far more than this noble service to the literature of his country. They were a potent factor in the preservation of the national life during the calamitous times of their production. Says Francke, in his "Social Forces in German Literature": "There can hardly be a question that no other species of seventeenth-century liter-

ature has exerted so healthy an influence upon national life and has helped so much to reawaken a strong and manly sentiment as sacred song. At a time when princely courts had come to be meeting-grounds of vice and frivolity, when the city halls and market-places had ceased to echo with the sounds of popular energy and enterprise, there still remained a refuge for noble imagination in the churches, and from more than one solitary country parsonage there shone forth a light which in due time was to mingle with the dawning of a better day. Only ten years after the death of Paul Gerhardt, two men were born who were to make church music the vehicle of emotions as lofty and exalted as any that ever found expression in poetry and art, Bach and Händel. And these men were both still living when Klopstock, the first great poet of modern German literature, arose to sing the delivery of the human soul from the thralldom of sin, the resurrection of mind, the immortality of the individual." So much for the influence of these sacred songs.

Gerhardt wrote no hymn which has taken so firm a grasp upon the affections of the German people as Luther's great battle-hymn. But still some of Gerhardt's collection have become almost household words, and will ever live in the memory of a grateful nation. "Many of them," says Scherer, "have really become sacred popular songs, in which millions of faithful souls still continue to find edification." Two of these possess an historic interest,—the hymns beginning, "Zeuch ein zu deinem Thoren" (Come to Thy temple here on earth), and "Gottlob, nun ist erschollen" (Thank God, it hath resounded). The one was written at the commencement of that unhappy war from which Germany emerged exhausted in resources and more than decimated in population; the other was written at the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia.

But the most popular of Gerhardt's hymns, among

English-speaking peoples, is his notable "Hymn of Trust." It was not till during the Methodist movement, when there was such a copious outburst of hymns in England, that this song of comfort was translated into English. If the translator of this hymn could have known beforehand how much good his translation was destined to do, surely it would have been one of the most joyous labors of love he ever did in his life, so abundant in good works. The version was made by the distinguished founder of Methodism; and so terse and dignified was the English John Wesley employed in his translation, that it has retained, even to the present day, a welcome place in most hymn-books. This version was published in 1739, under the caption "Trust in Providence," in Wesley's collection of Hymns and Sacred Poems. It is now divided into two hymns, beginning, "Commit thou all thy fears," and "Give to the winds thy fears." Commenting on this, in his "Notes on the Methodist Hymns," Stevenson says: "There is not a hymn in the book which has afforded more comfort and encouragement than this to the Lord's tried people."

The circumstances of the origin of this hymn, inasmuch as it grew out of the actual experience of its author, may not prove uninteresting to the reader. Gerhardt, who in 1659 was appointed Deacon of the Nicholai-Kirche in Berlin, was an ardent Lutheran, and had little sympathy with the Calvinistic doctrine of a limited atonement. And so he preached against this doctrine with force and fervor. In 1666, the Great Elector, who wished to "tune his pulpits," ordered Gerhardt to sign a rescript forbidding him to preach against the Calvinistic dogma. But the fearless, conscientious preacher, like Bishop Latimer before Henry VIII., refused, saying, that he would preach only what he found in the Word of God, even though he should lose his home and his livelihood and be sent into banishment. So, with his wife and children into banishment he was sent by

the Great Elector. At the end of the first day's journey they lodged at a wayside inn, the wife and children weary and weeping, and Gerhardt's own heart heavy and saddened by the sight. He retired alone to the dark forest near-by, and laid the distressing situation before God in prayer. While praying, the text came to him, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass." He felt reassured and comforted in his heart. "Yes," said he, "though banished from house and home, and not knowing where to take my wife and children on the morrow, yet God sees me in the dark wood; now is the time to trust him."

He paced to and fro under the trees, thinking upon the exhortation and promise of the text, and the beautiful, comforting verses of his "Hymn of Trust" shaped themselves and crystallized in his mind. He returned to the inn and comforted his weeping wife with the same text and with the hymn he had composed; and they both retired, cheered by their implicit trust in God. But scarcely had they fallen asleep when a loud knocking at the door aroused them, and brought them again to their feet. It was the messenger of Duke Christian of Merseburg, who was sent post-haste to overtake the homeless exile and to offer him a home in the Duke's own realm. A sealed letter was handed Gerhardt from the messenger, which he opened, and read. "Come into my country, Paul Gerhardt," ran the Duke's letter, "and you shall have a church, people, house, home, and livelihood, and liberty to preach the gospel, as your heart may prompt you." So, the legend goes, the Lord took care of his servant.

The following is Wesley's excellent version of the hymn written in those trying circumstances:—

- “Commit thou all thy griefs
And ways into his hands,
To his sure trust and tender care,
Who earth and heaven commands:
Who points the clouds their course,
Whom winds and seas obey,
He shall direct thy wandering feet,
He shall prepare thy way.
- “Thou on the Lord rely,
So safe shalt thou go on;
Fix on his work thy steadfast eye,
So shall thy work be done.
No profit canst thou gain
By self-consuming care;
To him commend thy cause, his ear
Attends the softest prayer.
- “Thy everlasting truth,
Father, thy ceaseless love,
Sees all thy children's wants, and knows
What best for each will prove;
And whatsoe'er thou will'st,
Thou dost, O King of kings!
What's thine unerring wisdom's choice,
Thy power to being brings.
- “Thou everywhere hast sway,
And all things serve thy might;
Thine every act pure blessing is,
Thy path unsullied light.
When thou arisest, Lord,
What shall thy work withstand?
When all thy children want, thou giv'st;
Who, who shall stay thy hand?
- “Give to the winds thy fears;
Hope, and be undismayed:
God hears thy sighs, and counts thy tears;
God shall lift up thy head:
Through waves, and clouds, and storms,
He gently clears thy way;
Wait thou his time; so shall this night
Soon end in joyous day.

“Still heavy is thy heart?
 Still sink thy spirits down?
 Cast off the weight, let fear depart,
 And every care be gone.
 What though thou rulest not,
 Yet heaven, and earth, and hell,
 Proclaim, God sitteth on the throne,
 And ruleth all things well.

“Leave to his sovereign sway
 To choose and to command;
 So shalt thou, wond’ring, own, his way
 How wise, how strong his hand!
 Far, far above thy thought
 His counsel shall appear,
 When fully he the work hath wrought
 That caused thy needless fear.

“Thou seest our weakness, Lord,
 Our hearts are known to thee;
 O lift thou up the sinking hand,
 Confirm the feeble knee!
 Let us in life, in death,
 Thy steadfast truth declare;
 And publish, with our latest breath,
 Thy love and guardian care.”

Among Gerhardt’s one hundred and twenty hymns, which he published in 1667, were many paraphrases of portions of the Bible, just as there were among Luther’s collection. Indeed, his “Hymn of Trust,” just quoted, is in the manner of a paraphrase, for every verse begins with a word or two from the text which inspired it, upon which it is based; and if you read the first word of each verse in the original, you read the text in full. Gerhardt also attempted an adaptation or translation of certain of the mediæval Latin poems, some of which are models of their kind, and so adequately meet all the requirements of a hymn, that they have as yet to be supplanted by our modern hymns, with all their boasted excellence and beauty. Among others he translated the glowing hymn of Bernard of Clairvaux, beginning “*Salve caput cruentatum.*” This

sacred song of the pious monk of Clairvaux he rendered, "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden," and his version remains, to the present time, a favorite among the Germans. This German version, it is interesting to note in passing, was beautifully englished in 1830 by Dr. Alexander; and his English translation of Gerhardt's version of the original Latin is our fine hymn, "O Sacred Head, now wounded," rightly included by Mr. Stead in his "Hymns that have Helped."

Gerhardt's hymns are not far removed in tone and sentiment from the fervent hymns of Bernard. Like those of the devout monk, they are the impassioned utterance of the individual experience,—sweet and tender sacred lyrics. Themselves inspired by pious feelings, they appeal to the mind in its moods of religious emotion, and set the heart aglow with their sweet melody. Because they are the expression of the individual experience, they are consequently not so well adapted to congregational use. They are not, however, of a sad or dismal character. As a certain critic has observed, the poet's religious earnestness does not exclude cheerfulness, which forms indeed the leading moral characteristic of his poetry.

There is far more of the personal note in Gerhardt's hymns than there is in Luther's. The hymns of the latter, sharing in the spirit of their author, are more militant and breathe less of peace and serenity than do Gerhardt's. But Gerhardt's poems lack the fire, the rugged force, and the manly simplicity of Luther's hymns. This lack, however, is offset, to a considerable extent, by the superior finish, elegance, and melody which Gerhardt's hymns possess, as compared with Luther's. "Whereas with Luther," says Scherer, "the world is full of storm and tempest, with Gerhardt, on the contrary, it lies in perpetual sunshine; everything, he thinks, is so beautifully calculated for the good of man; death and hell have lost their power, and

the soul rejoices in the certainty of salvation; we must throw our cares on God, for God cares for us, and if we succumb, he will extend his mercy to us. Luther resists evil like a man, but Gerhardt overlooks it like a youth. Even sin he thinks is of some use: 'Had I no guilt of sin on me, I had no part in thy mercy.'" So much for the difference between the points of view of Gerhardt and Luther, and for the consequent contrast of their hymns.

Gerhardt's hymns, as I have said elsewhere, lie midway between the objective, congregational hymns of Luther, on the one hand, and the subjective, sentimental hymns of the Pietists, on the other. He shows a decided *penchant* for the pietistic side in a few of his songs in which his ardent gush of feeling runs counter to the canons of good taste. In this respect, however, he was but following the tendency of sacred song in his age, for Pietism was already in the air, and it was only about the time of his death that Spener founded the religious school of the Pietists. The mystic hymns of Tersteegen and of the world-renowned Count Zinzendorf, so often disfigured by their florid, gushing language and their excess of imagery, represent the teachings of this school reduced in practice to their logical conclusion. And it required the cold didacticism and classical purity of a Klopstock and of a Gellert in the succeeding century to turn the course of German hymnody therefrom into the channel of its best traditions.