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THE DEVELOPMENT OF HYMNODY.[1]

II.

IN POST-REFORMATION TIMES.

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IT is a remarkable fact, as Dr. Schoff of New York has pointed out in Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*, that some of the greatest religious revivals in the Church were sung as well as preached, and that the leaders of those revivals were themselves hymnists. The remark is specially true with regard to the Reformation in Germany. To Luther belongs the extraordinary merit of having given to the German people in their own tongue, not only the Bible and the Catechism, but also their own hymn-book. Indeed it was said by Coleridge that "Luther did as much for the Reformation by his hymns as by his translation of the Bible." He was "the Ambrose of German hymnody." His hymns, we are told, were sung everywhere—"in the streets and fields, as well as in the churches, in the workshop and the palace, by children in the cottage, and by martyrs on the scaffold." It was also by his hymns that Luther gave to the new Protestant worship its congregational character. And he was but the first in a long succession of hymn-writers who have made German hymnody famous. We have but to recall the names, from a multitude of others, of Paul Gerhardt, John Scheffler, Martin Rinkart, Hiller, Zinzendorf, and Tersteegen. No other country, it has been truly said, is so rich in good hymnody as Germany.

Notwithstanding the example of Germany, the development of hymnody in England was sadly retarded by the Reformation. This was no doubt due to a variety of causes. The fierce hatred of Rome tended to discredit the use of the old Latin hymns. In spite of the desire of Archbishop Cranmer to present to the people, in an English dress, some of these beautiful compositions, it was found impossible to do so. The intense love of the English Bible was another factor in limiting the scope of public devotions. But the main reason was undoubtedly the influence of Geneva. In the matter of hymnody, our reformers followed Calvin rather than

[1] The first article, "The Evolution of Hymnody up to the Reformation," appeared in the Churchman for January.

Luther. Calvin had imbibed the ancient notion, formerly held by Paul of Samosata, and censured by the fourth Council of Toledo—an opinion which appears more than once in the course of Christian history—that the Bible alone should supply the devotions of public worship. He therefore discarded entirely the hymnology of the mediaeval Church. In its place he used the French metrical version of the Old Testament Psalms by Clement Merot and Theodore Beza, which opportunely appeared about the year 1540. The example thus set by Calvin at Geneva was most unfortunately followed by the English reformers, with the result that for nearly three hundred years hardly any hymns were used in public worship, except the Canticles, and the metrical Psalms. It cannot but be regarded as a great misfortune to the English Church that she was thus deprived, during a long period of her history, of the use of hymnody in public worship, which in Germany and elsewhere was found to be of such high spiritual value.

The story of our metrical version of the Psalms is not without its interest. The French metrical version was originated, as we have seen, by Clement Merot, who was valet or groom of the bed-chamber to Francis I. Strange to say, the English metrical version was begun by Thomas Sternhold, who held a like position in the household of Henry VIII, and afterwards of Edward VI. Sternhold's psalms were originally composed for his own "Godly solace," as Strype tells us, and were sung by him to his organ. He published in 1549 metrical versions of thirty-seven psalms, with a dedication to King Edward, and shortly afterwards he died. The work was continued by John Hopkins, a Suffolk clergyman and schoolmaster, and by others. It was finally completed in 1562, and is known as the "Old Version" by Sternhold and Hopkins. For a long period it remained the only "hymn-book" of the English Church, until indeed it was superseded, in the reign of William III, by another metrical version, known as the "New Version" by Tate and Brady. Indifferent as is the "Old Version" from a literary standpoint—for its authors, as old Fuller says, were "men whose piety was better than their poetry"—it yet became very popular, and great crowds of people, we are told, were wont to assemble at St. Paul's Cross for "psalm singing," to the "sad annoyance of mass-priests and the devil." In its favour, we will not forget that the fine rendering of the "Old Hundredth" psalm—"All people that on

earth do dwell"—said to have been written by William Kethe, a Protestant refugee at Geneva, comes to us from this Version.

The so-called "New Version," which eventually ousted the "Old," is associated with the time of the Restoration, and is the work of Dr. Brady and the poet-laureate Nahum Tate. It appeared in 1696, under the sanction of "an Order in Council," permitting its use among such congregations "as should think fit to receive it." A few years later, in 1703, a "Supplement" was added, which contained new versions of the Canticles, and also six hymns for use at Christmas and Easter and at the Holy Communion. These were the first hymns authorized to be used in the English Church; and it is interesting to find among them the famous Christmas paraphrase, believed to have been written by Tate, "While shepherds watched their flocks by night." The relative merits of the two metrical versions of the Psalms has been often discussed, and to the "Old" must certainly be given the praise of fidelity to the Hebrew original; but the literary standard of both is miserably low, and surprise must be felt, as Lord Chancellor Selborne said, that "in the country of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, and notwithstanding the example of Germany, no native congregational hymnody worthy of the name arose till after the commencement of the eighteenth century."

The honour of introducing the use of hymns among the English people belongs, not to the Church of England, but to the Nonconformists. Isaac Watts must be regarded as the true founder of English congregational hymnody. He was born at Southampton in 1674. His father was an "Independent," and had twice suffered imprisonment for his religious convictions. Watts' *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* appeared in 1707, and contained a number of excellent congregational hymns. Indeed some of Watts' hymns reach a very high standard of merit; and one of them may probably be regarded as the best hymn in the English language. This, we need hardly say, is the magnificent hymn, or paraphrase of Psalm xc., beginning, "O God, our help in ages past." Among other excellent hymns, still in common use among us, may be mentioned his Good Friday hymn, "When I survey the wondrous cross," and the beautiful composition, inspired by the view over Southampton Water of the New Forest beyond, beginning, "There is a land of pure delight." With Isaac Watts may be associated Philip Dod-

dridge, also an Independent minister, to whom we are indebted for the familiar hymns, "Hark, the glad sound," and the Holy Communion hymn, "My God, and is Thy Table spread?"

What is known as the Methodist movement, which began about the year 1738, produced a large number of good hymn-writers. The movement at length divided itself into two branches, the Armenian or Wesley branch under the leadership of John Wesley, and the Calvinistic branch under the leadership of Whitefield. Both these sections were fortunate in possessing hymn-writers; indeed it may be said that the success of the movement was due, in no small measure, to the use of hymnody. Of the Methodist hymnologists, the greatest was Charles Wesley. He was a true poet, as well as a writer of hymns. The prodigious number of over six thousand hymns are said to have been written by him. In so vast a number many are naturally of inferior quality; but some rise to a high degree of excellence. His most popular hymn is beyond question, "Jesu, Lover of my soul"; others that may be mentioned are: "Hark, the herald angels sing"; "Soldiers of Christ, arise"; "Rejoice, the Lord is King"; "Love divine, all love excelling"; and "Let saints on earth in concert sing." For literary merit, we should however have no hesitation in placing first, among Charles Wesley's compositions, the fine poem, founded on the wrestling of Jacob with the Angel until the break of day, beginning, "Come, O Thou Traveller unknown," and his beautiful lines on Catholic Love, "Weary of all this worldly strife." Of other Wesleyan hymn-writers, we must not forget the Welsh shoemaker, Thomas Olivers, whose stately ode, "The God of Abraham praise," is one of "singular power and beauty." Nor would we pass over James Montgomery, who has given us, among other lyrics, the popular hymns, "Angels from the realms of glory"; "Go to dark Gethsemane"; "Hail to the Lord's Anointed"; and "Songs of praise the Angels sang."

Turning to the Calvinistic section of the Methodist party, we at once call to mind a hymn which, in the opinion of many competent authorities, is the finest hymn in the English language. We mean Augustus Toplady's "Rock of Ages, cleft for me." It first appeared in the March number of *The Gospel Magazine* for 1776, of which journal Toplady was the Editor, under the heading, "A living and dying prayer for the Holiest believer in the world." This "song of

grace," says Dr. Grosart, "has given Toplady a deeper and more inward place in millions of human hearts, from generation to generation, than almost any other hymnologist of our country, not excepting Charles Wesley." It has been translated into many languages; and it will be remembered that Mr. Gladstone rendered it into Latin. To William Williams, the Apostle of Calvinistic methodism in Wales, we are indebted for the fine hymns, "Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah," and "O'er the gloomy realms of darkness." The famous *Olney Hymns*, though Newton and Cowper, like Toplady, remained in communion with the English Church, also belong to the Calvinistic school. The volume appeared in 1779; sixty-eight of the hymns being by Cowper, and two hundred and eighty by Newton. Few of them now find a place in our modern hymnals; but Newton will be remembered for his beautiful lines, "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds"; while many of Cowper's hymns, as we should expect, are of high quality. Among them, we would mention, "God moves in a mysterious way"; "O for a closer walk with God"; "Jesus, where'er Thy people meet"; and above all, the touching words, "Hark, my soul! it is the Lord."

Thus by the beginning of the nineteenth century a considerable number of good congregational hymns were in general use, especially among the Nonconformists; and to a certain extent, among the Evangelicals in the Church of England. But the High Church clergy stood rigidly aloof, and continued to use "Tate and Brady" only. The ancient prejudice against the use of hymnody still existed. It seemed no doubt to lack ecclesiastical authority, and to savour too much of that religious "enthusiasm" with which the Methodist party were associated. But in the year 1827 two works appeared, which at length broke down the barrier of prejudice, and introduced a new epoch in the development of hymnody. The one work was Bishop Heber's *Hymns*; and the other was John Keble's *Christian Year*. From henceforth, hymns were used alike by High Churchmen and Evangelicals, to the spiritual enrichment of the worship of the Church of England. Reginald Heber had won the Newdigate prize at Oxford for his admirable poem on *Palestine*; and his hymns are marked by a fine literary instinct. His best hymn is the truly majestic composition, beginning, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." He has also given us the popular Missionary hymn, written, strange to say, before he was appointed

to the bishopric of Calcutta, "From Greenland's icy mountains"; and a touching funeral hymn, "Thou art gone to the grave," composed on the death of his first-born child. With Heber's *Hymns* were included several by Dr. Milman, Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and afterwards Dean of St. Paul's, of which two must be mentioned, "Ride on, ride on, in majesty," and "When our heads are bowed with woe."

The *Christian Year*, by John Keble, who succeeded Milman as Professor of Poetry, while in no sense a book of hymns, yet contains several compositions which have found a place in most modern hymnals. His Morning and Evening hymns are as well known as those of Thomas Ken's; while "Blest are the pure in heart," and "There is a book who runs may read," are familiar to most English Christians. Since the publication of the *Christian Year*, a great number of good hymns have appeared. The *Lyra Apostolica*, which was published in 1836, contained John Henry Newman's immortal poem, "Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom," and also, as we have seen, Keble's rendering of the Greek "lamp-lighting" hymn, "Hail, gladdening Light." Henry Lyte's famous hymn, one of the most beautiful we possess, "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide," was written at Brixham in South Devon in 1847. Many others might be mentioned. We have only to remember the contributions of such hymn-writers as Dean Alford and Chatterton Dix, of Samuel Stone and Baring-Gould, of Mrs. Alexander and Charlotte Elliott, of Frederic William Faber and Horatius Bonar.

Such, very briefly, is the evolution of Christian hymnody, from its first indications in the New Testament to its vast development to-day. A modern hymn-book bears a striking witness to the true catholicity of the Christian Church. It contains contributions from ancient and modern sources, from the Eastern and the Western Church, from mediaeval saints, from Anglican poets and from Protestant dissenters. It testifies to the inspiring truth of the Communion of Saints. For a true hymn, it has been well said, knows nothing of the differences that divide us; it knows only of Christ and God.

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