

also were long without a hymn-literature, and differed from the other Churches of the Reformation in using only the Psalms of David in the praises of the sanctuary, to the exclusion of uninspired hymns. It is not difficult to discover the reason of this. These churches were all of one type, being modelled on the Genevan form; and in doctrine, worship and government were Calvinistic. True, indeed, there is no peculiarity of Calvinistic doctrine unfavourable to sacred song, for both English and German Calvinists have been among the best of hymn-writers. Nor yet did the want of a hymnology spring from any deficiency in the natural genius of the people; for the Swiss, French and Scotch are noted for the vigour and abundance of their national melodies. The cause of it lay in the application of a principle common to those churches—that nothing was to be accepted, in doctrine, worship or discipline, for which scripture warrant could not be pleaded.—In stern protest against Rome, and in order to clear away all those additions and encumbrances which had overlaid and deformed the religion of Christ, they went back to the New Testament, and refused to accept anything in doctrine, or sanctuary service, for which express sanction could not be found therein, “or which by good and necessary consequence, might not be deduced from Scripture.” It is a noble principle,—the very corner stone of the Reformation itself—one to which we all heartily subscribe, when its limits are fairly stated, and its application duly guarded by other co-ordinate truths. It is, however, capable of being misapplied and stretched beyond due bounds, when it is brought to bear on matters which the Word of God has left free. Our Confession of Faith recognizes this limitation of the principle, when it reminds us that “there are some circumstances connected with the worship of God and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”

In applying this principle rigidly to Psalmody, the Genevan Reformers, finding that the “hymns and spiritual songs” of which Paul spoke, and the adoption of which he enjoined, were not to be found in the New Testament Canon, arrived at the conclusion that they must look for them in the liturgy of the older dispensation, which, as being inspired throughout, they conceived was *alone* entitled to be used in the service of song. Accordingly the book of psalms became their hymn-book; and, by-and-by, the strange theory grew up and found acceptance, that to offer praise to God in *any other words* than those of the inspired psalms, was to present an unau-

thorized and unacceptable sacrifice, as much so as if a Jew had presented swine upon the altar. Even under the christian dispensation, to go beyond the Jewish psalmody in offering praise, was pronounced daring and presumptuous impiety. To such extremes will good men go at times, in the misapplication of a principle right and scriptural in itself. Doubtless, too, the fact that the Latin hymns in use were deeply tainted with the errors of Romanism, largely influenced their decision.—There was no Luther to separate the wheat from the chaff; and no poet arose with genius sufficient to create an English Protestant hymn literature, and so in their anxiety to get rid of “every rag of Popery,” they rejected all existing hymns, and clung to the psalmody of the Jewish church.—However right and proper such a course may have been then, the reasons for following it no longer exist, when we have such an abundance of pure, evangelical hymns to choose from.

There are still a few in these days who hold the same views; but the vast majority of those who glory in the name of Calvin have long since relaxed this narrow rule; and becoming, like the Psalmist, “wiser than their teachers,” have added to “the song of Moses” “the song of the Lamb,” and while loving and using the psalms of David, have conjoined with them devotional hymns, accordant with the thoughts and language of the New Testament, and expressive of their praise and thankfulness for the blessings of Redemption through Christ. Still there are some good men who, no doubt, with the best intentions, enter their solemn protest against this, and denounce the introduction of christian hymns as an impious, unwarranted “innovation,” opening the door for the direst heresies. They insist on it, that this is “will-worship”; and that to use words other than those inspired by the Spirit in praise, is to dishonour His productions and to place human compositions “on a level” with the divine. They calmly assume that the mind of God is, that in inspiring men under the Jewish dispensation to write the psalms, no religious feeling is permitted to embody itself in other songs of the sanctuary till the end of time. The whole of this theory rests on assumption unsustained by proof. If the authority of the New Testament be appealed to, there is not one word in its pages directly commanding us to sing the psalms of the old dispensation in public worship, or indeed any other compositions the words of which are recorded. We shall see presently the bearing of the apostolic precept, “speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” Thus we might fairly argue, as the Baptists of England long did, that if there is to be