

CONCERNING THE HYMNAL.

EXTRACTS FROM A PAPER ON PUBLIC PRAISE, BY REV.
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The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada is engaged in a task of the utmost importance at the present time. The question of what shall be sung by our congregations in the sanctuary is one which should claim the best thought of the church in answering it correctly. Sacred song bears a large share in moulding the spiritual natures of the worshippers. The large committee which has in hand the work of preparing the new hymnal for the church should have the hearty co-operation of every member, so that the book may be comprehensive enough to meet the need of the church for years to come. To this end, presbyteries should send definite reports to the convener. If the public reports of presbytery proceedings regarding action on the new hymnal are adequate statements of the work done in presbytery to perfect the hymnal, we fear the Assembly's committee will not in many cases receive much aid from them. To make a book of praise reasonably perfect will require much time, thought, and wide reading on the part of some who must go into the work *con amore*.

One does not need a very extensive acquaintance with the church—Presbyterian or any other—to know that the service of praise in the sanctuary in many places is most seriously neglected. One might almost say that the neglect is sin lying at the door of the congregation—that the very praise rendered is sin. Their insolence in this matter is certainly sinful. What is the object in view in the musical part of the service? Can there be more than one object in view? If we take the Book of Psalms for our guide, we shall find that they are used for many different purposes. It would seem from them that anything suitable for praise. In fact, we may say that praise is only prayer presented with musical accompaniment.

Taking the psalms as our guide, we have very varied objects recognized in them, such as praise to God by the whole congregation, addresses in song to the congregation by a leader, a leader announcing the theme of praise as a solo singer, and the congregation as a chorus responding; and in the first song recorded the men sing the song of deliverance, while the women answer in chorus.

The psalms of David do not exhaust the subject matter which the church may use in the praise of God. Few will admit, surely, that the only form of psalm suitable for use is the monotonous common meter version which our church has persistently, yea, almost stubbornly, used for the past two hundred and thirty years. That monotonous version has kept the music of the church at low water mark, if not stranded hopelessly, in many places for generations. The metre to be chosen should certainly be in keeping with the spirit of the psalm. The whole sentiment of the poem may be changed by putting it in shackles of unsuitable verse. Some of those noble, heroic psalms chained in such metre are like Samson shorn of his strength, blinded, and sent to grind in the prison house of his enemies. The twenty-ninth, and the forty-seventh are the illustrations of the unsuitableness of common metre to express the spirit of the psalm.

The book of praise for a congregation should have a wide range of subjects. If the service is to have unity in it, then there must be songs of sufficient variety to cover the themes of scripture teaching, and also the religious experience of the people. A magazine article is not the place to specify the topics which should be embraced.

The songs of general praise and thanksgiving should be many and varied, as should also be those of Christian experience, setting forth confession and supplication in wide variety.

Few days pass in which songs of comfort in sorrow and bereavement are not required. In our larger con-

gregations "never morning wears to evening but some heart does break," and so hymns of comfort are largely needed if the service is to be a help and a blessing to such.

One element in which the hymnal now in use is seriously deficient is that of songs calling forth Christian activity. There are many psalms which make a special appeal to the Jew, as a Jew, and rouse him to the pitch of enthusiasm. Here come in most appropriately songs with a chorus. The first son of praise on record, as we have seen, is one with an enthusiastic chorus. Men's voices sang, and women's answered. We have various examples of chorus songs in the psalms, and also where one part of the people answered another in the rendering of them. In the Book of Revelation we have a most beautiful example of song with a chorus. Chapters iv. and v. take us into the upper sanctuary among the "harpers harping with their harps."

In the fourth chapter, the four living creatures sing the song of creation, and the four-and-twenty elders, representing the redeemed sing the chorus.

In the fifth chapter, the redeemed sing the new song of redemption and all the angels having no part in that redemption song, make heaven re-echo with their chorus, and then all together join in one grand hallelujah chorus which must fill the whole heaven with melody.

It is very evident that chorus songs are appropriate to the church on earth, and that one part of the congregation answer another in the rendering of them. The whole range of Christian life should be expressed in song.

All men have not musical culture. The Canadian school system is radically deficient in this respect. The good Presbyterian at the head of it would do a wise thing were he to make music a compulsory subject in all town and village schools, and make it incumbent on boards of trustees to provide a suitable, qualified teacher. Then we would have better readers in our schools, and, certainly, we would have better singing in all our churches.

In the meantime, while musical culture is not general, it will be the duty of our church, in preparing its hymnal, to provide a wide range of easily learned tunes with harmonies not too difficult. Then the compass of voice required in rendering such tunes must not be too great. Tunes should be distinctly separate from each other. One of the most vexatious things in congregational music is to find a tune in two or three different forms. Several of the tunes in our psalter and hymnal have these slight vexatious variations.

Every well-known hymn should have joined with it an easily learned tune. The old hymns which had the tune born with them, and have lived together, should not be divorced without cause. Divorce is too easily obtained in these days. Some of our hymns are being strangled with the dead corpse of a tune tied about their neck, and they cry to the committee for deliverance. Hymns are being weeded out; let there be a weeding out of tunes also. By all means let us have the more elaborate music also, for we must have a book which will educate and elevate the taste of our people. But, doubtless, of some of the tunes in our hymnal, the best that can be said is that they are "faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null." Hence, some simple-minded folk in the church, anxious to get rid of proxy singing, believe that it would be well-spent money to get out a first edition of the new book of praise, with the music, on cheap paper, and send it down to presbyteries before its final adoption by the church. Possibly many would take very little interest in the matter, and the committee might not receive very much help in perfecting the book by this method, yet it would take away all cause of complaint as to the unsuitableness of either the words or the music. The committee has a noble work on hand, and one which will make a deep and permanent impression on the spiritual life of the church, and they should be upheld by the prayers and sympathy of our people, and every member of presbytery should conscientiously assist in making our hymnal the very best possible.—*Knox College Monthly*.