

In the year 1556 we find John Knox minister of the English-speaking Congregation at Geneva. A large proportion of the worshippers were refugees from the fury of Bloody Mary, and from the persecuting Romanists in Scotland. These refugees were familiar with a work of the Wedderburns, and also with that of Miles Coverdale, who indeed was actually present amongst them. Beside this they had brought with them the metrical renderings of Sternhold and Hopkins who had successively been most active in this good work. And now with these various materials in their possession, although as yet without a complete psalter, this congregation introduced psalms in metre into the public worship and thus at once revived the congregational praise of the early church and moulded the praise of Presbyterian Scotland for centuries to come.

When John Knox finally returned to Scotland in the year 1559, he carried with him, in his hand and in his heart, this Genevan Psalter. The enthusiasm of his fellow reformers in Scotland was at once aroused and as a result a complete psalter was ere long given to the people for use in public worship. This early Scottish psalter, of which the first edition appeared in 1564, was strongly marked by its Genevan origin. To the extent of about one third the versions are those used in Geneva. It also exhibited the influence of the French version of Marot, used by Calvin and his French countrymen. Many of the tunes also were of French origin, and were sung by the worshippers in Geneva.

A goodly number of the versions in the early Scottish Psalter are of the highest order. Of these perhaps the very best are now universally used in Presbyterian worship, and have been preserved in the later "Rous" version. The beautiful short metre version of the 45th psalm is found in the Scottish Psalter.

O daughter take good heed,
Incline and give good eare,
Thou must forget thy kindred all,
And father's house most deare,
So shall the King desire
Thy beauty excellent ;
Hee is thy Lord, therefore shalt thou
To honour Him bee bent."

Here too, we find the 100th psalm :—

"All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice."

Also, in French metre, that grand version of the 124th psalm :—

"Now Israel may say, and that truly :"
and the no less majestic 145th.

"O Lord Thou art my God and King."

Besides these versions, preserved to us with comparatively little change, a rendering in this Scottish Psalter has formed the basis and main element of certain other versions. We may, for example, call to mind our beautiful rendering of the 116th psalm and find the source and main portion in the early psalter—

"I love the Lord, because my voice,
And prayer heard hath Hee,
When in my days I cald on Him,
He bow'd His care to mee.
E'en when the snares of cruel death,
About beset mee round :
When paines of heil mee caught, and when
I wo and sorrow found,
Upon the name of God my Lord
Then did I call and say
Delyver Thou my soul. O Lord,
I do Thee humbly pray.
The Lord is verie mercifull,
And just Hee is also :
And in our God compassion
Doth plentifully flow."

The early psalter was very dear to the people of Scotland, and was in universal use by them from 1564 until it was set aside in favour of the "Rous" version in 1650.

It served its purpose as providing a Book of Praise from the Reformation period, and prepared the way for the fuller praise of the future. Amongst the quaint and beautiful treasures we find in this now well nigh forgotten Psalter, we cannot but quote the opening stanzas of a beautiful version of the 84th psalm

"O Lord, Thou loved hast Thy land,
And brought forth Jacob with Thine hand,
Who was in thralldome strait.
Thy people's sins so great and hudge,
Thou covered hast, and didst not judge,
Thy mercies were so great.

"Thine anger then, and wrath so hote,
Thou didst remit, and hast forgot ;
Such was Thy tender love.
O turn us then, God of our strength,
Release Thine ire, and now at length
Let our distresse Thee move."

It was with great reluctance that this Psalter was given up. But when the Scottish representatives to the Westminster Assembly of Divines returned, in 1647, they reported that a version of the Psalter by Francis Rous, speaker of the House of Commons and a lay member of the Westminster Assembly, had been approved for use in England. After this version had been several times revised by Committees of the General Assembly, and in the process greatly altered from the renderings of Rous himself, it was approved in 1650, and from that time displaced the early Psalter. This version is so familiar to us and our space is so limited, that we must at present be content with brief reference. Suffice it to say that the revisers appointed by the Scottish Assembly included in the new collection much that was best in the old. For centuries these two Psalters were the successive Books of Praise of the Presbyterian Church.

Influence of the Psalter upon our Church.

It has been so profound that we cannot fathom it. The constant use of the Psalms gave to the people adequate views of God. In the