

• Our Young People •

The Psalms in History.*

BY WOODFORD.

It was said by the late Mr. Gladstone "All the wonders of Greek civilization together are less wonderful than is the simple book of Psalms—the history of the human soul in its relation to its Maker." In the Psalms is to be found the heart and essence of the Word of God, so that we, with all the members of the church of God, have in them a meeting place for the heart. There is no other such river of melody which has made glad and strong and hopeful so many generations of the children of God. In these songs of the heart we join in praise with a multitude that no man can number, pilgrims of the past now at rest; pilgrims of the present, journeying on to the trysting-place. Who but the One who made the hearts of the disciples, on the way to Emmaus, burn within them, inspired these productions, making other hearts to burn and drawing them forth to reveal their need before He came to reveal Himself, as that for which their hearts and flesh longed. In the Psalms we feel this beating of the heart-pulse of humanity.

When the day is about to break the birds begin to sing. Even so the faint fore-glimmerings of the Reformation were heralded by songs among the people. Priests and popes had for too long shut the people out from active participations in worship and the Spirit of God brooding over humanity as erstwhile over chaos, caused an awakening to the lights and truths sent forth that made itself felt in such songs as have ever been a feature of the uprising of truth.

Two things marked the sacred songs of those separated from the Romish church, they were in the mother tongue and took the form known as rhyme. Seeing that the Reformation movement as led by Luther had its source in the doctrine of justification by faith, while that led by Calvin took for its basis the Word of God, we are given to understand how hymns were favored by those of the Lutheran order, and psalms by those of the Reformed or Calvinistic. Luther and his followers adhering to the leading truths and spirit of the Bible, and less careful about the form, delighted in sacred poetry in the form of adaptations of the Psalms; Calvin and his followers ever striving to keep close to Scripture, delighted in versions of the Psalms.

The wisdom of combining both in Christian worship has appealed to us in these days. Hymns have their place manifestly, as well as Psalms. But if the hymn awakens impressions and aids revivals, the psalm conducts more directly to the study of the Word of God—without which revivals are shallow and short lived. The flame that is caught from a hymn is most secure when its heart rests in the white heat which gathers round a psalm.

Coming to metrical versions of the psalms the first we have an account of is that by Clement Marot into French. Marot translated only fifty psalms; two were by Calvin, the rest by Theodore Bèze. These versions were sung to the simple airs of the popular songs. By degrees it came to be that one who sang these songs was counted a protestant. By the prohibition thus implied they became more dear to the people in whose blood was

beginning to pulsate the stirring throbbings of spiritual life. These were the songs sung by the Huguenots at the peril of life in the secrecy of their homes, or the solitude of the woods, that rose boldly on the onset of battle, and cheered them while they toiled in the galleys, soothed them on the rack, and mounted with them to the scaffold.

Here we may most fitly note what Carlyle has said of the Psalms, "Reader, art thou one of a thousand, able still to read a Psalm of David, and catch some echo of it through the old time centuries; feeling far off in thy own heart what it was to other hearts made as thine? To sing it, attempt not, for it is impossible in this late time; only know that it once was sung. Then go to the opera and hear, with unspeakable reflections, what things men now sing."

Before the definite triumphs of the Reformation there were metrical versions of a number of the Psalms in England and Scotland. The English versions were by Miles Coverdale, the associate of Tyndale, in the first complete translation of the Bible published in 1535. The Scottish version was by three brothers, Wedderburn of Dundee, and were known as the Dundee Psalms. It was one of these, John Knox tells us, George Wishart and his friends sung at Ormiston shortly before his death. Scotland at this time was more in touch with Germany than with France, so that whatever psalms were rhymed were supplemented by German hymns. Knox and the reformers associated with him brought the Scotch into touch with France and Geneva. In this way a complete English version of the Psalms came to Scotland.

The first English version was prepared by Thomas Sternhold—groom of the robes to Henry VIII and Edward VI., and Jo'n Hopkins, a minister of Suffolk. They were authors of only portions of the versions. The edition was first printed in London, then enlarged in 1556 in Geneva, where were many English speaking refugees from the persecutions of Mary. In 1563 this version was completed and under Elizabeth adopted as the metrical version to be used by the Church of England. It had a wide circulation until 1698, when it gave way to the version of Brady and Tate, which, though free from the rudeness of the other and smooth in syllables and metre, was very unequal in the rendering of the Psalms.

In Scotland the Sternhold and Hopkins version brought by Knox from Geneva, not quite the same as adopted in England, took the place of the Wedderburn psalms and goodly songs. In the version adopted in Scotland many psalms had different versions by various authors. The complete version was first printed at Edinburgh by order of the General Assembly and continued in use till 1650. That it was received with general satisfaction is evident from the many "sang schules" established. This was the psalm book of Knox, Welsh and Melville; in it were the melodies that cheered the prisoners in the dungeon of Blackness, that sailed with them in their ships to France, and consoled them in their exile.

In 1643 the matter of selecting a version of the psalms that might take the place of the existing ones, came before the Westminster Assembly of Divines in London. The idea of one church in Scotland and England made many in both countries anxious to have some common forms in worship as a

bond. The version of Francis Rous, of Cornwall—a lay member of the Assembly, as well as Parliament, who died in 1658, Provost of Eton College, Oxford—was chosen, and a committee was appointed to confer with him on charges and emendations. Owing to divisions in England the Psalter was deposed, and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland took the matter up for itself on the lines supplied to the Westminster Assembly. Not until 1650, nor without many reprints and much pious care, with many modifications, and substituting for those of Rous a number of translations drawn from the Scottish Psalter and many other sources, was the version now in use in Scotland ready for publication. With the exception of that of Marot, no version has had as long an existence as this, nor made a home for itself in so many lands.

Those who judge that smoothness is better than strength, and correct rhyme superior to scriptural fidelity, criticise this version as uncouth, and Galilean in speech, faulty in measures and rhyme and affording little scope for musical variety from monotonous versification. Notwithstanding any such trivial defects, let it be remembered that no other version adheres so closely to scripture. There are no wordy paraphrases, nor is there weak sentimentalism, but in all a directness that is interpretative, and in many a tenderness, a quaint beauty, that can best—perhaps only—be appreciated by those who are not so utilitarian as to destroy the faded flowers and similar mementoes of days when hearts were young.

Dr. John G. Paton is a notable example of a good steward. There were \$70,000 due him in the way of profits from his biography. Instead of holding any part of this for his own use, he gave the whole sum to the missionary society that had supported him saying: "It is the Lord's. Pass on the bread of life to my brethren in the South Seas."

The world sits at the feet of Christ,
Unknowing, blind, and unconsoled;
It yet shall touch His garment's fold,
And feel the heavenly Alchemist
Transform its very dust to gold.

John Greenleaf Whittier.

The Christian is to be—not by fits and starts, but by habit and repute—conversant with heaven. His life is properly a heavenly life, "hid with Christ in God." It is only "members" that he has on earth—not his life, and certainly not his treasure.—Donald Fraser, D. D.

How aptly that lost coin represents the soul made in the image of God, lying amid the dust of neglect. It may be it is yourself. The one hope for the lost coin is that the owner's heart can never be at rest until it rejoins its companions, and the one hope for you is the anxiety which fills the heart of God, and which will cause Him to leave no stone unturned that He may win you back. There is disturbance and removal on all hands; the house of your life is upset in every part, for no other reason than that you should be recovered.

God's joy in bringing us home, in recovering us, to put us again in circulation, is greater than even ours is at our recovery. The gladness which thrills the heart of the restored backslider is infinitely less than His whose property we are, and who has made us His own by creation, redemption, and fatherly interest. His joy is too great to be self-contained. He bids unfallen angels rejoice with Him.—Christian Endeavor World.

*Special Topic for Oct. 21st.—The Psalms in History.