

MISCELLANEOUS SECTION.

THE HYMNS AND POETRY OF THE AUTHOR OF "AMERICA."

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CIRCUMSTANCES combined to give prominence to the name, character and reputation of the Rev. S. F. Smith, D.D., the author of our National Anthem, "America," down to the day of his death, November 16, 1895. Dr. Smith was the personification of modesty, and was accustomed to write upon envelopes and scraps of paper. He found inspiration, he said, in this habit. The wonder is that "America" ever saw the light, for it was written upon a chance bit of paper, and when handed to Lowell Mason, the tune composer, was one of a number of hymns and poems that had been loosely laid in the author's portfolio, and which were produced for the use of Mr. Mason, at his request. The public so emphasized the origin and history of "America" as almost to disassociate Dr. Smith from the authorship of "The Morning Light is Breaking."

He was the last of that group of hymnists who, in the first third of this century, became the sweet singers of our American Israel, and to some extent of British Israel. The ranking hymnists of the period were Thomas Hastings (1784-1872), the Rev. Ray Palmer, D.D. (1808-1887), and Dr. Smith (1809-1895). Which of these was the greatest is a fair question to consider, provided the object be to ascertain a question of fact, to do historic justice, and to learn in which life there was the most of the beneficent Providence of God. No odious comparisons should be contemplated nor made. The same question arises when contemplating the historic usefulness and position of Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and Charles Wesley (1707-1788). Hastings preceded Palmer and Smith

about as Watts preceded Wesley. He wrote voluminously, more so than the others, although all held the pens (the quills) of ready writers. His hymns have been adopted more numerous by the compilers than those of Palmer and Smith, and more are still adopted nearly a quarter of a century after his death. The Rev. F. M. Bird, D.D., says:

"If we take the aggregate of American hymnals published during the last fifty years, or for any portion of that time, more hymns by Hastings are found in common use than by any other native writer."

On the other hand, Bishop Hurst, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, attributes first rank to the hymns of Ray Palmer, for their perfection of form, coupled with spirituality, usefulness, and power of survival. Well-known as many of the hymns of Dr. Hastings have been and are, no one of them has such uniqueness and prominence as Palmer's "My Faith Looks Up to Thee," or Smith's "The Morning Light is Breaking." The first lines of well-known hymns by Hastings are: 1, "Gently, Lord, oh gently lead us;" 2, "Hail to the brightness of Zion's glad morning;" 3, "He that goeth forth with weeping." Fifty-six of the hymns of Hastings are annotated in Julian's "Dictionary of Hymnology," 38 of those of Palmer, and 32 of those of Dr. Smith. These figures are significant and typical. The honors go to Dr. Hastings on the score of useful hymns. They go to Ray Palmer in accordance with the characterizations of Bishop Hurst, and Palmer ranks second only to Hastings as a successful, voluminous hymnist.

Dr. Smith wrote many hymns on baptism. His denominationalism, however, was of a mild type. Inter-denominational fellowship he delighted in as a sentiment and a reality. He was the hymnist of the Christian Endeavor