

CONCERNING THE HYMNAL.

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The articles lately appearing in your valued paper regarding the Hymnal revision, have justly excited widespread attention. The controversy appears to be over the retention or addition of certain hymns—the eligibility of certain hymns, owing to their decidedly subjective or emotional character.

Some hymns are more in favor than others. Perhaps, from our present hymnal might be chosen: "Nearer My God To Thee," 174; "Lead Kindly Light," 200; "Onward Christian Soldiers," 223; "The Sands of Time," 281, and "Jesus Lover of My Soul," 179; This much from the Hymnal. Now from the more popular melodies from other sources, others might be chosen which will suggest themselves at once to anyone acquainted with hymns.

There must be some one or more reasons why these hymns possess such an extended attraction. They are not subjective, nor again are they all objective, yet they are universal favorites. Nobody has been iconoclastic enough to attack the words of No. 174. It seems part of one's religion, and sacrilege even to criticize it. True it is full of repetition and when sung, even more so than when written. As to No. 200, the words are within the suburbs of nonsense, that is to any but a learned man. No. 223, and others in the same strain, taken literally have materially assisted in producing the outward style of the Salvation Army. No. 281 is so full of metaphor that it requires more than a first glance to pass the beauties of expression and reach some of the even more beautiful thoughts. In No. 129, the longings of the trusting heart are clothed in simpler raiment.

It is true that these hymns are beautiful, but not everyone will admit that they, as compared with others more obscure, are surpassingly so. From a literary standpoint though, it is doubtful if any common factor exists to which can be ascribed their universal favor. The neglected element is the tune. Fifteen years in choirs, whether as a humble singer or as leader, has unfortunately left the impression on my mind, that the tune not the words is king.

Excelsior, Lux Benigna or Sandon; St. Gertrude, Ruthford and Hollingside, are all in their way gems of music. They have few equals and no superiors. To Mason, Dykes, Sullivan, is due their popularity. Fix these hymns to unpopular tunes, and they would be lost among the excellencies of the many others of their fellows. Again, it may be the stirring melody, certainly not the words which gave to "Hold The Fort," its day of popularity among a large class; so too "The Sweet Bye-and-Bye," "Shall We Gather," and many others.

This may be a new way of examining a hymn; the harmony rather than words. But that this is the true and actual way, although in theory the wrong way, a little practical observation will prove. In other words, while a critical congregation (or possibly with more truth a choir) will be satisfied to sing any obscure or involved hymn to attractive harmony; their taste will rebel against even the choicest literary expression to second rate or ugly music. Of course, fortunately, both first-class words and tunes are obtainable.

There are in our present Hymnal about seventy-five different metres, of these long, short, and common, 7, 6, 5 and 7's and their doubles predominate.

To the pastor the present arrangement of hymns according to their subject is a convenience; though almost the same result could be had from a subject index.

On the other hand, immediately it is admitted that the tune may be as much an object of search as the words, it becomes desirable to so arrange the book as that given a certain hymn; music of the character suited to those interested is subject to some range of choice.

By putting all hymns on the same metre together, and correspondingly the music of each metre by itself

above, and cutting the leaves between, enlarged freedom is obtained, though possibly at the expense of individuality; yet this latter to an extent could be preserved by indicating over each hymn the number or name of the tune suggested.

Another conclusion is, that with all the labor of the Hymnal Committee in getting together a superb collection of hymns: an equal labour in importance remains, namely, to get an equally magnificent collection of tunes. Tastes differ. Why some prefer "Lydia," to "Spohr," "Tell me the Old Old Story," to "Vox Delecti," "Sweet Hour of Prayer," or "Woodland," to "Worms," or "Intercession" or Garratt's "Onward Christian Soldiers" is not open for dispute. The fact remains. Out of thousands of hymns the Committee has selected a limited number; out of the ten or twenty verses of some of those selected, they might make a second pruning to reduce them to, say six single or four double stanzas, and so preserve unity of verse as well as unity of hymns in the Church throughout the Empire.

This would reduce the proposed Hymnal by half and so give that much more room for music. Then by scoring out about half of the German trash, even though to fill the space resource must be had to such plebeian harmony as is found in Sanky's 750; for instance, hymn 615, "Refuge;" or hymns 594, 588, 584, 575, 572, added choice and utility might result.

These are merely random selections from a small portion of the book. And above all, leave the old tunes in their popular binding; the rigidity of the interminable half note, kills the melody. The latter quality melody, not harmony is what attracts the young—at the same time an excess of "swing" detracts from the solemnity.

The work of selecting music is undoubtedly a big task; and if when the committee is about it, they could lay aside in a convenient spot, of the many tunes under their consideration, a few, that while good in other respects, are a little too long or complicated for congregational use; some energetic publisher might see his way clear to print as anthems what would be neither trash nor sacred dance music on the one hand, nor the extremely difficult or very long music, of the style of Mozart or Handel.

This would give as collateral to the Hymnal something in the nature of an authorized anthem book, the popularity of which, if reflecting the usual ability of the committee, would be undoubted.

The Sabbath comes to us week after week with so fair a gift in its hand, so gracious a smile on its face, so Divine an elevation in its heart, that it behoves us to make some preparation for so welcome a guest.

We do not fail to set our houses in order, and appoint our tables fittingly when friends whom we delight to honor are expected within our doors. There are days which we all keep with an extraordinary splendor, anniversaries, gala days, fete days. This seventh day festival comes to us from God Himself, the ever renewed expression of His gentle thought of us, His children. Can we do otherwise than greet it with joy and receive it with gratitude?

To prepare aright for the Sabbath we should lay our worldly cares aside. Even if the week has been full of disappointments, embarrassments and perplexities, we shall the better gain strength to enter on another wrestle with such cares and solitudes, by bringing serenity and patience to the Sabbath. This blessed interlude is meant as a truce to the week-day strife and struggle. Let us take the full benefit of it, with thankfulness in our souls. We are in peril of losing, as a people, our sense of obligation to God; our consciences are less sensitive than formerly on many points. We need to be toned up, and to have courage and the faith to hold fast to our blessed Sabbath day.

The man who has never tried the companionship of a little child, has carelessly passed by one of the greatest pleasures of life, as one passes a rare flower without plucking it or knowing its value.