

*Reformation Hymns.*

The Reformation was accompanied by an outburst of song on the part of the people throughout Christendom. The altar-screen, which fenced the priestly caste from laic intrusion, was broken down. Instead of canons or friars intoning drowsy antiphons in the choir at the hours of prime, sext, and compline, the Reformed congregations, young men and maidens, old men and children, were heard with loud voices praising God. Translations of the psalms prepared the way for hymns which popularised the tenets of the Evangelical Confessions, and became to the religious life of the Protestant communities what the ballads of a nation, according to Fletcher's maxim, are to its political life. In Luther's hand "the thing became a trumpet." His hymn, "Ein' fest Burg ist unser Gott," has been called by Heine the "Marseillaise" of the Reformation.

*English and Scotch Hymns.*

In striking contrast with the number of hymns elicited by the great religious awakening on the Continent, is their comparative scarceness in the early Protestant literature of England and Scotland. We know that in both countries religious canticles were adapted to old and favorite tunes, and widely diffused, but they were never so thoroughly assimilated with the religious life of the people, and incorporated with its ritual, as in Germany. The sublime poetry of the Bible satisfied the popular heart, while it nourished the intellect and imagination; and the psalms of the Jewish temple were sung with clearer emphasis and fuller response in the Christian sanctuary. The hymnology of British Protestantism may be said to be the growth of the last century and a half, before which period Germany possessed a classic literature of sacred song. The rude English version of the Psalms by Sternhold and Hopkins was superseded by that of Brady and Tate—a sacrifice of rugged strength to insipid smoothness and inflated verbosity. Milton's attempts at translation only shew that his strong arm could not bend the bow of Ulysses. The Scottish version, though in reality the work of an English Puritan, has, with all its roughness and dissonance, preserved more of the vital spirit, the rich and pure aroma of the Hebrew original.

The sacred poems of Herbert, Quarles, Vaughan, and other writers of that period, cannot be accepted in the strict sense as hymns. A few written by Mason, who died in 1694, more justly deserve the name. They are often quaint and harsh in diction, but compact with thought, and luminous with imagery. The hymns we have from Addison's pen are marked by elegance and refinement, and devoutness of feeling, though his muse stands in the outer court of the temple. Tried by the test of popularity—here a true criterion of excellence—one of the highest places must be assigned to Watts. He is our most voluminous writer, and though his effusions are occasionally deformed by conceits and false ornament, they are often lofty, impassioned, and felicitous in expression, while, above all, the living spirit of devotion breathes in every line. More simple and spontaneous are the hymns of Doddridge, with the same sacred warmth and glow. The numerous hymns of Charles Wesley are distinguished by the predominance of the subjective and emotional elements. Everywhere they are stamped with a fervid individuality, which verges at times upon vagueness and mysticism of the Moravian type. The hymns of Toplady, the great antagonist of the Wesleyan theology, are often charged with dogmatic statement to a degree of prosaic stiffness and austerity; but some of them, in their simple energy and fulness, and a kindling ardour which reminds us of Wesley, have obtained general currency. One of the most popular collections is that known as the "Olney Hymns," the joint production of Cowper and John Newton. Newton's hymns are sound, vigorous, and sensible presentations of Christian truth, penetrated and