

Chaldeans, Phœnicians, and Egyptians, have employed music and song in the worship of their false Gods. The Greeks and Romans sang short odes in praise of their deities; and the northern barbarians, from the remotest periods of their history, have had their Bards and Skalds, who composed and taught the people sacred songs. The Jews, after their deliverance from Egypt, praised God in a triumphal song; and we have several instances of the same custom in the Old Testament, till David, with other holy men, composed the Psalms which were used in the Temple Service. Now, since hymns were sung to God by all nations from such a remote antiquity, there must have been a felt necessity for the practice. We conceive that hymns do not only nourish, in the popular mind, the glow of devotion, and kindle the fire of a pure inspiration in the human breast; but the melting of many voices into one is an affecting symbol of the unity of faith, and the harmony of feeling that ought to pervade every heart. Hence, though there are innumerable multitudes in Heaven, yet they sing one song—showing that one common triumph is celebrated, and that one joy ravishes every heart.

Christ himself seems to have sung the Old Testament Psalms after the institution and celebration of the first Communion; the evangelist Matthew informs us, that Christ along with his disciples retired to the Mount of Olives, and that they sung a hymn.—Matthew xxvi., 30. This was evidently one of the hymns composing the great Hallel, extending from the 113th to the 118th Psalm, inclusive, which were usually sung at the Feast of the Passover. The Christian Church, also, seems to have been founded on the model of the Jewish Synagogue; and, hence, it is probable that the early Christians sung the Psalms which had been previously used in the Temple Service.

But we contend that hymns besides, and in addition to the Psalms of David, were sung in the Christian Church. This is evident from the very nature of the case. The introduction of the Gospel seems to have made a deep impression on the minds of the community. The world was lying wholly in the wicked one, and mankind were sitting in the region and shadow of death. The Gospel was suddenly introduced, as a rising sun upon the dense darkness; and, consequently, the strongest feelings of gratitude must have been excited—feelings too strong to be confined in the breast, and which would naturally find expression in songs of praise. During every period of deep religious excitement, the popular feelings have found expression in hymns composed for the express purpose; and, therefore, reasoning from analogy, we contend that Christian hymns would naturally spring up beside the Psalms of David.

But, on such an important subject, we are not left to mere inferential proof. From the abuses which crept into the Corinthian Church in the matter of psalmody, we perceive that other hymns were sung, even in the apostolic ages, than the Psalms of David.—1 Cor. 14, 15, 16, 26. It is here evident, from the whole structure of the argument, that Paul does not condemn the practice of every man having a psalm and a hymn, but simply the manner in which they were sung. Now, if nothing but the Psalms of David had ever been sung in the Christian Church, it is difficult to conceive how any man could have had his psalm, or that any irregularity could have ever existed on the subject in the Church. Besides, Paul does not blame the use, but only the abuse of private hymns; an evident proof that they were perfectly consistent with the spirit and genius of Christianity.

The singing of sacred songs is made, by Paul, an express injunction. "Let the word of Christ," says he, "dwell in you richly, in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Compare Colossians iii., 16, with Ephesians v., 19. What is the distinction to which Paul here alludes? Are all the terms employed, exclusively applicable to the Psalms of David? The communities of Colosse and Ephesus seem to have been, for the most part, converted heathens; and, as no explanation is here given of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, these early converts must have understood them, not as Jews, but as Gentiles, and have assigned to them the current signification of the country. Now, a hymn differed from a psalm in this respect—that while a psalm might be composed on any religious subject, and be in any form, meditative or didactic, a hymn was exclusively addressed to God. The phrase spiritual songs, or, as the word might be rendered, spiritual odes, are surely a species of composition different from the psalms of the Old Testament. The Corinthians had been accustomed, in their heathen state, to sing odes to their

Gods many, and Lords many; and, as distinguished from them, they are now commanded to sing to the true God spiritual odes, as a manifestation of their spiritual nature.

It is not probable that the Apostles wrote any hymns; yet it has been thought that Paul alludes to several hymns in his epistles. It has been asserted, that the first three verses of a hymn are quoted in Ephesians v., 14—"Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." We have obviously another fragment of an ancient hymn in 1 Timothy iii., 16—"Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." In the Revelation, the Church in Heaven sings a new song distinct from the Psalms of David; and that song is—"Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth." Now, if the Church in Heaven, composed of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, sing other songs than the Psalms of David, why should not the Church on earth imitate their example? The redeemed in Heaven and on earth are one family, and why should one department of the family be confined to the Psalms of David, while the other gives free expression to their feelings in songs of praise, which are the more immediate and spontaneous effusion of the heart?

But that hymns were sung in the Christian Church from the earliest ages may be most conclusively proved from the testimony of those writers who lived next to the age of the Apostles. Pliny, the younger, when governor of Bithynia, writing respecting the Christians to the emperor Trajan, not more than three or four years after the death of the apostle John, says, that the Christians "were accustomed to meet together, on a certain day, before it was light, and to sing a merited hymn to Christ as to God." Eusebius, who lived in the fourth century, and who embodied in his history fragments of still earlier works which have since perished, when giving an account of more primitive times, says—"How many psalms and hymns are there which were written by faithful brethren, praising Christ as the divine Logos." And Tertullian, who wrote about the year 200, when giving a description of family worship, says—"That lights being brought, every one is incited to sing as he is able, either from sacred scripture, or from his own composition." These passages, from ancient writers, clearly shew that hymns, in addition to the Psalms of David, were sung in the very earliest periods of the Christian Church. In fact, the ancient evening hymn, to which Cyprian is thought to allude, is still preserved. It is addressed to the Saviour, and is as follows:—"Jesus Christ, joyful light of the holy glory of the eternal, heavenly, holy, blessed Father. Having now come to the setting of the sun, beholding the evening light, we praise the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit of God. Thou art worthy to be praised, O Son of God, with sacred voices, at all seasons, who givest life. Wherefore the universe glorifieth thee." Now, it surely cannot be supposed that if nothing was sung, in the early Church, but the Psalms of David, that hymns should have been introduced less than a hundred years after the death of the apostle John. This uniform practice, in the second century, indicates a custom still more early, and proves that hymns were sung even in the apostolic age.

There is also a kind of sacred propriety that the Christian Church should not be confined to the Psalms of David. The Psalms celebrate the praises of a coming Messiah, and they do not contain that clear light and immortality which have been revealed by the Gospel. The Jewish prophets did not always understand the meaning of their own predictions; for they "inquired and searched diligently what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify; when he testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." Now, ought we not to take advantage of the clearer light of the Gospel, and embody our pious feeling in language more exactly understood by the vast majority of professing Christians? But it has been said, that we have an inspired Book of Psalms, and not to use it is preferring the inventions of man to the word of God. Now, the Book of Psalms contains as many prayers as hymns of praise; and, therefore, if we ought to sing in inspired language, why ought we not to pray in inspired language?