

CHURCH OF ENGLAND HYMNALS.

HYMN-SINGING used to be one of the points of difference between Dissent and the Church of England, and indeed gave occasion to one of the epithets aimed by Episcopalians at Nonconformists. Psalm-singing was one of the many adjectives prefixed to the term Puritan. But this point of difference has faded away, and hymn-singing, instead of being one of the dividing, has become one of the uniting influences between Church and Dissent. Churchmen may still regard Dissenters as schismatics, but the schism cannot be very serious whilst the fretted roofs of venerable cathedrals echo with verses penned by the schismatics. Dissenters may still regard Churchmen as heretics, but the heresy cannot be very pervasive whilst even the most orthodox of meeting houses ring with the hymns of Anglican priests and bishops. Hymns, in fact, now form a point of union between parties who are widely sundered by rite, dogma, and ecclesiastical idea. The most fervid Methodist feels half at home in Churches, from which his ancestors were thrust out, as he hears sung the well-loved verses of the venerated Charles Wesley. The highest Anglican, if he should stray into some humble village conventicle, is somewhat placated as he hears, and perhaps joins in, the singing of well-known verses by Bishop Wordsworth or John Keble. If the Churches are ever to be drawn into unity, it will be not by the dogmas of the theologian, but by the verses of the hymnist.

In the matter of hymns the Churchman is as free as the freest of Dissenters. In the matter of prayer in the Church of England there is still the most rigid uniformity. Every petition must come out of the one book of Common Prayer ; its hymns may be taken from any source, and from any collection. Here the Church of England is grandly inconsistent, just as the Independents once were, when they allowed every preacher to make his own prayers, but