

THE HYMNAL.

BY A PRECENTOR.

For the Review.

Only to-day I got from a member of Presbytery the "Proposed Book of Praise," with the slip from the Hymnal Committee accompanying it.

I cannot appreciate the wisdom of the last, the 9th, resolution of Assembly. This says "that the psalm selections should be numbered separately from the Hymns." Instead of this, it seems to me better to continue the numbering as if these psalm selections were an integral part of the Hymnal, and then continue; so that Hymn 1, "Holy, Holy, Holy," would be numbered 99 and Hymn 2 numbered 100, and so on.

Imagine the confusion, especially to strangers, if the minister wished to give out say the 10th Hymn. Some people picking up the Hymn book, would properly turn up the hymn beginning, "Praise the Lord ye Heavens adore Him," others would start at the beginning of the book and come upon the 20th Psalm, and so a general confusion would arise.

Or, say the minister wished to announce the 22nd psalm beginning at the 24th verse. He would then have to add for the benefit of those who relied upon their "selection" edition that this was No. 11 of the "selections" at the 2nd verse thereof; whereas with continuous numbering, to prevent confusion all that would be necessary would be to announce the 11th Hymn 2nd verse. And if it turned out to be part of the 22nd psalm so much the better. I think from an etymological standpoint all psalms are Hymns even though all Hymns may not be psalms.

Then, considering the small space the "selections" take, there is no likelihood that they will be eliminated from any edition even if the full psalter is added at the front; and resultantly, when a psalm is given out the people look for it in the psalter and when a Hymn is announced it is sought in the Hymnal even if by chance its author may have been David.

The last part of the 9th resolution says "that pages be uniform in all editions." Now what is the sense of this. Does this apply to the libretto editions or to both music and libretto editions. The latter is impossible. On page 206 part of the Hymns only is there, the rest is on another page. Surely it would not be so in the music edition. Again if the printers saw fit to print a thin flat pocket Hymnal putting in double columns and six times the quantity of print on each page as in the sample, as a special convenience for the breast pocket why should an arbitrary rule prevent them, a rule which in some cases must necessarily as I have shown have an exception—I fear this "conformity act."

A writer in your paper asks for a cut leaf edition, that is music above and words below and the leaf cut to allow one part to turn independent of the other; and he says in support of his plea that by a cut leaf, the choir master who should be the best judge can then make his own selections of music for the Hymn, to which another writer replies by challenging the ability or reliability of the choir master. Did it ever occur to the latter writer that, say, six hundred Hymn tunes make a rather large repertoire for a country congregation. Or if nothing but the music set to the Hymn is allowed to be sung is it solo singing that is aimed at. Someone says that the words are more likely to be remembered

when a single tune is set to a single Hymn, as its own proper tune. Now, admitting this, take the Hymns best-known, what are their proper tunes: what is the proper tune of "Jesus Lover of my Soul" is it "Hollinside," "Refuge" or what? or what is the tune for "Rock of Ages" or the 23rd psalm or the 54th paraphrase. After all we see some good ideas are hard to carry out.

But I will give you some inside facts from the choir loft. The minister for special reasons wants a special Hymn which our present Hymnal is set to an unknown tune. Do the choir take the recommendation of Assembly, learn a new tune, the one prescribed, sing it and let the congregation wait till they are through. That has been done. But I have also seen the choir select some other tune in the Hymnal which is not only appropriate but is known to the people; then the choir with music in one hand and a little extra Hymn book with the words in the other hand or inside their bigger music books; or else with their thumb at the music and their finger at the words somewhere else in the book, struggle to get through their part. Probably some in the audience have struck into the bass or tenor of the set tune in their Hymnal and not till they discover the discord do they find the mistake. But then the binding of the Hymn book lasts longer with uncut leaves. But presume a cut leaf music edition with a suggestion in fine print over each hymn of the most appropriate tune according to the opinion of the Committee. This would make the music edition of some use in the pews as well as in the choir. It is easy for the minister in announcing the Hymn to announce the number of the tune. But all this convenience in the Hymnal not only to the choir but to the congregation must be withheld so as to preserve continuity of subject. What continuity is there about the psalms? and who ever heard of rearranging the psalms according to class. At best it is only for convenience of selection, and all the ease of selection can be had by a copious subject index.

At present it is mostly the city and large town churches that use the Hymnal, for the simple reason that the tunes are too hard for the country choirs. But for some city choirs the harder and newer the tunes the better, as there is less likelihood of anyone in the congregation breaking in and spoiling the music.

Beautiful theories are all right, continuity, classification and uniformity are all right; but usefulness is better; and from more than fifteen years experience in a choir, and half of that time as leader I am convinced that with a cut leaf Hymnal five times as many tunes will be accessible to an ordinary congregation as are now in the present or any other so arranged Hymnal.

It is poor satisfaction when everlastingly telling the minister after he has with pains selected beautifully suitable Hymns that the people don't know the tunes set to them, to be able to lay the blame on the General Assembly for the hustle and make shift at the last moment. To double book the choir and let the people fall in as best they can is a poor way to get along. And it is poor encouragement for the people to buy music editions and then not to be able to find the tune.

This is a small matter of personal experience and I would suggest that if the upholders of uniformity still oppose the cut leaf system that they give the organists and choir leaders an opportunity to convert them.