

*Paper on the Psalms and Hymnal Question.**Read to the Presbytery of Lindsay on Feb. 20.,*

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The service of praise in public worship is one well worthy of the earnest consideration of Presbytery. It has a most important bearing on the future of the Church. We are now on the eve of changes. The present discussions in Presbyteries, guiding the decision of the General Assembly will determine largely the character of the book soon to be issued. Therefore the question deserves our best attention.

There are some principles which, if adopted, at the outset will make the course of Presbytery clearer.

1. The book of praise should be adapted for the use of the entire congregation, both as to words and music. Hymns should be clothed in such simple language that the sentiment can be clearly understood by the average worshipper. The spirit of devotion should pervade it. It may contain lofty thoughts, exalted conceptions of God, expressive of adoration, thankfulness or petition, yet the language be simple.

2. Our Hymnal should contain the best of the hymns of the past, but at the same time there should be an effort to supply such hymns as will express the devotional spirit of our own time. There is no doubt the work of the Church in connection with special services aided by what seems to be a tendency of our age, have formed a taste for warmer expressions of devotion, and more exuberance of thankfulness and joy; more pressing invitations to the unsaved and tender pleading for their salvation, than are to be found in the stately classified hymns of our collection. It will be observed that about ninety per cent. of the hymns sent down for consideration are of the stately class, and those united to the very large number of the present book will give an overwhelming preponderance to this high class of hymns. This is perhaps as it should be. The ideal hymns should give tone to the book. In time their educative influence will raise the popular conception of praise. Nevertheless the Church will be wise if she incorporates a very considerable number of the best of these so-called evangelistic hymns. It will probably deter pastors occasionally at Sabbath evening meetings, and in special services, from abandoning our Hymnal and using Sankey's 750 sacred songs and solos. Besides there are a great many devoted servants of Jesus who enjoy singing these hymns. Their tastes and feelings should find expression in the new hymn-book, as well as the tastes of others. The General Assembly's Committee only recommends one additional hymn of this class, No. 113, in the list of proposed new hymns. Quite a number will of course be transferred from the childrens' Hymnal to the Church Hymnal, but we think there should have been more effort to meet the reasonable desire for hymns of this class. There may be difficulties in the way with copyrights, etc., but these can probably be overcome. I would recommend that Nos. 115, 198 of the Hymnal, and Nos. 91, 135, 198 and 210 from the childrens' Hymnal be retained, and hymns such as the following from "Sacred Songs and Solos, 750 pieces," be added.

No. 123. The Light of the World is Jesus.

" 168. Now Just a Word for Jesus.

" 236. Only a Step.

" 297. Why Not.

" 458. Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling.

" 481. Jesus my Saviour. . . Seeking for Me.

" 491. Firmly Stand.

" 573. Only a Beam of Sunshine.

And also the following from "Songs of Calvary."

No. 8. I Gave my Heart to Jesus.

" 14. Ye Dying Come.

" 28. Was it for Me.

" 98. Come Away to Jesus now.

" 114. Seek Me Early.

The character of these will indicate what is suggested. The names of these hymns are given not to intimate

that they have an exceptional superiority over others, but as samples of a class of hymns devotional and popular. It would take much more time than I have been able to give to expert investigation of many books to suggest a complete list. I think, however, a fuller collection of this class of hymns is necessary to make the Hymnal complete and satisfactory to the Church.

3. The tunes and harmonies should be such that the average choir can learn the parts with fair practices. The harmonies should be as simple as is consistent with an elevated standard of melodious solemn or joyful praise. In many of the tunes the harmony is needlessly complicated as in Melita, No. 43. This remark is true of many other hymns. The comfort of a choir is often completely destroyed because they fail to render correctly some of the difficult intervals. There is another danger. If the choir finds the harmony a little too hard they may try to adapt the simpler tunes of the American Singing School books to our hymns, and thus produce confusion and introduce tunes unsuitable in other respects. Old tunes which have won for themselves a place in the affections of the Church should not be arbitrarily altered. Better leave them out altogether than do this. If retained they should be left with the simple harmony that has made them popular. No reviser of harmony should be permitted to mutilate "Peterborough" as is done in Doxology 4m. Evan, Jackson and other old tunes are not improved by revision while those who loved them as they were sung for generations are offended at the changes. I have heard a choir attempt to render Excelsiors, "Nearer, my God, to Thee," No. 174, as it is written in the Hymnal. But the people had the usual popular air in their minds and proceeded to sing it in their own way. The result was a sort of tug-of-war between choir and people in which neither party came out victorious. The same is true of "Even me," No. 140. It is better to take a new tune altogether than make serious alterations to a popular air.

4. We now come to consider the Psalter. The book of psalms has a place in Presbyterian worship that it has perhaps in no other. Not only in the abodes of worship in many lands in peaceful days such as these, but in earlier times on the hillside and in mountain glen, when pickets had to be stationed to guard the persecuted congregations from sudden incursions of soldiers, these solemn stanzas in weird melodies were poured forth, the tribute of praise of godly men and women to their creator, and the aspiration of many hearts ascending upwards for restful peace and dauntless courage in perilous times. The psalms are hallowed to us not only by associations of joy but of the afflictions of centuries. They should therefore have a reverent place in the worship of every Presbyterian congregation.

The question before us is not the use or disuse of the psalms but whether the use of selections shall be permitted to those who do not wish the whole psalter. It would be tyranny to say to congregations you will be permitted to use only portions of the psalms. Let congregations have freedom to use the whole psalter and in the version so much in use. There should be no change in this matter at present. There are, however, many congregations that do not use the whole psalter and which would be better satisfied with selections from the psalms with tunes set to them as in the hymns and included in the Hymnal. There seems little doubt this is the form our book of praise will ultimately take, and that we are now in a transition state. It would be very arbitrary to say to congregations desiring to have their book of praise in this form that they could not have it. The General Assembly's Committee have recommended that the Hymnal include selections of psalms and in other versions if preferable in order to meet the wishes of those anxious to have the book in this form, and if it should prove that any great number preferred the Hymnal in this way it would be tyrannical to refuse their request.

It may be urged that the tendency in time will be the disuse of the psalter in its complete form. That might be, yet it would not be politic or right to interfere with the liberty of congregations to use the psalms by selections as proposed. It is questionable if the use of the