

to quote yet another testimony regarding those times, the famous Jerome, who lived in Palestine in the fourth century, mentions that the psalms were so familiar to Christians from the practice of singing them at meals, that in his own neighborhood, "the ploughmen and mowers, and vine dressers might be heard singing them in the field."

At the Reformation, the singing of psalms and hymns was no longer confined, as it had long been, to monasteries or religious houses, as they were called, but was introduced into the private dwellings as well as public assemblies of those who were delivered from Papal darkness and thralldom. Our forefathers were wont to be branded as "psalm-singing Presbyterians"—a title of commendation this, as all those epithets are, which a spiteful world has applied to Christians, when it has taken them from what is peculiar in their practices or characters. The title of "psalm-singers" is, however, we grieve to think, not very appropriate to the members of our churches in the present day. The exercise of family worship, of which the singing of psalms or hymns is, we may say, an essential part, is by no means so common in the families of our congregations as it once was; and the singing of sacred songs on any other occasion than the stated worship of the family or the church, is scarcely at all known amongst us. The revival of religion which took place under Wesley and Whitefield was distinguished by the frequency of devotional singing amongst their followers. And it says something for the perpetuity of that revival, that the Methodists of our own day, whether in the woods of Canada, or the in towns of Britain, are honorably distinguished amongst other bodies of Christians for their culture of sacred music.

The neglect of sacred music is, in ordinary cases, symptomatic of a declining state of piety. In the Scottish Presbyterian churches this neglect is in part referable to the imperfect and defective character of their psalmody. We by no means undervalue the merits of our metrical version of the psalms. It is, perhaps, on the whole, the best that has yet been made. But it is the work of an age of our English literature, in which the art of rhyming, if not that of poetry itself, and the art also of poetical translation, were in a state of great rudeness; and so it partakes of the defect which are incidental to all similar compositions of that age. This is one reason why our metrical psalter is unacceptable to those who have not been accustomed to accommodate its defective measures with the occasional addition or subtraction of a syllable, and to whom it is not endeared by those interesting associations that cluster around it in our recollections, as having been sung by our pious

forefathers for many generations in their families and churches, and even at the stake.

And then, the supplement to our psalter which is found in the collection of paraphrases, though free from the metrical defects referred to, is too scanty, especially in songs which touch on the experience of Christian life, and are directly eucharistical to the God of salvation. Our church seems to be more rigid than most other Protestant churches, in exacting that the songs of the sweet singer of Israel should be rendered into verse as nearly as possible literal. Yet, for this reason, is it fit that we should be furnished with an additional collection of sacred songs adapted to the New Testament age. If it be a commendation of our version of the psalms, according to the celebrated Dr. Owen and others of his contemporaries, that we have "David in David,"* then surely we ought, also, as far as practicable, to have "Paul in Paul." The glorious views of the kingdom of God which have been communicated to the church through him and John, and the other Apostles, have at least as direct a connection with the praises of the New Testament church, as the prophetic visions of David and Isaiah. We would desire, therefore, to see an addition made to the collection of sacred songs used in our churches, and that for promoting a far higher object than sacred music—even a devotional spirit. Melody is of real importance only as it is the expression of this spirit, and as it tends to foster it.

The obtaining of a better metrical version of the psalms than that which we possess, is not to be despaired of; though we believe that even higher poetical gifts than those of Watts, and a devotional spirit not inferior to his, must be found in him who would accomplish such a work. In the mean time, we think that the Synod should seriously set about the making of an additional compilation of sacred songs. The General Assembly of the church at home, has, we fear, indefinitely postponed this most needful undertaking.

It would appear that our present metrical version when it first came out of the hands of Rouse, had a greater variety in its metres than it now has, as amended by committees of the General Assembly.* It may be safely questioned whether the alterations in this respect which it underwent were in reality *amendments*. The variety in subject and style of expression for which these sacred

* In Dr. Owen's recommendatory preface, quoted in a paper in this magazine for November and December last, entitled "Remarks on Psalmody," &c., p. 323. The historical sketch of the metrical version of the psalms contained in that paper is very interesting; but we subscribe to its eulogy on the poetical beauties of that version with very considerable qualifications.

† See the article already referred to, p. 323 vol II