

A DICTIONARY OF HYMNOLOGY.*

In demonstration of the essential unity of the faith, Christian hymns are in evidence to-day as never before. Their growing influence is ushering in the conditions for a new eirenikon, diffusing a heavenly spirit in worshipful hearts, and making very manifest the hallowed bonds which bind all believers to the Christ of the Gospels. "There is somewhat of Heaven," says Richard Baxter, "in Holy Poetry: it charmeth souls into loving harmony and concord."

The great poets have kindled the souls of men from age to age. Among the determining forces in human life these seers have ever divined the emotional and spiritual to be essential, and have recognized the warm pulsations of the heart rather than the cold processes of the intellect as central and controlling. Of all the forms of poetic utterance, however, hymns hold an altogether exceptional place of influence in the personal life. They have to do with what may be termed the practical aspect of spiritual life, prayer and praise. It is this practicalness, this aim at direct usefulness to the individual or the church, that has countenanced some disregard of the poetic in sacred verse. With his besom of criticism Dr. Johnson makes a clean sweep of poetry from the domain of hymnody:—"Poetry loses its lustre and its power, because it is applied to the decoration of something more excellent than itself. All that pious verse can do is to help the memory, and delight the ear, and for these purposes it may be very useful; but it supplies nothing to the mind. The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestic for ornament." This criticism taken too literally would unstring Isaiah's harp and hang David's on the willows. In so far as the didactic element is dominant in hymns Johnson's dictum has force, but the dictum wholly ignores the function of feeling to a hard age. The higher functions of

* A Dictionary of Hymnology, setting forth the Origin and History of Christian Hymns of All Ages and Nations, with Special Reference to those contained in the Hymn Books of English-speaking Countries, and now in Common Use; together with Biographical and Critical Notices of their Authors and Translators, and Historical Articles on National and Denominational Hymnody, Breviaries, Missals, Primers, Psalters, Sequences, etc., etc. Edited by John Julian, M.A., Vicar of Wincobank, Sheffield: 1600 pp. in double col. (John Murray, 42 s.)