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"**RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION.**"

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History of the Decline and Extinction of Psalm-Singing in the Presbyterian Church.

BY REV. F. M. FOSTER, PH.D.

Inasmuch as "Versions" are developing interest in the United Presbyterian, the Associate Reformed, the Reformed Presbyterian, and other Churches, it will perhaps be of interest to give a few historic citations going to show just when the Presbyterian Church took the first side-steps which finally landed that great denomination as a hymn-singing body.

The shepherding of families which sought the New World as their home was by traveling ministers. Where sufficient number of families could be brought together, the nucleus of a congregation was formed. A minister would have several of these under his care. Separated by long distances, much travel on horse-back was required. These traveling ministers appear to have been explorers of the New World on their own account; and they appear to have carried on the work without direct supervision. The worship in these groups, so far as they were of Presbyterian and Reformed lineage, was with the use of the Version of the Psalms used in England, Scotland, and Ireland—i. e., the so-called "Rouse Version."

The first Presbytery was organized in 1705. Previously to this date, as well as up to 1753, when the first Synod was constituted, the records do not disclose other than full harmony in the use of the Psalms in worship. The first reference to Psalmody is in the Minutes of Synod seventeen hundred and fifty-three (1753). Action taken at that time would disclose, as the moving cause, dissatisfaction, in some New York congregation, with the "Rouse Version." Some Session appears to have taken it upon themselves to introduce another Version. The question raised in the Synod was, "Has the Session power to introduce a New Version of the Psalms into the congregation without the consent of the majority of the congregation?" It was voted in the negative. (*Minutes N. Y. 1753*). This is the first recorded effort, in the Psalm-Singing Presbyterian Church, so far as the writer has been able to discover, to change the "Version." It is evident that the tide for "something new" and "more up to date" was then beginning to set in; and it has increased in force and volume ever since.

The line of separation from the Old to the hymn-singing New, was via Watts' Psalms." That this is so is seen from the Minutes 1755, only two years after discontent was first manifest. The Minute reads: "The Synod determine that the Scotch Version be equally used with the other (Watts' Version) in the stated public worship on the Lord's Day."—(*Minutes 1755*). Watts' Version is paraphrased Psalms. This is the wedge by which a corrupt worship gained entrance. The evil grew rapidly. A number of congregations appear to have displaced the "Rouse Version" by "Watts'." The minority opposing appealed to Synod with the result that time was to be divided between "Rouse" and "Watts." By this compromise, the doctrine of purity of worship was surrendered by the Presbyterian Church, and corrupt worship got a footing. But there was much agitation, with here and there disturbances in congregations.

The position taken by the Synod in 1755 was emphasized in 1765, at which time the Synod declared that "they looked on the in-

spired Psalms in Scripture to be proper matter to be sung in divine worship, according to their original design and the practice of the Christian Churches; yet will not forbid those to use the imitations of them whose judgment and inclination lead them to do so." (*Minutes 1765*). At this date, there does not appear to have been intention or desire to go further than to use in worship that which could, in some sense, be called a "Version of the Psalms." Neither the majority of the people, nor the majority of the Synod, appear to have been burdened with scruples as to fidelity to the original tongue; but were satisfied with a "free, easy and smooth" versification. This point should be carefully observed and remembered. The first steps were—a Version that would read well and which would admit of "better music." In this lay the germ which presently developed into the unrestricted use of hymns. Usually those who want change argue for a version that will be popular and which admits of "better music." These desires grow as they are fed, until it requires operatic music to satisfy the most advanced, as is seen this day.

The use of two Versions—Rouse and Watts—was a source of dissatisfaction, and in the Synod of 1785, a Resolution was adopted, raising a Committee "to take the assistance of all the Versions in our power, and compose for us a Version more suitable to our circumstances and taste than any we have yet"; and while this Committee is completing its work, "the Synod still allow the use of the Imitation of the Psalms of David," "but they are far from disapproving of Rouse's Version, commonly called the Old Psalms." (*Minutes 1785*). Evidently there was, for a few years, much agitation, for the use of Watt's Psalms was brought again and again before Synod, as the records show; and usually with the deliverance that Watt's Version and other Imitations were allowed. And in 1789, the General Assembly, constituted that year, exhorted all that felt aggrieved "to be carefully guarded against disturbing the peace of the Church on this head." (*Minutes 1789*). As is usually the case, the blame for disturbing the peace was laid on those who tried to hold the Church true to purity of worship. These "disturbers" were warned to keep quiet.

In 1802, the General Assembly took action broadening out beyond Watt's Psalms, thus: "Whereas the Version of Psalms made by Watts has heretofore been allowed in congregations under the care of the General Assembly, it is now thought expedient that the Hymns of Dr. Watts be allowed; and they are hereby accordingly allowed in such congregations as may think it expedient to use them in public and social worship; and whereas the Rev. Dr. Timothy Dwight, by order of the General Association of Connecticut, has revised the Version of the Psalms made by Watts, and versified a number omitted by him, and has also made a selection of Hymns from various authors, which, together with the Psalms, was intended to furnish a System of Psalmody for the use of churches and families, which system has been revised and recommended by a Joint Committee of the General Assembly and the General Association of Connecticut heretofore appointed, as well as examined and approved by a Committee of this General Assembly; the said system is hereby cheerfully allowed in such congregations and churches as may

think it for their edification to adopt and use the same." (*Minutes 1802*).

In the action of 1802 is the first official sanction of Hymns outright. In 1806, any book of hymns was practically allowed. The action reads: "Your Committee are of the opinion that the General Assembly of the year 1802, in their Resolution on this subject, did not intend that churches under their care should use no other Psalms or Hymns than those specified in the Resolution. It is further the opinion of your Committee that when any families or congregations in their religious worship make use of hymns containing erroneous doctrine, or trivial matter, it becomes the duty of Church Sessions and Presbyteries to inquire into the matter, and act as the case may require." (*Minutes 1806*).

In the immediately succeeding years, it would appear that the worship in Presbyterian congregations was by the use of many kinds of books, each congregation using what it liked best. The Assembly of 1820 took action looking toward uniformity, and a Committee reported that a "uniform system of psalmody consist of two parts, viz.: I. A compilation of a Metrical Version of the Book of Psalms, adhering to the order and connection of the same as far as practicable. In this compilation the preference ought to be given to the authorized Versions now in use, so far as the poetry and conformity to the text will allow. The Committee, in recommending this compilation, disavow any design of committing the Assembly on the difference of opinion which exists about the Book of Psalms. They also wish it to be distinctly understood that they do not disapprove of Watts. But they think that a compilation, such as is recommended, if judiciously executed, will satisfy the friends of Dr. Watts' Imitations, and the advocate of the exclusive authority of the Book of Psalms."

"II. A copious collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs from various authors, giving the preference to those now authorized, so far as good taste, sound sense, and enlightened piety admit."

A Committee was accordingly appointed to execute this work. Said Committee made reports from time to time, to the General Assembly, with their work recommitted for further revision, until 1830, when a compilation was adopted. This effort required ten years.

In 1838, such dissatisfaction with the adopted book had arisen, that another Committee was appointed to "report alterations, corrections and additions." This Committee made report in 1842, and their work was referred back for further revision. In 1843, their work was accepted by the Assembly.

METRICAL VERSION OF THE PSALMS CAST OUT

In the collection adopted by the Assembly in 1843, the Metrical Version of the Psalms was not given place. The report of the Committee reads: "With regard to the Psalms; after mature deliberation and full examination of the subject, the Committee were of opinion that an acceptable literal and metrical Version of them, however desirable, could not, at present, be obtained. The Versions of Psalms to which they have had access, do not furnish such a number of superior merit as to justify the attempt to alter the book now in use." This was practically the end of Psalm-singing in the Presbyterian Church. Only a few of the Psalms find even

a place in their Hymn-book, and these are not often sung. The heritage of the Fathers, the purity of worship, departed, probably forever: for it is rare that a denomination retraces the path. The career is usually downward, until wholly rejected of God.

In 1854, the Associate Reformed Synod requested the General Assembly to join in preparing a Version of the Psalms, but the Assembly declined thus: "The General Assembly recognizes the right of our Churches and members to use the Version of the Psalms commonly called Rouse's, if they prefer it, yet it respectfully declines the invitation to co-operate in the projected work."

In recent years, the Assembly appointed a Committee on Joint Metrical Version. But little interest, however, in the results of the work was shown by the Assembly. That any Version will be put in their Hymn-book and be used is a possibility very remote.

The above, in brief, is the history of the extinction of Psalm-singing in a denomination whose roots were imbedded in thorough Psalm-singing soil; which was Psalm-singing fully and wholly for fifty years after a Presbytery was organized; and was partly Psalm-singing for an hundred years more, or until about sixty years ago. The battle for purity of worship appears at the first to have been hotly contested, but with ever decreasing forces until the last protest was hushed. "They made a solitude; they called it peace." Organized in 1705, the first step downward was over a New Version in 1753. Some wanted a Version "more smooth, free and elegant" than the Rouse Version. A few of "Watts' Psalms" fought for place and were finally allowed; and then a battle, lasting one hundred years, resulted finally in casting out of the Hymnal the Metrical Version of the Psalms. The "more up to date," and "opportunity for better music," were the battle cries which fought out the "Old" and fought in the "New." But, getting what they Resolved was "better," like the Children of Israel with meat, they were presently as dissatisfied as before: and to this day, every now and then, a Resolution is passed to the effect that "the revision of the Hymnal is imperatively demanded." *Rest does not come through New Versions, New Hymns, or New Music.*

Thus is traced the downward course of the Presbyterian Church into corrupt worship where it now is. "How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" "Tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Askelon: lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice; lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph."

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS

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Rev. W. G. Robb, missionary, ill in hospital on landing on the Coast, is, it is hoped, by this time recovered. These missionaries should have the constant prayers of the people of God.

* * *

There is to be a National Missionary Congress in Chicago, May 3-6. The promoters of the movement say that it is to be the "most

representative and potential convention ever assembled on this continent."

The prospectus goes on to say:

"Not only will the leading missionary speakers of North America be heard at the Congress, but more important than that in many respects will be the framing up and adoption of a worthy National Missionary Policy. It is already clear that the Churches of North America are responsible for reaching about sixty per cent. of the non-Christian world. The National Missionary Policy adopted at this Congress should mark a new era in the history of Christianity."

"In view of the vast issues involved, will not pastors and Christian people everywhere make this Congress an object of habitual prayer during the next few weeks, that the will of God for the Church of our day may be both clearly understood and completely obeyed? A conquering Christianity abroad will be the surest guarantee of a dominant and regnant Christianity at home."

As to the worship in this great National Missionary Congress, the prospectus puts the matter in this way:

"The Association quartet, which sang with such acceptance at the Canadian National Missionary Congress, and at the Student Volunteer Conventions, will sing at each session of the Congress. The concluding feature of the Congress program will be the 'Hallelujah Chorus' rendered by the Apollo Club of Chicago."

* * *

From the above it would appear that, in great gatherings, worship has almost passed out of the curriculum of duty, and in its place, people bow before enchanting music for their own delectation. It is a pity, a great pity, that great religious movements are sectarian and worldly in their worship. This National Missionary Congress would do much more good if it worshipped God as He has appointed in His Word.

* * *

There have been, in New York City, one or two Follow-up-Meetings of the Laymen's Missionary Movement. These have taken the form of banquets. A minister who attended one of these said he was quite surprised to hear the Chairman, as they were through eating, announce that "those who wished to light cigars could now do so." And with wreathes of tobacco smoke as a background, the speakers drew pictures of heathen who do not smoke tobacco.

We live in an age of very great progress, of methods triumphantly new and which eclipse any thing heretofore! We have almost succeeded in yoking together religion and worldliness! How much stronger would the Laymen's Missionary Movement be if it was flowing out of "broken and contrite hearts."

But notwithstanding features which the best people reject, good will result from the Laymen's Missionary Movement. People who heretofore had little conception of the breadth and scope of Missions, are having their views enlarged and their interest quick-

ened. That the greatest good will come from it is sincerely hoped and devoutly wished.

* * *

That Mission work in Rome is making itself felt is becoming more and more evident. The Methodists are especially active in preaching the gospel. Hence that Church is especially and cordially and openly and bitterly hated by the Pope and all in the Vatican. This hatred has lately been cried out world-wide and world-loud. The Fairbanks incident, in which, because he had arranged to address the Methodist Mission in Rome, he was "turned down" by the Pope, has been swelled to international importance by experiences of ex-President Roosevelt, who refused, for the privilege of calling on the Pope, to submit to any conditions whatsoever. So the ex-President did not call on the Pope, and retained his liberty to do as he pleased, and speak where he pleased, while in Rome: and the "old man of the Vatican" sits behind his self-erected bars "gnawing his tongue with rage."

The whole matter is one of the most significant happenings in recent years. The Methodists in the United States, because of their interest in the mission work in Rome, and because ex-Vice-President Fairbanks is one of their own people, are tremendously stirred, and are outspoken in no uncertain language, and sermons and resolutions by conferences. One of their bishops recently preached in a Washington, D. C., church, a sermon in which he showed the true character of Rome, and methods pursued in this land. The sermon is being widely distributed.

AND IT IS TIME.

This is the language of Archbishop Ireland, of St. Paul, Minn., on the Roosevelt-Vatican incident:

"Of one thing I am certain—the Methodist propaganda in Rome is so vile, so calumnious in its assaults upon the Catholic faith, so dishonest in its methods to win proselytes, that the Holy Father, the supreme guardian of the faith, is compelled by the vital principles of his high office to avert, at all cost, the slightest movement on his part that might, directly or indirectly, be interpreted as abetting the propogana, or approving, even by implication, its purposes and tactics.

"Since the Fairbanks incident I have received from Rome most reliable data that more than justify any statement I have heretofore made or may at any other time be prepared to make, with regard to the Methodist propaganda. Indeed, the Methodist minister in Rome, the Rev. Mr. Tipple, in his address the Sabbath after the Fairbanks incident, is an all-sufficient indication of its rancorous spirit and of the egregious calumnies to which it resorts. It is as clear as noonday, to those who know the facts in connection with the Methodist Roman propaganda that any man, however otherwise worthy and illustrious, giving or likely to give, public recognition of any kind to its work, even to its existence, could not be received by the Holy Father.

"How far Cardinal Merry de Val had reason to suspect, from the movements of the Methodists themselves, or otherwise, that there was peril lest Mr. Roosevelt, even unwittingly, be entangled in their meshes, I am not in position to say. The Cardinal is a wise, judicious statesman, and must have well weighed the whole situation before he acted. His words to the agent of the Associated Press deserve consideration. 'It is not,' he said, 'a question of religion. Mr. Roosevelt might have gone to an Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or any other Church, except the Methodist, and delivered an address there, and he could have been received by the Pope even on the same day. But he could not be received when it was suspected that after the audience with the Pope he intended to go to the Methodist Church in Rome, which is carrying on a most offensive campaign against the Pontiff.'"

* * *

The more Archbishop Ireland talks the better, for he is opening the eyes of Protestants very wide.