

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I. BABEL AND ITS LESSONS.

“ALL the languages of the earth,” says an eminent authority, “have affinities enough to indicate a common origin; but they have differences enough to show that some great dislocation has occurred in their history.” The Scriptures tell us when and how this dislocation occurred. It was a judgment of God inflicted upon men because of their rebellion against his will.

The descendants of Noah had greatly multiplied since the flood, and the earth was again filling with people. They had spread themselves out over the East until the centre of population seems to have been the plain of Shinar—that fertile region which lies between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers. There, under the leadership probably of Nimrod, the Cushite, they devised and undertook the ambitious scheme of building a great city, with a tower whose top, in their hyperbolic speech, should reach unto heaven. Josephus says that their purpose was to secure themselves against destruction from another flood. If such was the animus of the movement it is easy to see why it should have been displeasing to God and deserving of his judgment. He had given his promise that the earth should never again be destroyed by a flood; he had set his bow in the cloud as a pledge of faithfulness to that covenant.

Now if, instead of resting on that divine promise as a sufficient and infallible guarantee of safety, they set themselves to provide a refuge of their own, they plainly betrayed the most

called a mother's cradle-crooning or a father's lullaby that first melted to tears and then aroused to conquer. Doubtless we would do well to test this when in depression, halting or gloom over the dark day, or under temptation, or before the enemy. By all this blessed ministry of song which has had so large a part in moulding our characters and forming our principles, and in sustaining us in holy living and happy dying, we should be aroused to one earnest effort to prepare and publish our own book of praise, of psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, and including such songs of real merit and melody as our later days have furnished with a power to live and a ministry to move. The collection should not be too large. Let a committee be raised representing all parts of our church, having sufficient knowledge of music and acquaintance with our hymnology, and knowledge of what is good and useful from other sources, and having full sympathy with our past and hopeful of our future. Then let sufficient time be given and means provided to warrant the labor necessary, and to secure a result commensurate with the importance of the cause. We should leave nothing undone or unprovided to secure *our own book of praise*.

Wilmington, N. C.

A. D. McCLURE.

OUR BOOK OF PRAISE: HYMNS OF THE AGES.

IN the last QUARTERLY, under the above heading, appeared an article in which the writer says of the hymnology of the church, that "to a plain observer and a practical man it seems that our church is all at sea in this respect." Then a kindly criticism is made upon the committee of the General Assembly that recommended the adoption of *Hymns of the Ages*. Let me say that the *Hymns of the Ages*, the name of which was retained by request of many members of the General Assembly at Macon, is practically the hymn-book of the church, for acting under the authority of the Assembly the Committee of Publication assumed the entire control of its publication and sale for twenty years, which is about the life-time of a hymn-book. It is going into use rapidly in our churches, and about eighteen thousand copies have been taken. It was not prepared with a view to making money by the compiler, and he has not yet gotten back what he invested. The Committee gets thirty-three and one-third cents on every dollar's worth sold, and is not at any expense for the stereotype plates, the purchase of copyrights, or the manufacturing of the books.

Before *Hymns of the Ages* was published the Committee of Publication had repeatedly declined to prepare a new book, because of the

great expense; and then Dr. Kerr at his own cost prepared the collection, giving it the labor of several years, assisted by Rev. Drs. M. D. Hoge, W. A. Campbell, W. S. Lacy, T. D. Witherspoon, J. P. Smith, and Professor N. B. Clapp, one of the most eminent musicians in the United States, with a view to giving the work to the General Assembly. This he offered to do, only asking that he be paid for the cost of the stereotype plates. The Committee on Hymn-books recommended the Assembly to accept this offer. Dr. Hazen, who was present at the Assembly, advised against this plan, on the ground that the Committee of Publication could not then afford the money required for the purchase of the plates. So the Assembly authorized Dr. Hazen and the Committee of Publication to make the best business arrangement possible for the sale of the book. The arrangement made, and now standing, is that the compiler should own the plates, and furnish all the books required for the committee in Richmond, and that the committee should have thirty-three and one-third per cent. of all sales. Furthermore, it was agreed that the committee should have the exclusive right to sell the book. So the church controls *Hymns of the Ages* for twenty years, and that is as long as a hymn-book will stand without revision, in order to keep up with the progress of hymnology. It would be difficult to suggest an arrangement more advantageous to the church, especially in view of the fact that critics and pastors using *Hymns of the Ages* declare that it is not only gotten up in the highest style of the printer's art, but also that it contains about every good hymn extant, set to tunes which are the cream of all musical literature of America and Europe.

For the General Assembly to get up a new hymn-book now would hardly be fair, for at their request Dr. Kerr had prepared a set of plates for the word edition, and cancelled his contract with A. D. F. Randolph & Co., of New York, his publisher, cutting off all sales in the North, and turned over the whole business to the Richmond Committee of Publication of the General Assembly, under contract that no other concern should be allowed to publish or sell the books for ten years; with the privilege, on part of the committee, of an extension of the contract for ten years additional. Dr. Kerr is still willing to sell to the Committee of Publication the plates and copyright at cost, less such an amount as may be deemed just, for the use already made of the plates in printing the several editions.

I take the liberty of setting these facts before the church. They are true, being compiled from written statements.

J. CALVIN STEWART.

HAVING read with interest the article in the January number of the QUARTERLY on "Our Book of Praise," and also been privileged to peruse the foregoing in the present number, it occurs to me that while the writers have brought to notice an important matter, they have not struck the chief difficulty in regard to the several hymnals now used in our church, nor those to be met in the preparation of a new one which they suggest. To my mind, the trouble lies in another and more serious direction.

It is hard to understand the objections made by a few to the old *Psalms and Hymns*, and when it is remembered that that collection still holds its own and serves its purpose in so many of our churches, it seems evident that it has not yet lost its suitability for general use; and had it not been that a few of our more restless spirits in some of our stronger churches, forgetting the loyalty that was due to church authority, of their own motion laid aside the recognized hymnal of the church, and adopted those of outside and independent publishers, it might have occupied the place of honor until reverently laid aside, when another edition, revised and improved, had been made ready authoritatively to take its place. Afterwards the same spirit of unrest was brought to bear on the Assembly, and led to the authorizing of the Robinson Series, thereby ratifying and making lawful what was at first a defection in church loyalty. That any of our congregations should have cast off conformity with what the church had provided and authorized for use in worship, without first receiving the sanction of our church courts, and that the church herself, by her highest court, should have recognized this lack of loyalty, is to my mind more seriously to be regarded than the attainment of a fancied perfection in the church hymnal. But the fact that the new hymnals had their origin in quarters beyond church authority, notwithstanding that they had been authorized, and were possessed of much merit, was sufficient to hinder their universal approval; and besides, another element of discord was introduced in that, if one foreigner was welcomed why may not others? and when one of our esteemed and most popular pastors, acknowledged to be well fitted to perform the service, was found to have devoted his time, talents and means to research in the direction desired, and with the help of several able co-workers had produced a work worthy of the church's adoption, and which was presented to her as a labor of love, it was most natural that it also should have been received with favor and accepted. But the church, by this further action of her Assembly, gave rise to a spirit of independency which it will find difficult to exorcise, and which crops out in other directions.

It is most desirable that the church should endeavor to foster a spirit of fidelity in her membership, which we confess with regret is to be seen in a way much more pronounced in other denominations. A sense of the superiority of our church in every way—in her worship, her doctrines, her ministry, and even her hymnals for praise—should be instilled into the hearts of her people. They ought to be to them the best, because they come nearest to our ideals of what the church of God ought to be—most scriptural; but also they ought to take pride in all her interests, because she is *our* church, which we desire to hand down to our children pure, strong and vigorous in the work of the Master.

But both the writer of the first article and Mr. McCluer suggest another committee to compile yet another hymn-book! Without first securing the fidelity of the people and their willingness to adopt it, this would only be perpetuating the trouble by enlarging the field of choice. The Assembly might authorize a new book, but it has no power to enforce its acceptance, and the only hope of its being successfully introduced must lie in bringing the people back to a higher sense of the allegiance they owe to the church and its authorized courts. But is it probable that any compilation of hymns, by even the most talented of our ministry, will meet with approval in all quarters, or be generally approved? “Many men, many minds,” and with two hundred thousand to please it is far from probable. And in what respect would such a compilation be better than the church already has in the *Hymns of the Ages*? It is the work of our own men, the result of years of labor, the cream drawn from every source, ancient and modern, and very widely—universally is more than can be expected—acknowledged as excellent in its doctrinal arrangement, its poetic sentiment, and its musical setting. Besides, being already in the hands of many of our best churches, and issued at as cheap a rate as the church could possibly procure another, it will be the best of wisdom for the church to foster its adoption, to the exclusion of all others. But to this end, and for the good of the church in all its departments of beneficence, it is essential that the Assembly find means of enforcing its enactments, and the people encouraged to take a patriotic pride in their acceptance of them.

R. W.