

INTRODUCTION

SONG has always resounded in all ages of the Church, but it took on a new power and exhibited a new joy in the days of the Reformation. A new song burst forth from the glad hearts that tasted the blessedness of Evangelical faith. The freedom of faith and the assurance of grace moved the gifted singers of the Lord to attune their harps and to raise their voices. The motive of Evangelical hymnody is to be found in the new light and the new life of faith in the Christ. There was an adequate experience to inspire creative art in song. The Reformation gave us new hymns as it gave us so much that was new through which it profoundly changed all living. But the new song was not revolutionary. Whatever was true and beautiful in the worship and hymnody of the Church was preserved. The song of the Reformation was in unity with all the hymnody that had preceded. The hymns of the Reformation are truly universal. Their universality impresses us when we look back from them to all preceding Christian songs. They are also universal in their religious value and Evangelical meaning for all time.

The great Reformer, Martin Luther, was the father of Evangelical song. In the large and manifold endowment of his nature and in the breadth of his genius music was not wanting. In fact, Luther was a musician and a lover of song. He had a soul for music, and possessed a temperament for deep appreciation of the art of melody and harmony. Song burst from his soul, and he was also gifted with the power of the poet. Thus the hymn and its music often arose in unity, although other composers, like Walter, often clothed Luther's hymns with expressive melody. In Luther's hymns there appears the full message of the Gospel. They were a mighty aid in the spread of the Reformation, and through them the Evangelical truth sang its way into the hearts of the people. The whole Luther in all his inwardness appears in his hymns. They are in part the story of his spirit. Strong, triumphant, forceful, they contain the note of conquering faith and hope. In their might they dash along like an irresistible mountain stream. Through them we are inspired to the heroism of Christian confession and to a spiritual warfare against error and sin. But there are also hymns, like the famous Christ-

mas hymn "Vom Himmel hoch," which breathe the spirit of gentle love and childlike confidence. They mirror the quiet moments of Luther's life and show the inner peace amidst the continuous strife. In them the tossing waves have been gathered for a time into a placid pool. Luther's hymns have, therefore, a real value for the understanding of the life and faith of the great Reformer. But, in addition, they belong to the Church universal, and they have inspired subsequent sweet singers of Evangelical faith. Their place in the hymnody of the Church cannot be slighted by any unprejudiced student of hymnody, and by any Christian who loves the songs of the sanctuary.

The author of this book has, consequently, rendered a valuable service to all lovers of Christian hymns in giving to the Church and to the common people of the Church this new and beautiful edition of Luther's hymns. A busy pastor with the many burdens of a large parish upon him, he has nevertheless found time for this labor of love, which he offers to the Church in order to give a larger knowledge of the great Reformer, and to aid in enkindling devotion. It was not his purpose to produce a book for scholars, but rather to use the best results of scholarship and to give them to the people. A difficult task has been undertaken in the translation of Luther's hymns into English. Fidelity to the original sense rather than a finished translation marks most hymns, which were not available through the labors of great translators like Miss Winkworth. The English form of the hymns is, therefore, not to be judged from a literary point of view and because of a literary value, but the translation is to serve as a guide to those who do not readily understand the original, rugged German. In the history of the hymns, and in the description of incidents which relate the blessing they have brought to believers, the author has given to English Christians something of permanent value. Too few Christians unacquainted with the history of our great chorals know that they have become a spiritual treasure to thousands of souls. The incidents related of what they have done and how they have inspired and comforted men are only typical of their extensive value to the Christian life of believers.

May the Lord bless this volume to many souls for their spiritual nurture, and use it for the edification of their hearts and minds in our most sacred faith!

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