

**HYMNS: THEIR HISTORY AND
DEVELOPMENT IN THE
GREEK AND LATIN CHURCHES,
GERMANY AND GREAT BRITAIN**

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Hymns: their history and development in the Greek and Latin churches, Germany and Great Britain by Roundell Palmer

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H Y M N S

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IN THE

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W
Palmer BY

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PREFACE

THIS volume is, with a few additions and variations, and with illustrations by selected hymns (accompanied, when not English, by translations), a reprint from Volume XII., published in 1881, of the last edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

H Y M N S

1. CLASSICAL HYMNODY

THE word "hymn" (*ἕμνος*) was employed by the ancient Greeks to signify a song or poem composed in honour of gods, heroes, or famous men, or to be recited on some joyful, mournful, or solemn occasion. Polymnia was the name of their lyric muse. Homer makes Alcinous entertain Odysseus with a "hymn" of the minstrel Demodocus, on the capture of Troy by the wooden horse. The *Works and Days* of Hesiod begins with an invocation to the Muses to address hymns to Zeus, and in his *Theogonia* he speaks of them as singing or inspiring "hymns" to all the divinities, and of the bard as "their

servant, hymning the glories of men of old, and of the gods of Olympus." Pindar calls by this name odes, like his own, in praise of conquerors at the public games of Greece. The Athenian dramatists (Euripides most frequently) use the word and its cognate verbs in a similar manner; they also describe by them metrical oracles and apophthegms, martial, festal, and hymenæal songs, dirges, and lamentations or incantations of woe.

Hellenic hymns, according to this conception of them, have come down to us, some from a very early and others from a late period of Greek classical literature. Those which passed by the name of Homer were already old in the time of Thucydides. They are mythological poems (several of them long), in hexameter verse,—some very interesting. That to Apollo contains a traditional history of the origin and progress of the Delphic worship; those on Hermes and on Dionysus are marked by much liveliness and poetical fancy. Hymns of a like general character, but of less interest (though these also embody some fine poetical tradi-

tions of the Greek mythology, such as the story of Tiresias, and that of the wanderings of Leto), were written in the third century before Christ, by Callimachus of Cyrene. Cleanthes, the successor of Zeno, composed (also in hexameters) an "excellent and devout hymn" (as it is justly called by Cudworth, in his *Intellectual System*) to Zeus, which is preserved in the *Eclogæ* of Stobæus, and from which Aratus borrowed the words, "For we are also His offspring," quoted by St. Paul at Athens. The so-called Orphic hymns, in hexameter verse, styled *τελεταί*, or hymns of initiation into the "mysteries" of the Hellenic religion, are productions of the Alexandrian school,—as to which learned men are not agreed whether they are earlier or later than the Christian era.

The Romans did not adopt the word "hymn"; nor have we many Latin poems of the classical age to which it can properly be applied. There are, however, a few which approach much more nearly than anything Hellenic to the form and character of modern hymnody.