

**THE HYMNS OF THE PRIMITIVE
CHURCH: NOW FIRST
COLLECTED, TRANSLATED,
AND ARRANGED**

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The Hymns of the Primitive Church: Now First Collected, Translated, and Arranged by J. Chandler

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THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH:

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BY

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P R E F A C E.

ON putting forth these Hymns to the world, I find a few words are necessary to explain the nature of the compilation, and the views I had in forming it. Some time ago, feeling the want of a collection of Christian Hymns, as an accompaniment to (not a substitute for) the Psalms of David in the Service of the Church, I looked around to those already published, to select one from among them, thinking that of course there could not possibly be any occasion to add another to the already too numerous list of Hymn-compilers. But in the first place, there was the difficulty of fixing a choice amidst the immense multitude of rival collections, each claiming the preference, there being almost as many different hymn-books as there are churches wherein a reformation of Psalmody has been effected. And then there was the recollection that, from first to last, they are all of them unauthorized; neither are they sanctioned by proper Episcopal authority, nor is their introduction into our churches legalized by statute or order in council, so that a collection allowed by one diocesan might be forbidden by another; and if a clergyman attempted to introduce

any one of them into his church, contrary to the prejudices of his choir, not only would the law not support him, but would positively decide against him. Moreover, thirdly, the actual contents of these hymn-books are anything but satisfactory; not that they do not all of them contain a certain number of, in themselves, very beautiful hymns, but even of these many are quite unfit for public use; many are from sources, to which our Primitive Apostolic church would not choose to be indebted; many have been subjected to such rude alterations, that their original authors would hardly know them again; while they are generally mixed up with a great deal that is objectionable in taste, doctrine, and expression: they speak no certain language, they contain no defined system of religious feeling;—in a word, they are not, for purposes of praise, what our Liturgy is for purposes of devotion. The fact is, there is not, what there surely ought to be, in our establishment—a standard book of Christian Hymns, set forth by the spiritual authorities of our Church, and recognised by the temporal government of the State; and it certainly seems incongruous, that whereas the doctrines of our Church are fixed by her articles, and our devotional spirit regulated by our Liturgy, and possessing, as we do, in our homilies, an outline for our preaching, we

should be left entirely to our own private judgment and discretion to provide that whereon so much depends, in the way of rousing the religious feelings, and fixing the religious impressions of our congregations, and any mismanagement in which must be productive of such evil consequences. Moreover, not only does mischief arise from the want of a fixed standard of hymns, but uniformity also, in this part of our service, is thereby put entirely out of the question.

It surely adds to the effect produced by our Liturgy on the hearts of those who use it, to be able to think that so many thousands of congregations are simultaneously lifting up their united voices to God in the same form of supplication, the same language of penitence, the same expression of grateful confidence in God's mercy through Christ. Would not this effect be heightened—would not these holy feelings be improved—would not the communion of worshipping saints on earth be drawn more closely together, and more assimilated to the assembly of adoring saints in heaven, if they could all sing in concert, as well as pray together,—if we could be sure that the self-same hymn of praise also was continually ascending up to heaven at the same time from those same thousand congregations, in anticipation of that glorious unison in

which hereafter we hope to join in singing "the new song about the throne of God?" But the present state of our Psalmody rather destroys than heightens this effect,—rather reminds us of present discords, than prepares us for future unity, rather tends to isolation, division, and weakness, than to unity, compactness, and strength. It may be said, in answer to this, that we have the Psalms of David, translated into English verse by Tate and Brady. But, in the first place, it would not be difficult to show that their version has not a single good point to render it worthy of the monopoly it has so long enjoyed; and, in the second place, even if it were as faithful, simple, and interesting, as it is too confessedly unfaithful, vulgar, and uninteresting, yet of itself the Psalter alone would be as insufficient for the purposes of Christian praise, as the Old Testament would be for Christian instruction without the New. To discard the Psalter, as some have done, is one extreme—to use it exclusively is the other—to alternate the Psalm and the Hymn, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, is the medium to which we would wish to attain. So long, then, as so legitimate a want as that of a body of Christian Hymns is not regularly supplied, it is sure to supply itself, as it has in fact done, irregularly and inadequately.

It appears, moreover, that these same opinions very generally prevail—all seem to agree that the present state of things is bad, and loudly calls for some effectual remedy—all seem to allow that the hymn-books which are at present in vogue are only for the present exigency, as just better than nothing, and that of course no one ought to think, and very few people *would* think, of keeping on with them, if a proper hymn-book was put forth by proper authority, by the rulers of the Church. But meanwhile all seem to be aware of the difficulties that lie in the way, and none seem exactly to know how they are to be got over, or what is to be done. It has long struck me, indeed, that as our Liturgy is compiled, in a great measure, from ancient materials, so, if there were any ancient hymns still extant, of the same date and character with the prayers, they would be most suitable for our purpose; for they would, from their antiquity, carry more weight with them than any modern ones could do, and the precedence they claimed would more readily be granted to them; if, then, there could be a foundation laid, and the general mass of the work constructed out of these ancient materials, then the best of the modern ones might be very advantageously brought in to finish it off, and this would be in accordance with what was done in

the case of the Liturgy, where some of the prayers and collects are ancient, and some modern, but the additions, and insertions, and restorations, are so carefully contrived, that the whole is blended together in the most perfect harmony. I was not aware, however, till very lately, of there being any such ancient hymns extant: it certainly seemed most likely that if there had been any genuine primitive ones good for anything, they would have been brought into notice long since, and therefore I concluded that there was nothing in that way superior to those rhyming jingling hymns which are found in the Popish missals, as barbarous in their latinity, as defective in their doctrine. But my attention was a short time ago directed to some translations which have appeared, from time to time, in the "British Magazine," very beautifully executed, of some hymns extracted from the Parisian Breviary, with the originals annexed. Some, indeed, of the Sapphic and Alcaic and other Horatian metres, seem to be of little value, but the rest, of the peculiar hymn metre, *Dimeter Iambics*, appear ancient, simple, striking, and devotional—in a word, in every way likely to answer our purpose. So I got a copy of the Parisian Breviary, and one or two other old books of Latin Hymns, especially one compiled by Georgius Cassander,