

**THE HYMN OF HILDEBERT
AND OTHER
MEDIAEVAL HYMNS,
WITH TRANSLATIONS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649478286

The Hymn of Hildebert and Other Mediaeval Hymns, with Translations by Erastus C. Benedict

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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ERASTUS C. BENEDICT

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BY ERASTUS C. BENEDICT

A NEW AND ENLARGED EDITION

NEW YORK
ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH & CO.,
1868

PREFACE.

THESE translations have been the agreeable labor of occasional hours of leisure. Several of them have at different times, during the last fifteen years, appeared in public journals, literary and religious, and the favorable mention made of some of them has induced me to collect those which have been published, and to add some others, including the Hymn of Hildebert to the Trinity. Of some of them, previous translations are numerous and excellent.

In making this selection, my aim has been to bring together such a variety of hymns and topics as should, in small compass, exhibit the evangelical faith and character of those eminent and devout men, whose light shone so purely in that period of Christianity which we call the Middle Ages; their ideas of God and his attributes, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; their knowledge of the Scriptures; their exhaustive treatment of their topics, and their modes of thought and expression, so

simple and unpretentious. I was also especially influenced by a desire to exhibit that oneness of evangelical faith, and that Christian union in the great characteristic and essential elements of our holy religion, which enables us to acknowledge our brotherhood with these simple-minded, cultivated, and sanctified men, who devoted their lives to religion as it was presented by the Saviour and his sacred family, and their early successors, appealing to the heart instead of to the senses, and manifesting itself in great but simple and intelligible truths, and not in forms and rites, and ceremonies and vestments. I make little account of the fact that they may have believed something which I cannot believe, and may have used a ritual and liturgy which I disapprove. I never stop to think that the authors of the "Imitation of Christ," of the "Holy Living and Dying," of the "Pilgrim's Progress," held to points of faith, and used rites and modes of worship different from mine, any more than I do that the holy apostles themselves, who were with the Lord continually, and listened to those daily teachings which drew such crowds of hearers, and who saw all his miracles, were, even after the resurrection, still ignorant of the nature of his kingdom, of his sacrifice, and of his great salvation.

I make no apology for the simplicity and naturalness of these translations. It would have been less laborious

and difficult, to make translations which, to certain tastes, would have been more agreeable, and would have seemed more poetical—expanded paraphrases—English hymns founded upon the Latin ones, intensified by epithets and ornamented with imagery. My own taste, however, found a great charm in the great simplicity and brevity of the originals, and I preferred to translate those striking qualities. I have accordingly kept the English version within the length of the Latin original, and have endeavored to perform this task, certainly difficult, and sometimes said to be impossible, without sacrificing ease in versification, or the meaning and spirit of the original. How far I have succeeded must be left to the judgment of others.

In most cases also I have adopted the stanza and measure of the original, and the double rhymes and dactylic terminations so common with those Latin hymnologists. I do not share the opinion sometimes expressed, that in our language such rhymes are inconsistent with the dignity, gravity, and tenderness which may be expressed by them in Latin, and without which sacred hymns would lose their character. To this opinion, perhaps, may be attributed the fact, that in the English version of the psalms by Dr. Watts, there are no double rhymes, except three couplets in his translation of the Fiftieth Psalm, and in the versions of Tate and Brady,

and of Sternhold and Hopkins none, and that the earlier translations of the *Dies Iræ* were made in single rhyme. Many of the more recent ones, however, are made with double rhyme, and I apprehend that the opinion is now general that the true spirit and solemnity of that great hymn are better exhibited in some of the double rhyme translations than they are in any others. When the line is trochaic, the trochaic ending preserves, instead of impairing, the tone and feeling of the lines—which may be expressive of any sentiment, however grave or tender. Many of the sweetest and most devotional hymns in our language, are in double rhyme, and I need refer only to the grace and dignity, as well as tenderness and strength, with which Wesley and Heber and others, use the double rhyme, to show the truth of these remarks. I am, indeed, by no means certain that the double rhyme may not in the end, prove to be the higher and better style of versification and rhythm. I incline to the belief that there is in it a more graceful cadence, a more flowing and easy transition, and a more unbroken harmony, than in the sometimes crisp and sharp ending of the single rhyme.

It is surprising that Milton, who used rhyme with admirable skill, should speak of it as the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre. In the universality of rhyme, as in the further fact that it is peculiar neither to the rudeness of an early and bar-