THE STUDENTS' SERIES OF LATIN CLASSICS. LATIN HYMNS

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Trieste

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The Students' Series of Latin Classics

LATIN HYMNS

SELECTED AND ANNOTATED

BY

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οὐ πόλλ' ἀλλὰ πολύ

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PREFACE

LATIN hymns appeal to students on many grounds. Some appreciate the poetry, some the religious character, and a few the theological learning; while to others the changes in the language and the development in metrical treatment and versification prove attractive. Others, still, are interested in medieval thought and in literary history. Many of these hymns have exercised such wide influence that an acquaintance with them would seem to be desirable for broad literary culture, if for no other reason.

The best results have been gained by encouraging students to sing the hymns in the original and to hunt up English metrical versions and musical settings. Literal translation and close philological treatment should not be encouraged.

In the preparation of the Introduction and Notes the editor would acknowledge his great indebtedness to Julian's "Dictionary of Hymnology."

W. A. M.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
September, 1904.

INTRODUCTION

A HYMN, according to ancient canons, must consist of praise to God or his saints, must be metrical, and must be capable of being sung. The word is of Greek origin, and there are references to hymns in both the Old (e.g. Isaiah xlii 10) and in the New (e.g. Act. Apost. v 25) Testaments; it is probable that from the beginning of the Christian church they were used in public worship, for Pliny in his famous letter to Trajan (Ep. 97) and Tertullian (Apol. 2) imply their use. There was early a minor order of the clergy, called Psaltae or Cantores, whose duty it was to lead the singing which was often antiphonal. What was the exact distinction between psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Coloss. iii 16) is not known; it is, however, remarkable that in the Greek church, even at the present day, there are no metrical hymns, all of them being rhythmic and accentual.

Christianity is an Oriental religion, and came to the West through Greek influence; it is, therefore, natural that Greek precedent should preponderate in ritual as well as in theology; and undoubtedly the use of hymns was due to Greek authority. One of the earliest was the Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις — the *Gloria in Excelsis;* and the *Te Deum Laudamus* has a Greek kernel. The various hymns of the church service, those consisting of verbal quotations from the Bible as well as the *Gloria Patri*, the *Tersanctus*, and the like, were of Greek, when not of Hebrew, origin; and, indeed, they were long sung in Greek even in Latin countries. Latin hymnody begins with Hilary

of Poictiers, who acknowledges that he brought some of his hymns from the East, and Ambrose, the great bishop of Milan in the fourth century, in establishing a definite form for Latin hymns, avowedly followed the custom of the East.

About a hundred hymns are attributed to Ambrose and his school. In style they are objective; they are simple and rugged, intended for daily use — hymns of praise and prayer for guidance and help. The prevailing metre is the iambic dimeter, — the English Long Metre which still continues Ambrosian tradition in the character of the hymns which it frames, but with little regard for classical quantities. Alcaics and Sapphics with an occasional dactylic rhythm are exceptionally used in religious poems, but for congregational singing the iambic proved to be the measure best fitted to the genius of the Latin language and to the popular taste. As a means of inculcating orthodox doctrine hymns were found to be of the greatest value; and the example had already been given by heretics, both in the East and in the West, who had demonstrated their efficiency in conveying error. These hymns were incorporated into the Ambrosian breviary, and were also adopted by Benedict for the use of his order of monks, being selected and appointed for the various occasions of the day and season; they became widely known, and even at the present day the hymns of the canonical hours and the monastic services are still Ambrosian.

From the fourth to the eleventh century there was not much change in subject-matter and style. The objective character still remained; the metrical treatment tended more and more to the purely accentual instead of the quantitative; and the vocabulary and syntax, while showing plainly the increasing remoteness of the Augustan age, are yet remarkably pure in comparison with the prose of the same period. The Bible in

its Latin form was the principal source of the hymn writers, and whatever objection may be made to the Vulgate on the ground of rhythm and word order, so markedly different from the Ciceronian flow, it cannot be denied that its Latin shows an energetic vigor and lively force that harmonize well with the power of the new and victorious religion which adopted its Latinity as peculiarly its own. The prominent names in this second period are Prudentius, Sedulius, Sidonius Apollinaris, Juvencus, Venantius Fortunatus, Gregory the Great, the Venerable Bede, Paul the Deacon, Theodulphus, Fulbert, Peter Damiani, closing with Bernard of Clairvaux. In this list are laymen as well as clergy of all orders, monks and seculars, popes, bishops, and deacons. Some, like Prudentius, were literary men purely, some were monastic scholars, some were citizens of the world, and some were contemplative poets. In addition were many anonymous hymns rivalling in sweetness and beauty those attributed to definite authors; and even the authorship of some, which are connected with explicit names, is highly uncertain. These hymns are found in various places —in collected works of their supposed authors, in Graduals, Antiphonals, Breviaries, and other collections, and like the hymns in modern hymn-books, they were changed to suit the editors in many ways,—in length, in order, in words, and sometimes even in metre. The hymn was freely adapted to its intended use, there was little consideration of literary proprietorship, and authorship was a matter of no moment. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries Latin hymnody reflected plainly the change that had come over the church. The principal sacred poets were devout monks who, secluded from the world, gave themselves up to meditation and contemplation. Occupied with the life of the monastery, with its settled order of prayer and praise, poetic effort was certain to manifest itself