

**PRACTICAL
HYMNOLOGY.
[1921]**

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Practical Hymnology. [1921] by Hubert McNeill Poteat

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HUBERT MCNEILL POTEAT

**PRACTICAL
HYMNOLOGY.
[1921]**

TO
MY MOTHER
WHO TAUGHT ME IN MY CHILDHOOD
TO LOVE GOOD MUSIC

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PREFACE

IN non-ritualistic churches the participation of the congregation in the service is limited to the singing of the hymns. And yet, this exercise, instead of being universally recognized as of vital importance, and treated accordingly, is permitted, in innumerable churches, to sink into a kind of dull lethargy which invariably succeeds in communicating itself, in greater or less degree, to the whole service. The selections are made from a slender cycle that is traversed again and again, week after week, month after month, year after year, with never an attempt to learn new hymns; the spirit of religious fervor and enthusiasm is quenched by the lazy and indifferent manner in which the songs are sung, and nobody knows or cares enough about it to initiate reforms; the pastor has never taken the trouble to study the history of hymn singing or to investigate the circumstances and incidents that cluster around the composition and use of the great hymns; and the people never receive any instruction or inspiration or assistance to supplement their own negligible knowledge of, and interest in, hymnology. As a result of this inexcusable ignorance, carelessness and

laziness, the singing of hymns, in all too many churches, instead of being an act of worship, has degenerated into a mere incident of the service,—holding its place solely because of immemorial custom.

A fruitful soil is thus prepared for the purveyor of the cheap, ragtime "hymn." He glibly informs the music committee (composed usually of business men who would be insulted if one ascribed to them any knowledge whatever of music) that his book will wake the congregation out of the lassitude into which it has sunk; that the perfect panacea for the lack of interest in the singing is bound up within the cheap covers of his "Tinkling Cymbal"; that the proper way to stir the souls of the people is to begin with the feet, which, being galvanized into frantic activity under the spell of sundry jigs, waltzes and jazzes, will speedily communicate their exhilaration upward. He succeeds almost invariably in selling his wares, whereupon he goes his way rejoicing to the next church with a "music committee." Now, the cheap hymn book is *not* a cure for the disease; its adoption simply means the substitution of one malady for another.

The cure, then, must be sought elsewhere. It is to be found in the application of a little earnest consideration and study to the whole question of hymnology. The ignorance and indifference of pastor and people are, as suggested above, very

largely responsible for conditions as they exist today. This book is prepared with the very practical purpose of presenting what seem to me the most important phases of the subject,—one of which, as far as I can learn, has not been treated at length before,—in as small a compass as possible, to readers who have neither time nor inclination for exhaustive investigation.

Pardon a personal word: I am neither a professional musician nor a teacher of music. The convictions set forth in this little volume have been formed during a long term of service as director of a volunteer choir. Further, I am not in the pay of any publisher of hymn books, nor do I ever expect to be.

I shall be sorry if certain opinions expressed in the following pages appear to any reader to be harsh; but I shall comfort myself with the reflection that every word was written in an earnest endeavor to check what I believe to be a real evil and to promote a deeper interest in the true worship of God.

H. M. P.

Wake Forest, N. C.,
March 30, 1921.

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