

**THE HYMN TE DEUM LAUDAMUS;
OBSERVATIONS UPON ITS COMPOSITION
AND STRUCTURE WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO
THE USE LITURGICAL AND CHORAL OF THIS
AND OTHER CANTICLES AND PSALMS AND
TO THE TRUE CHARACTER OF THE CHANT**

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The hymn Te Deum laudamus; observations upon its composition and structure with special regard to the use liturgical and choral of this and other canticles and psalms and to the true character of the chant by Francis Pott

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FRANCIS POTT

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PREFATORY.

THE following "observations" owe their inception to a correspondence of some twenty years ago in a serial now some time defunct,—their gradual development to the casual gleanings of the interval from books and experience,—and their publication to the encouragement of friends who think that they will be to many interesting and helpful, and to some of those who are charged with the ordering of our Church worship and music suggestive of practical considerations, and, I venture to hope, reconsideration of some of our traditions and methods.

They offer only a small contribution to the increasing study of our liturgical inheritance. Their immediate subject is a very limited one; and although it raises questions which run beyond itself, the discussion of these I have sought rather to open than to close.

A few statements of fact and opinions, borrowed from others and jotted down as chance brought them before me, without any intention of publication, can now, to my regret, neither be traced to their source and verified by references, nor credited to their authors and supported by their authority.

FRANCIS POTT.

NORHILL RECTORY,
January, 1884.

TE DEUM LAUDAMUS.

The Received English Version.

We praise *Thee*, O God ; we acknowledge *Thee* to be the Lord ;
All the earth doth worship *Thee*, the Father everlasting.
To *Thee* all angels cry aloud, the Heavens and all the Powers therein ;
To *Thee* Cherubin and Seraphin continually do cry ;
 “ Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth ;
 Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of Thy Glory.”
The glorious company of the Apostles praise *Thee* ;
The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise *Thee* ;
The noble army of Martyrs praise *Thee* ;
The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge *Thee* ;
 The Father, of an infinite majesty ;
 Thine honourable, true, and only Son ;
 Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ ;
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.
When *Thou* tookest upon *Thee* to deliver man, *Thou* didst not abhor
 the Virgin's womb :
When *Thou* hadst overcome the sharpness of death, *Thou* didst
 open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father ;
We believe that *Thou* shalt come to be our Judge.
We therefore pray *Thee* help Thy servants whom *Thou* hast redeemed
 with Thy precious blood ;
 Make them to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting.

O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine heritage ;
 Govern them, and lift them up for ever.
Day by day we magnify *Thee* ;
 And we worship Thy Name ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.
 O Lord, have mercy upon us ; have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let Thy mercy lighten upon us ;
 As our trust is in *Thee*.
O Lord, in *Thee* have I trusted ;
 Let me never be confounded.

*For the Latin original and for the numbering (old and new) of the
verses, see pp. 26-28.*

TE DEUM LAUDAMUS.

"HYMNUS optimus,"¹ "Nullâ laude inferior,"² "above all the composesures of men uninspired."³ Thus do writers of different ages and countries vie with each other in appraising this "wondrous anthem."⁴

Many writers of our own times have dwelt severally on different aspects of it: Daniel, in his "Thesaurus Hymnologicus," at great length, on the question of its birthplace, history, etc.; Bishop Forbes, on its devotional and theological character; Archdeacon Freeman, on its ritual import; Mr. Wratislaw, in his "Notes and Dissertations," and Mr. Thompson, in his interesting "Vindication," with its collection of modern versions, on the text; not to speak of Dr. Blunt and other well-known annotators of the Prayer-book.

The *Te Deum* claims a position and character quite its own among the five canticles which, with three Psalms added in 1552, have been retained by the English Church,

¹ So entitled in "the Bacon Psalter" at Cambridge.

² Alcaïn.

³ Wheatley on the Common Prayer.

⁴ The Rev. D. D. Stewart, to whose recent essay on the vision of Isaiah as the basis of the *Te Deum* (Hatchards) I am also indebted for the above references.

out of the much larger number that are, or have been at different times, in use in the various Churches of Christendom.

Alone among them it is not drawn from the Canonical or other books of Scripture ; alone it was written neither in Hebrew nor Greek, but, I believe, in Latin ; alone it is a song of the New Dispensation, and retrospective rather than prophetic ; categorical, not figurative. It stands out too above the rest as an act of direct adoration, and as representing that phase of Christian thought and worship which, concerning itself with the being, attributes, and acts of the Almighty, rather than with our relations to Him, is so characteristic of the earlier ages, and especially of the Eastern mind, and so unlike those introspective questionings which are reflected strongly in the hymns and in the general conceptions of worship which prevail in these later days, particularly among Teutonic peoples.¹

The *Te Deum* is at once the grandest in style, the most comprehensive in thought, and yet the simplest in expression of all the canticles.

So simple is it, that it neither asks nor admits any

¹ This feature is to some extent obscured in our English version ; for the pronoun, "Te, Tibi, Tu," which in the Latin stands so emphatically first in every verse where it occurs at all, down to the twenty-first, and thus shows the whole mind and soul of the worshipper centred upon the Divine Object of his adoration, has been deprived of this force by the translator, who, apparently not seeing the loss incurred thereby, has varied its position much more freely than the English idiom demanded. This loss can now be restored only so far as choirs can be taught to emphasize the pronoun (when it is emphatic in the Latin), in whatever position it stands. In no case is this misplacement more unfortunate, and at the same time more difficult to restore by emphasis, than in ver. 20, "We therefore pray Thee help," etc., instead of "To Thee we therefore pray, help Thou Thy servants," etc. "*Te ergo quæsumus*," "To Thee—Thee Whom we praise and acknowledge as the King of Glory, the Eternal Son, the Incarnate Redeemer, the Opener of Heaven, the Glorified Man, the Righteous Judge, to Thee *therefore*, because Thou art all this, we come in prayer for help."

exposition of the *meaning* of any single verse ; and a devotional commentary, such as the beautiful one by the late Bishop Forbes, becomes rather an expansion,—a meditation on thoughts which gather round each line from outside,—than a drawing out from within deep meanings, which, as in the *Magnificat* for example, lie concealed in prophetic allusion and figure.

Nothing can well be clearer and bolder than the general sequence of its thoughts. Beginning with an act of adoration from ourselves, it expands first to the whole earthly creation, and then rises to comprehend the worship of Heaven, till it reaches the highest ranks of the angelic hierarchy in the Cherubim and Seraphim, and the very words of their worship.

It then seems to take a new departure again among men in the body of the elect ; but now in a descending order, beginning, in Paradise, with the highest order of the ministry of the new covenant ; then passing to the prophets of the less glorious ministration which was done away ; then embracing that "army," or "host," among whom the apostles themselves and many of the prophets have their place—that multitude whom no man could number, arrayed in white robes, with palms in their hands ; and, lastly, still descending and still widening its view, it takes in the whole Church throughout the world, not only the world of to-day but that of the past and the future, of the departed as well as the living, and the yet unborn worshippers "per orbem terrarum."

And now the great Object to whom all this worship is directed, held, as it were, in reserve, though constantly kept before the mind in the repeated "Te" or "Tibi" of every preceding line, is opened before us in the names and attributes of the three divine Persons of the Holy Trinity (vers. 11-13).

Te Deum Laudamus.

“The Father, of an infinite majesty ;
Thine honourable, true, and only Son ;
Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.”

At this point, and, so to say, out of this triplet, there breaks forth the great central thought of the hymn—that it is in Christ and in redemption that this glory and love of God is revealed and adored ; and the address of our worship is turned directly and specially to the Second Person, whose divine nature and glory, love and power, exaltation and faithfulness, is the theme of the next eight verses.

The hymn then closes with prayers to God for protection and blessing upon the Church and upon ourselves individually, mingled with professions of confidence in Him.

ITS LITURGICAL AND OTHER USE.

It has been used as an independent act of worship on many public occasions, of very various kinds indeed ; chiefly after great victories, as for instance, after that of Dettingen (when for the last time a king of England fought in person, when Handel composed his well-known music for it) ; at the conclusion of a peace, the coronation of sovereigns, the restoration to health of princes and great men of State ; at the recurrence of great commemorations and jubilees ; and once it has even been used, as Daniel records for our amusement, after a funeral oration over a deceased monarch.

Its more regular use in the services of the Church is confined by the Roman Breviary to Sundays and festivals, except during Eastertide, when it is said daily. It is altogether silenced during the seasons of Advent and Lent (from Septuagesima). This omission of it is not ordered