The History and Use of Hymns and Hymn Tunes
David R. Breed
Fleming H. Revell Co., 1903

CHAPTER IV

PSALMODY

The term "psalmody" is applied to that body of sacred song which is composed of metrical versions of the psalms, wherein they are adapted to modern methods of singing. It generally includes, also, similar paraphrases of other portions of Scripture.

The subject is an immensely large one of itself, and its literature most extensive. Julian, in his *Dictionary of Hymnology*, gives a list of three hundred and twenty-six separate publications, of substantially the entire Psalter, in English alone; besides about one hundred and twenty minor versifications. To these must be added, before exhausting the catalogue, similar attempts in other languages and also the vast number of songs ranking simply as "hymns," but virtually belonging to psalmody. We are compelled by our limits to treat only of the most important versions, as they are known to-day, specially those in the English language.

CLEMENT MAROT

Psalmody, in its modern sense, began with Clement Marot of France, court-poet to King Francis I. The time and circumstances should be carefully noted. Francis reigned from 1515 to 1547. These years cover the most momentous events in modern history, the Reformation, the rise of Spanish ascendency under Charles V., and all else that was associated therewith. Marot was writing his psalms while Francis and Charles were engaged in bitter warfare over their respective claims to the control of Italy, while Luther was stirring all Christendom with his attacks upon the papacy, while the Huguenots were struggling for the control of France, while Cardinal Wolsey was running his eccentric but influential course in England. It is not strange that such work as his in psalmody in such an age should have been productive of permanent results.

Marot became *valet de chambre* to Marguerite de Valois at the age of twenty-one. Her influence over him was so great that he espoused the Huguenot faith, though his religion does not seem to have become particularly vital. His character is variously represented by Catholic and Huguenot. He was certainly a gay, witty, and volatile soul, and his poems are for the most part short pieces—ballads, epigrams, and the like. Yet he suffered again and again for his Protestant principles, though we are tempted to believe it was chiefly because his Protestantism was so largely displayed in his satires upon the Roman clergy, even though these alternate with expressions of simple, unaffected faith. King Francis seems to have promoted him in his own persistent attempt to use anything or anybody who would serve his cause against the emperor. But even Charles V. subsequently admired his gifts and richly rewarded him for his work.

Marot began to versify the psalms in 1533. Thirty of them were in circulation, in manuscript form, in 1537, and became the fashion of the hour. The king and his court sang them to ballad tunes, and from France they spread to adjoining countries. Their subsequent publication, in

1542, brought upon Marot the persecution of the Roman authorities and he fled to Geneva. Thence his psalmody spread through the Protestant world, and set the example for the host of versifiers who followed.

THE GENEVAN PSALTER

In 1543 was published at Geneva a remarkable historic volume known as *The Genevan Psalter*, the permanent influence of which may be attested by reference to any modern hymn-book. Marot died in 1544; his psalter was enlarged and revised by Beza at the request of Calvin, and much which was objectionable, in its gayety, classical allusions, and references to the members of the French court, was removed. This psalter passed into a second edition in 1554; and into a third in 1562, when the work was completed by the versification of all the psalms. Marot's name is still attached to it, as appears in the title, "*Les Pseaumes mis en rime francoise par Clement Marot et Theodore de Bèze*."

The success and influence of this work were most remarkable. It was largely adopted among all the French-speaking people and was used to a considerable extent even by the Catholics. Francis I. cherished it upon his deathbed. Henry II. used one of its numbers as a hunting-song! The Huguenots everywhere were acquainted with it, and their Catholic enemies disguised their identity at times by singing its melodies. Very touching stories are related of its use on the battle-field, and in the sad times following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. At least one thousand editions of it were issued, and its influence extended throughout the Protestant world.

It was translated into many languages, including Dutch, German, Italian, Spanish, Bohemian, Polish, Latin, and even Hebrew. In England several translations appeared, and a number of the versions that succeeded it in Great Britain followed its form and expression in many particulars. Take it for all in all, it is doubtful if any book of praise—the original Psalms alone excepted—has ever had so important a mission or exercised so great an influence.

ENGLISH PSALMODY

Great Britain received the continental treasures of psalmody with her adoption of the doctrines of the Reformation. Its influence seems to have been immediately felt in England, for in 1538 Myles Coverdale, bishop of Exeter, published a metrical version of thirteen psalms, entitled "Goastly Psalmes and Spirituall Songes drawn out of the Holy Scripture." This was the beginning of English psalmody; but it had no decided influence.

The first important work in psalmody in Great Britain was that of George Buchanan, 1548. But his work was continued by another poet, John Hopkins, of whose personal history little is known, except that he was educated at Oxford and settled as a minister at Suffolk.

The third edition of the psalter, with additions by Hopkins, appeared in 1551.

And now the scene changes to Geneva, and the direct influence of Marot on English psalmody begins to be positively exercised. "Bloody Mary," daughter of Henry VIII. and Catherine of Aragon, comes to the English throne (1553), and her attempts to restore the Catholic faith are associated with the persecution of the Protestants, even to the burning of bishops, clergymen, and people. A number of refugees seek safety on the continent, and a religious congregation of English and Scotch Protestants is organized at Frankfort-on-Main.

John Knox is chosen pastor. But the Episcopalian and Dissenting brethren do not get on well together, and Knox, with his adherents, retires to Geneva, 1555. Here a distinct church is formed and a "Book of Order" published, and to complete it, the psalms of Sternhold and Hopkins are adopted, though with considerable alteration, and others are added. This was in 1556.

To this Anglo-Genevan psalter several psalms and tunes in use to-day may be traced, notably "Old Hundred," both the tune, as we know it, and the words beginning,
"All people that on earth do dwell."

In 1562—quickly followed by a second edition in 1563—appeared the most important of all the English works of this kind up to this date. The entire one hundred and fifty psalms were now versified and appeared in a book entitled, *The whole Boke of Psalms, collected into English metre by Thomas Sternhold, J. Hopkins, and others; conferred with the Ebrue, with apt notes to sing them withal. Faithfully perused and allowed, according to the order appointed in the Queenes Majesties injunctions, very mete to be used by all sorts of people privately for their solace and comfort, laying apart all ungodly songs and ballades, which tend only to the nourishment of vice and corrupting of youth. Imprinted at London by John Day, dwelling over Aldersgate benethe Saint Martins. Cum gratia et privilegia Regie Majestatis per septennium an 1563.*

This book contained, in addition to psalms, other metrical versions, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the "Veni Creator," "Venite," "Te Deum," and a number of other ancient hymns with some modern originals. This work was known in subsequent times as the "Old Version." It was in use in England for one hundred and thirty-four years, or until the Restoration.

SCOTCH PSALMODY

Meanwhile the Scotch psalmody was developing along lines of its own. The Scotch Church adopted eight-seven of the psalms in the Anglo-Genevan collection, selected and altered forty-two from Sternhold and Hopkins, and added twenty-one of its own. Its psalter was completed December, 1564, and the General Assembly ordered its use by all its ministers. Thereafter for forty years no further attention was given to the matter.

FRENCH TUNES

But Germany, though it was the primal source and chief agent in this work, was not alone in it. France and Geneva, so closely allied, as we have already seen, took an important part in it. The psalms of the Marot-Beza collection were set to old French tunes as early as 1552. They soon came into very general use, and were widely sung by French-speaking Protestants. An interesting account of their influence upon the people of Geneva is given by a visitor to that city in 1557, who writes of the large attendance upon Protestant worship, where "each one draws from his pocket a small book which contains the psalms with notes and out of full hearts, in the native speech, the congregation sings before and after the sermon. Every one testifies to me how great consolation and edification is derived from this custom."

In 1565 a collection of hymn-tunes was published in Paris by Claude Goudimel, a Netherlander, one of the last of the great school of Belgian contrapuntists and one of the first

musicians of his age. He had given much attention to the purification of counterpoint and had written music substantially in the "plain style" even before Palestrina had named and developed it. In 1540 he was at the head of a music school at Rome, and Palestrina was one of his pupils. Coming to France, he attached himself to the Huguenots, and thereby incurred the hostility of their persecutors. He was a "shining mark" for their malice and perished in the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

Goudimel's faith and training fitted him to become a leader in fixing the forms of Protestant praise and his influence was incalculable. Many of his tunes were derived from secular sources. Others were arrangements of Gregorian chants. One of the latter was *Old Hundred*, which appears for the first time in his collection, but set to the 134th Psalm. It was afterward embraced, as we have seen, in the Anglo-Genevan psalter, united to the 100th Psalm, with which it has been associated ever since.

There can be no doubt that there was an interchange of these new tunes between Germany and France, while the indebtedness of the English, and more particularly the Scotch, psalmody to these sources has been already noted.

The effect, however, upon English tune-music was not altogether salutary. The initial impulse was vigorous and hopeful; but the development was soon arrested. The Calvinistic Protestants of Geneva and Scotland, on conscientious grounds, repressed the artistic element in music as savoring of papacy, and consequently made little headway. Their hymn-tunes were not "hymn-tunes" at all, but *psalm-tunes*. The first sacred song-books in English were composed exclusively of the psalms in meter, and the tunes corresponded. English tune-music, therefore, like English hymnody was delayed for more than a hundred years, awaiting that burst of praise which was introduced in hymnody with Watts and Wesley, and which in turn promoted the development of music suited to itself. The psalms of Sternhold and Hopkins with the "apt notes to sing them withal" was the first complete psalm-book with tunes published in England. This was in 1562. The music was simple and severe, and was written in one part only, but the English Protestants were chiefly dependent upon it for one hundred and thirty-four years.