

Psalm-Singers'  
Conference.

Belfast, August, 1902.

Psalm-Singers'

Conference,

Held in

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of His holy soul in the language of the Psalms." The introduction of human hymns into the worship of God breaks up the unity and ennobling fellowship of the Church.

"Our Praise Worship" is a sectarian innovation. The name is unhappy and unscriptural, a vain attempt to perpetuate denominationalism. It indicates a retrogressive movement contrary to the Divine, progressive, and glorious ideal of the Church's purity and unity—one Lord, one faith, one baptism. "Our Praise Worship" is in line with uninspired productions. Jehovah's Praise Worship would logically suggest God-inspired matter in the praise, and also God-given grace in the rendering. "The Church Hymnary," "Our Own Hymn-book," &c., are men's books: the Psalms are God's book. The light of the former is that of the glow-worm: the light of the latter that of the noon-day sun. The former are like Job's deceitful brooks that pass away: the latter like the never-failing, boundless ocean.

We hope the time will soon come when all the debris of human compositions in the worship of Jehovah shall be removed for ever, and Jew and Gentile shall unite in singing the praises of God, taking their songs from the treasury of inspired Psalmody, the Church's heritage for thousands of years, and one of her glorious bonds of fellowship, connecting the wonders of Jehovah's arm in the memorable past with the mighty working of His power in the Church's glorious future.

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PRAISE—Psalm 96, 6-9.

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## OBJECTIONS TO THE USE OF THE PSALMS CONSIDERED.\*

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In the time allotted to this paper, I propose to consider three leading objections to the use of the Psalms by the New Testament Church.

I. It is objected, that the Psalms, as belonging to the Jewish Church, are obsolete, antiquated, obscure. Hence they may be, should be, laid aside. The modern hymn-books

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\* Read by Rev. J. T. Potts, B.A., Rathfriland, Ireland.

are often changed, and a new selection is made. Why may not these old Psalms be set aside? This seems a usual and effective way of disposing of an ancient book of praise.

But this sharp treatment of the Book of Psalms as only a common book, hardly satisfies the objectors themselves, for their arguments might be taken from them, and pressed against the whole of the Old Testament. So reasons are framed for retiring the Book of Psalms:—it is Jewish; it has served its day; its language belongs to an “abrogated ritual”.

But it must be admitted that what is Jewish in origin may be permanent in value, as for example the Decalogue, revealed to Moses at Sinai, the abiding law, expounded by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, and the rule of life to the believer.

Again, the Psalms may be Jewish in dress, and yet contain truth for the world. They cannot lose their dress, and hence the language of ceremony and symbol. But we have the key to all that might be thought obscure. The Book of Psalms is not obscure, nor are its contents obsolete. We ourselves, in New Testament days, are not freed from the language of figure and symbol, that we may be taught. We see yet in part. We know yet in part. The Psalms are not local and temporary; they are eminently spiritual and universal. They are not low and tribal. There is in them the clearest recognition that God is a spirit, and the God of all the earth. Need I refer to the 139th Psalm in its representation of God as the Searcher of hearts, from Whose presence none can hide? The Psalms deal with the human spirit, the same in its moods and desires in all lands. They have a universal character. All nations are called to praise God. “O praise the Lord, all ye nations”—Psalm 117, 1, quoted in Romans 15, 11.

Rev. William Somerville, Reformed Presbyterian Minister of Cornwallis, Nova Scotia, in his treatise, “The Exclusive Claims of David’s Psalms” (St. John, N.B., 1855), gives these points as to the freedom of the Psalms from what is local and temporary: “1. The inefficacy of legal sacrifices is taught in the Psalms.” “2. Predictions in the Psalms, and in particular those of which Christ is the subject, which admit of a definite accomplishment before the consummation of all things, are presented in a historical form.” “3. In those Psalms, in which Christ Himself is the speaker, it would seem that He uniformly appears before us, in the last act of His life of humiliation and sorrow, just about to give up the ghost; so that He is, as it were, evidently set forth, crucified among us.” “4. Those parts of the Mediator’s privileges and trials

in which His people have not only a legal interest, but have actual fellowship with Him, are sometimes exhibited as *present* enjoyed or suffered, without respect to their relation to the time of His crucifixion." (Pages 120-132).

The Christian Church is directed to sing the Psalms. We quote the epistle of "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." The 5th chapter and 13th verse reads: "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." Paul writes to the Ephesians, 5th chapter, verses 18 and 19: "Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." To the Colossians the same Apostle writes, 3rd chapter and 16th verse: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." It may be pardoned one, in his haste, to claim these commands as a broad warrant to use any matter of praise, whether inspired or not; but one who has studied knows, that while we call the book the Book of Psalms, the Jews call it *Tchillim*, as our word hymns; and that the titles of the pieces vary, and that the Apostle uses three of these titles—*Mizmor*, *Tchilla*, and *Shir*—for the compositions, which he qualifies as "spiritual", inspired.

Beginning, then, with the early Christian Churches, there is a long line of testimony to the Book of Psalms as a present joy and help. Believers in all ages have known the Psalms as not obsolete, but as new songs in their hearts in praise of God.

II. It is objected that the Psalms contain material unfit for the use of the New Testament Church. Dr. Isaac Watts, whose "Imitations of the Psalms" bridged the chasm between an inspired Psalmody and the later hymns for the Presbyterian Churches, in his Preface says, "Some of the Psalms are almost opposite to the spirit of the Gospel." "While we are kindling into divine love, some dreadful curse against men is proposed to our lips—as Psalm 69, 26-28—which is so contrary to the new commandment of loving our enemies." "By the time they (the Psalms) are fitted for Christian Psalmody, the composure can hardly be called inspired or divine." Of course the question occurs, Did Dr. Watts regard them as "inspired or divine" when he took them in hand to shape them for Christian worship?

1. There is a lack of reverence in the charge. The Psalms were given by inspiration of God. In Mark 12, 36, Jesus

quotes the 110th Psalm, saying, "David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." So, in Acts 1, 16, the Apostle Peter thus addresses the company in the upper room: "Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus." He then goes on to quote a passage in the 69th Psalm. Paul also quotes it in Romans 11, 9 and 10. When we compare these New Testament passages with the words of Watts in referring to the Psalms, may we not consider his treatment of the inspired Psalms as one of the influences that have promoted lax views of the Old Testament?

2. The portions of the Psalms deemed most objectionable are remarkable in their setting. For example, what more severe than terms that class men with beasts? The 22nd Psalm, in the 12th, 16th, and 21st verses, reads: "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Basban have beset me round." "For dogs have compassed me." "Save me from the lion's mouth: for Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns." Yet this is peculiarly the Psalm of Jesus on the cross, and begins with His cry to Him Who hid His face from Him: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" What more awful than the words in the 69th Psalm, a Psalm singled out by Watts: "Let their table become a snare before them; and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake," &c. Yet look at the setting. This verse precedes the passage quoted: "They gave Me also gall for My meat; and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink." This verse follows: "For they persecute Him Whom Thou hast smitten." So as to other portions to which objection is made that they are unfit for the Christian's lips. They are given to us as the words of Christ, and the Apostle Peter, in Acts, 1st chapter, refers to the same 69th Psalm, with this preface already quoted: "This Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus." See also, as already noted, Romans, 11th chapter. Do not the objectors need to study the Psalms in the school of Christ? We turn to the Book of Revelation, that completes the New Testament Canon, written by John, whom Jesus loved—a disciple filled with His Spirit. This message was for the Church at Thyatira: "These things saith the Son of God, Who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are

like fine brass." Then judgments are denounced on "that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess." Thus ends the effort to disparage a book most frequently quoted in the New Testament. When the Scriptures are searched, as directed by Him of Whom they speak, the Psalms are found in accord with the other books—the books of Moses and the Prophets and the Apostles. Men may not attempt, in a fancied higher spirit, to reject the Word and live above its awful truths, as to the end of the ungodly and the wicked. Let us, rather, reverently use the Word, and humbly learn from Him Who is the Lamb of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

III. It is objected that the Psalms fail to embody the New Testament matter of praise, not expressing New Testament truth, and the experience of the believer. In general, we set over against this objection the words of Patrick Fairbairn, in his "Typology of the Scripture": "The Psalms may well be termed, with Augustine, 'an epitome of the whole Scriptures,' and a summary, not, as Luther said, of the Old Testament merely, but of both Testaments together, in their grand elements of truth and outlines of history." He then quotes Hooker, who asks: "What is there necessary for man to know which the Psalms are not able to teach?" (1852 edition, pages 60-63.)

What do we take to be the elements of New Testament praise? The love of God in the choice of His people, the covenant made with His Son our Saviour, the mission of our Lord, His incarnation, His crucifixion, His exaltation, the gift of the Spirit, the calling of the Gentiles, the coming glory of Christ's Kingdom, along with the experience of the godly, are given in the Psalms as matter for praise. The well-known American treatise, "The True Psalmody," republished in Belfast, 1861, under the heading of Chapter 1st, the Book of Psalms: Complete Manual of Praise, has this outline: "Presents the most comprehensive delineation of the perfections of God, and of the character of His government—In Three Persons—Furnishes a full and accurate exhibition of man's real state and character before God—The Psalms are full of Christ—Contain the richest fund of Christian experience—The most eminent Christians and Christian teachers have ever so testified." Then follow twenty-three pages of development of this outline, in ample proof. All is made clear in the light of the New Testament, since Christ has come. Dr. Henry Cooke, in a Preface to "The True Psalmody," Belfast edition, tells us of his turning back to the Psalms as the sufficient and exclusive manual of praise. He says, "After having at-

tempted to explain the verses referred to in the twenty-fourth Psalm, and when I was in the act of explaining, as best I could, the first Psalm, and while labouring to accommodate the description in the Psalm with the state of all I knew of the attainments of the saints, it occurred to me to say in my heart, Is this the way we decide in botany and mineralogy? And my memory and my conscience answered, No! Then said I, in my heart, there never has been a man answering, in all respects, to these descriptions. It was not Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Paul; but was it not 'the man Christ Jesus'? The veil was instantly removed from the Book of Psalms, and I saw therein Christ clearly." He adds, "And truly, I believe, there is one view of Christ (and that not the least important to the tired and troubled believer) that can be discovered only in the Book of Psalms—I mean His inward life. No eye-witness of the outward man, though an inspired evangelist, could penetrate the heart. But the Spirit Who 'searcheth the deep things of God' has, in the Psalms, laid open the inmost thoughts, sorrows, and conflicts of our Lord. The Evangelists faithfully and intelligently depict the sinless Man; the Psalms alone lay open the heart of 'the Man of sorrows.' The most pious productions of uninspired men are a shallow stream; the Psalms an unfathomable and shoreless ocean." Would that others were won back, as Dr. Henry Cooke says he was, to "the exclusive use of inspired Psalmody in public worship"! God did not provide a second Psalter. The claim that the New Testament shows traces of any such is vain. We may refer the advocates of this theory to the note, in "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul," by Conybeare and Howson, on Mr. Humphrey's conjecture that a part of the Apostle's address at Lystra is a poetic quotation. The authors say, "The fact that the passage from *Ouranothern* to *Kardias* can be broken up into a system of irregular lines, consisting of dochmiac and choriambic feet, proves nothing; because there is scarcely any passage in Greek prose which might not be rendered into lyrical poetry by a similar method; just as in English, the columns of a newspaper may be read off as hexameters, spondaic or otherwise, quite as good as most of the so-called English hexameters which are published" (Scribner's edition, vol. 1, p. 195; note). No; the one Book of Psalms has been given to the Church of God. Israel used it—a chosen people in a chosen land. They are dispersed; they have stumbled in unbelief. But "the veil shall be taken away," "in the reading of the Old Testament" (2 Cor. 3). All the Israel of God—Jew and Gentile alike—in the use of the Bible Psalter shall praise the Lord their Redeemer, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of His people



Israel. " His name shall endure for ever : His name shall be continued as long as the sun : and men shall be blessed in Him : all nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only doth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious name for ever : and let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen " (Psalm 72, 17-19).



### THE "IMPRECATORY" PSALMS.

By REV. PROFESSOR DICK, M.A. D.D., Belfast, Ireland.

The Psalms have been received by the Church of God in past generations, without any dissentient voice, as a book of that Holy Scripture, of which Christ declared that it "cannot be broken." As such they were given by the Spirit of God, and as such they were accepted, used, and honoured by the Lord Jesus Christ. Having this Divine origin and Divine sanction they are distinctly the Songs of the Lord, and they have the seal of the Divine authorization for use in the Service of Praise. Moreover, it is because they have this authorization, and *solely* because they have it, that it is lawful and right to use them as songs of praise in the worship of God. If they were not given and appointed by God Himself to be used in singing His praise, it would be presumptuous and audacious to use *even them* in that way. For God from the beginning claimed the right to regulate the approach of sinners to Himself, and to prescribe all the forms and ordinances of His own worship. This unquestionable Divine prerogative, which has been so frequently and so fearfully emphasized and vindicated, is fitted to silence for ever *all objections* to the use of the Psalms. The answer given by the Spirit of God to the man who reasons against the Divine sovereignty—"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"—is equally applicable here. Who art thou that art so ignorant as to reason against the appointment of the all-wise God? Who art thou that art so profane and impious as to object to, and reject, the Praise Book graciously given from Heaven by the Holy One of Israel?

Nearly all objections to the Psalms assume that they are only human songs and that they merely express the various moods of the human spirit; or, if objectors do not quite assume this, they forget, at least, that the Psalms are Divine