



English Hymnal and Ancient and Modern

Treasure No 9: '*English Hymnal*' and '*Ancient and Modern*' by Erik Routley: An article from Bulletin No. 38, January 1947

A brief correspondence has appeared in the columns of *The Musical Times* for September, October, and November, 1946, under the general heading of "Hymn Tunes," but dealing in fact with the rival merits of *The English Hymnal* and *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. This is a well-worn subject of controversy, although it has not actually been ventilated before in our own columns. The correspondence was provoked by a letter from Mr G. W. Stubbings expressing concern that in one of our honoured cathedrals *A.M.* had been substituted for *E.H.* By a recent decision. A letter from our own Assistant-Editor was designed to allay Mr Stubbings' anxieties without offering judgment on either of the hymnals; two more letters appeared in November from Anglican vicars giving higher points for general usefulness to *A.M.*, and the Editor of *The Musical Times* then closed the correspondence. Some thoughts have arisen in the sub-editorial mind which might be passed on for what they are worth.

E.H. is now forty years old, and the last complete edition of *A.M.* is thirty. There has been time for the violence of initial controversy to die down, and a balanced judgment ought to be possible. It is quite clear, then, that from any point of view the scales are not so heavily weighted in favour of *E.H.* as many of us used to think. And one of the reasons for this, I am convinced, is the significance of the Second Supplement to *A.M.* This Second Supplement is really a most important development in Anglican hymnody, and those who are discontented with *E.H.* now are comparing it, not with the 1889 *A.M.*, with which it competed when it was first published, but with the complete (1916) *A.M.*, which is a much more formidable competitor.

What interested me most in this correspondence was the bold assertion of one of the vicars that *A.M.* was far the more suitable book for a simple, working-class congregation. Now in one sense, *A.M.* is undoubtedly a "people's book." It was, from its inception in 1861, the backbone of Anglican hymnody, and although it passed through six revisions its policy never changed from 1861 to 1916.¹ It filled with remarkable skill the needs of the people for whom it was designed—i.e., the Anglican churchgoing public. But—here is the point—in 1861 churchgoing was a very different matter from what it is to-day. There was already a tradition of churchgoing among a certain section of the population; those who went to church must have been less critical and more submissive than the churchgoing public (if public is not too strong a word) to-day; and, on the whole, the Anglican churchgoing public was representative of a certain section of the community at the expense of another section. Therefore we find throughout the history of *A.M.* just what we should expect—namely (a) a good deal of poor stuff in the way of words and music—particularly in the more markedly liturgical sections (Saints' Days, the Church's Year, etc.), and (b) the absence of any very considerable "missionary" drive either towards the poor and outcast or towards the intelligent and critical paeon. *A.M.* is a book (at any rate as far as No. 638) for those who come to church knowing what to expect and prepared to accept what they are given.

It is not so with *E.H.* In that book there is obviously a greater consciousness of the catholicity of the church; it extends its missionary work towards the liberal and intelligent mind, with its remarkably wide selection of

¹ The 1919 edition is not important for these considerations, being only a selective edition of the 1916 book.

authors from Phineas Fletcher, Thomas Pestel, and Samuel Crossman to John Bowring, J. W. Chadwick, F. L. Hosmer, and J. G. Whittier; and it also lines up with the evangelical Salvationists in its “Mission section.” The theology of *E.H.* is more liberal than that of *A.M.*, the church-order presupposed is more Puseyite, and its aesthetic standard, in the main high, is at some points deliberately and startlingly lowered beyond anything of which any editor of *A.M.* could ever dream.

Now the Second Supplement of *A.M.* shows a much milder but still unmistakable trend in the same direction. It has a number of rather striking literary pieces which the purists find difficulty in calling hymns, such as “Crossing the Bar,” Twells’ “Awake, O Lord,” Monsell’s “My sins have taken such a hold on me,” Greenaway’s “O Worn of Pity”; and it also has several hymns of the “Sacred Song” type—667, 764, 765, 766, 769, 772, 776. But that Supplement is more remarkable for the hymns it includes which fall under neither of these headings. With the example of *E.H.* before it, it still excludes the Unitarian Bowring and the Quaker Whittier; not yet do we find “It came upon the midnight clear,” “Eternal Ruler of the ceaseless round,” or “Thy Kingdom come, on bended knee” in *A.M.* Instead, the compilers of the 1916 Supplement dived into their Watts and their Wesley, and brought up such choice specimens as “Awake, our souls,” “How beauteous are their feet,” “Ye servants of God,” “Come, thou long-expected Jesus,” and (a boldness not equalled among Nonconformists outside Methodism), three new Wesley Communion hymns; this, to say nothing of Conder’s “The Lord is King,” Dugmore’s impressive “Almighty Father, Unoriginate with its monumental tune, and Hatch’s “Breathe on me.”¹ A few hymns seem to have come into that Supplement under the influence of *E.H.*, (“Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” “King of glory,” “Come down, O Love divine”—the last two without the *E.H.* tunes, of course); but really there is a startling and very important difference between the 1916 Supplement and the new material in *E.H.* Look at the figures! *E.H.* Contains 370 hymns that appear in *A.M.* up to No. 638; of the remaining 286, only thirty-seven appear in the second Supplement to *A.M.* Copyrights apart (and these overlappings include Latin and Greek hymns differently translated), this is remarkable.

There is a difference between the Whittier-Hosmer piety and the Watts-Wesley piety which is at present causing considerable theological controversy; *A.M.* seems to stand on one side, and *E.H.* on the other. The important difference between the two books, to my mind, is not that *A.M.* is low-church, and *E.H.* is high-church, but that *A.M.* is dogmatic-Anglican, and *E.H.* is liberal-Anglican.

The musical question is, of course, another issue altogether. So much of the music in *E.H.* was new, and remains unfamiliar, and so much of that is copyright and therefore unavailable to *A.M.*, that to compare the two books musically is to be in danger of misplacing emphasis and misusing evidence. That DOWN AMPNEY and SINE NOMINE are not in *A.M.* is no evidence concerning the musical taste of its compilers, because they are excluded for reasons other than musical; concerning gathering-notes, French Church melodies, folk-song adaptations, and Bach chorales there are two views, of which *E.H.* takes one and *A.M.* another, and we are not so sure as we once were that *E.H.* is invariably right.

As a hymn-book for use in the Anglican Church of to-day there is no question (apart from the liturgical issue) that *E.H.* is a better book all round than the 1889 *A.M.*; but between the 1916 *A.M.* and *E.H.* (whose words remain unaltered in the 1933 edition) there is much less to choose. Until we reach a synthesis of the two views which the books respectively exemplify, the need for both books will, in our view, remain. But, or course, we do not know anything yet of the proposed new *A.M.*!

E. R. R

¹ None of these are in *E.H.*