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### MAKING HYMNS IN AFRICA<sup>1</sup>

by the Rev. A. SANDILANDS, Kanye, Bechuanaland.

"Why do you make the poor Africans sing English hymns? Why cannot they sing their own African tunes?" Since part of my literature work for the church in Africa involves hymnology — if that is not too gradiloquent a term for pottering about with hymns and tunes in two languages — I may be able to give at least part of the answer.

**THE SINGING CHURCH.** First of all let it be known that the Bechuana church is a singing church. We have a hymnbook of 467 hymns, with four-part music in Tonic Sol-fa notation (we certainly would not be a singing church without that invaluable system of notation) which sells at 7/6 — and up to the time of the last war was selling at 2/6, perhaps the cheapest hymnbook in the world. It has been selling regularly, edition after edition, for over half a century.

**MOFFAT AND BRISTOL.** It shows two distinct types of hymn. Robert Moffat was our pioneer in hymnody, as he was in so many

<sup>1</sup> This article is printed here by courtesy of the editor of the London Missionary Society's *Chronicle*.



other things. I have seen an old words-only book containing 266 of his hymns, printed at Kuruman in 1870 — but there must have been earlier collections in use before that time. No less than 190 of our present hymns are over his name. The majority of them are four-line verses without any attempt at scansion or correct accentuation, set to C.M., L.M. and S.M. tunes, culled from the then standard 'Bristol Tune Book'. By modern standards, most of them are pretty awful; chunks of very pedestrian translation of English hymns, cut into the right number of syllables to suit the tunes. But they were a beginning, and the Bechuana people started to sing hymns.

**SANKEY HYMNS.** The second main element in our hymn-book is represented by some 150 hymns from Sankey's 'Sacred Songs and Solos'. These came in towards the end of last century, when many L.M.S. missionaries, along with innumerable other Christians, were strongly influenced by the wave of revival in Britain and America associated with the great names of Moody and Sankey. This revivalism was largely enshrined, and expressed, in its hymns. 'Sankey' was the great new hymn-book of the day, and its songs were sung with gusto in many African Mission houses. Now, today we look down somewhat superciliously upon most of that music; but it did a great work, and was a most effective handmaid of evangelism. The Sankey type of tune, as often as not musically trashy, was within the limits of the innumerable simple folk who were swept into experimental Christian religion: it had a strong (and not always superficial) appeal, being 'catchy' and singable; and the harmonies, frequently simple to the point of banality, were also within their compass, and in keeping with the nature and aim of the tunes. So, through such hymn-loving and hymn-writing missionaries as Roger Price, John Mackenzie, and James Good, that music poured into this country, and became a large element in our hymnody. For these men turned out better hymns than Moffat; some of them are still our best hymn writers. They had more knowledge of the language; and some of them began, very tentatively and unsystematically, to try to fit the normal stresses of the African language to the musical stresses of the tunes. But unfortunately the process stopped at that point. What ought to have been but a stage in the evolution of Bechuana hymns, suffered arrested development — it became crystallised or solidified into a permanence which it did not deserve, and which has lasted some sixty years. Our Tswana (Bechuana) hymn-book is that much out-of-date! And there isn't a scrap of real African music in it, from end to end.

**NO AFRICAN TUNES.** For one thing, early missionaries had neither time nor inclination — and perhaps not the knowledge — to commit to writing such bits of African music as they heard. There was, for another thing, a deeper reason. They came into this continent when things were very much more raw and wild and

unhappy and degraded than they are now. They were conscious of bearing the light of the Gospel from a comparatively enlightened and civilised Britain — and it never occurred to them to doubt that Christianity and civilisation were one and the same thing. They were not unnaturally obsessed with that double idea; in them was the light, and in Africa humanity was very very dark indeed. This was before the days of 'anthropology'. Their knowledge of African languages and customs, especially of the higher ranges of both, was meagre in the extreme. What they saw, day in day out, was the dirt, the barbarity, the degradation, the strife, the immorality; the life that, in Bishop Butler's words, was 'poor, nasty, brutish, short.' (And let us not forget that multitudes of ignorant or un-critical or un-Christian Europeans, in South and Central Africa, have very much that same attitude to all things African in this year of grace 1953.) So early Missionaries probably regarded what they heard of Bantu music as barbarous and cacophonous; the idea that any of it could be employed in worship would have been to them just ridiculous. And the Africans themselves, if they thought about it at all, probably agreed. Their music, the songs or dances or rhythms which they had, were inevitably strongly identified with the certainly un-European and un-Christian thoughts and customs of which these songs were a medium. Even today they tend to regard foreign hymn-tunes as being inherently more Christian than African music, because the foreign tunes seem to belong to religion alone, they have no other associations than worship.

**AFRICAN MUSIC.** Today, well over a hundred years since Moffat started making hymns, the outlook, as well as the conditions, have greatly changed: but in the meantime most of the old Bantu music has gone beyond recovery. There is little to indicate that most Africans regard this as a tragedy. Their music was at best fragmentary and undeveloped: there were some ploughing or hoeing songs, some threshing songs, used by the women, and some lullabies and domestic songs. There were work songs and some regimental songs, and probably (as today) many lampoons or local satire-songs about unpopular chiefs. (The latter are of course to be distinguished from the eulogies or 'praise-songs' of the chiefs and heroes, which were declaimed — never sung — on ceremonial occasions. They had a strong resemblance to the Song of Deborah in Judges.) And there were songs of the Initiation (circumcision) ceremonies of the boys and girls after puberty, which involved or contained much of the lore and the sex and morality codes of the tribe. I don't know that there was ever much that corresponded to the 'love songs' which form so large a part of European folk-music. For love and marriage did not coincide beyond a certain point; marriage was not a sentimental rose-coloured thing, it was an affair of families, social standing, cattle; it was the great cement of social and tribal life. It was not, for the most part, romantic.



**FOLK SONG TUNES.** Now, whether in Africa or England, the often-overlooked fact is that you cannot use folk-song for the purposes of worship until it has entirely lost its original associations, and come right away from its background. It is only during the last 50 years — since about the time of the appearance of the 'English Hymnal' — that old English folk-song tunes have been used for hymns. And it has only been possible because the ancient words of these songs have long ago fallen into oblivion. Musicians have discovered the tunes in old manuscripts, or have heard them and recorded them from old people in out-of-the-way corners of the land. 'Live' songs cannot be so used. Suppose a hymn-book editor were to set his hymns to 'Sally in our alley' or 'Dashing away with the smoothing iron' or 'The Lincolnshire poacher' or 'Old uncle Tom Cobleigh' or 'The little brown jug'? Or (Scottish tunes) to 'Duncan Gray cam' here to woo', or 'Johnnie Cope' or 'John Grumlie' or 'The lass o' Ballochmyle' or 'The Diel's awa' wi' the Exiceman'? (Not to mention tunes of bawdy soldiers' songs of either war or music hall ditties with perhaps somewhat doubtful allusions.) What would congregations say? Modern hymn-book editors 'get away with it' often just because they know that most folk are deplorably ignorant of their national music. In Sankey's collection one hymn is set to the tune of 'Robin Adair' (same as the Irish air 'Eileen aroon'), and another to 'Auld lang syne'. In a book of Children's hymns compiled by Herbert Wiseman (Oxford) before the war, a hymn is set to the Scots tune 'Yes-treen the Queen had four Maries', and another to 'A wee bird cam' tae oor ha' hoor'. First rate tunes, of course; and all right south of the Border. But you try it on Scottish kids — or congregations!

**DANGER OF FOLK-SONGS.** The point of this longish digression is, that that sort of consideration operates all the time when one attempts to use African vernacular music. The very fact that you hear a tune which you write down (thinking to use it later for a hymn), means that that tune is known and in use, and has its own strong secular associations in the minds of any Africans who hear it, which almost automatically puts it out of court for use in worship. Only when all its original significance has been sloughed off does it become available and valuable. So the answer to the critic who feels that Christian hymnody is a strange and unfamiliar thing in Africa, and who wants to use African music instead of this 'foreign Gothic', is simply, 'We do, and will, use African music whenever we can; but a little thought will show you that its not so simple as your question implies. Always its difficult, and often its impossible.'

**AFRICAN AIRS.** However, there are several ways of obtaining tunes which are either definitely African, or are inherently suitable for use in Africa. One way is to use African airs from another tribe

or area. Such have no vivid associations of work, or war, or sex; yet they are definitely African in scale and rhythm. (The scale is the pentatonic one, *d, r, m, s, l*, — no *t* or *f*.) Another way is to change, or adapt, or combine, bits of airs, especially if the airs are only known in restricted localities. A third way is to collect African music whenever possible, and study other peoples' collections, absorb the nature of it to your limit, and then write melodies as far as possible in the same idioms of tune and time. And that's not easy. Mrs. Agnes Mackenzie of the Church of Scotland Mission in Nyasaland published an extremely useful little collection (S.P.C.K.) of African airs: as a result largely of her work there are a number of real African tunes set to hymns in the Livingstonia Mission hymn-book, *Sumu za Ukristu*.

**NEGRO MUSIC.** Again, there are still further sources whence one can draw tunes suitable for African singing. One is the American Negro Spiritual music, that fascinating blend of West African musical modes and the Western music of the slave owners of America's deep south two centuries ago. Probably most of the 'Western' music was hymn tunes and folk-songs, some of them apparently Scottish. The Spirituals are a source of hymn-tune music which has not, so far, been used to any great extent: how far it is usable remains to be seen; but it has an underlying affinity that promises well.

**BRITISH FOLK SONGS.** Old Scots and Irish folk songs are also a good source. Many of these are fine airs; the time-patterns are seldom dull or flat; a great number are pentatonic, and some go back many hundreds of years. (One thinks of SLANE, GARTAN, BUNESSAN, and others.) Many such good tunes are no longer in popular use in the countries of their origin; they might well be transplanted into African hymn-books. (There are not so many Scots or Irish missionaries in the field that a possible feeling of incongruity need be an obstacle to more than an occasional isolated individual! Although I myself could never get accustomed, worshipping sometimes with the Basuto troops during the war, to hear them sing one of their hymns to the tune of 'On Ilkla Mo' baht 'at'! Good tune as it is.)

**CHINESE MUSIC.** Recently, the last great persecution of the Church has furnished me with an unexpected source. They 'that were scattered abroad (from China) and went about preaching the word (in Africa)', have (or one of them) brought to our land, among other good things, 'Hymns of Universal Praise', the hymbook of the six constituent churches in China. Here it comes, with quite a number of very interesting ancient pentatonic Chinese tunes, some at least of which ought to make effective tunes for a Bechuana hymn-book of the future. Curious that Chinese and African music (as well as Scottish, and perhaps ancient Greek) should employ the same scale, with the fourth and seventh tones omitted: on which



point Seward (preface to Fick Jubilee Singers song-book) had some remarks to make.

**AFRICAN MUSICIANS.** When will the Bechuana start to write tunes of their own? A few Africans are interested and keen. They see the need; and here and there in South and Central Africa, not to mention West Africa, African music is beginning to emerge. In our area nothing useful for worship has so far appeared, but doubtless it will come some day. Much of the little that is appearing is not really African, but a poor imitation of Western music. The thing that has (deplorably) become the 'African National Anthem' ('Nkosi sikelele iAfrika') is an indication, if an unfortunate one, of the music which is coming. (The scale, the range, the time, the fitting of words to musical stresses, are all uninspired and un-African, and may be said to follow the earliest missionary hymn-writing practice in the worst possible manner.) But something comparable to the Spiritual music will perhaps, in time, be evolved.

**MUSIC OF CHRISTENDOM.** Until that time, the vast body of hymnody of the universal church will remain the principal source for tunes. In which connection the more recent collections of hymns, notably the *Church Hymnary* provide many good virile tunes, some few with the trochaic endings we need. Of great interest to an African editor, also, are the modern pentatonic tunes of K. G. Finlay. (Six of his tunes are in *Congregational Praise*, and he has written others not included in that collection).

**PENTATONIC MUSIC.** Let it not be thought that only pentatonic tunes are deemed best for an African hymn-book. What is maintained is that, since this is the indigenous Bantu scale — quite uneducated Africans hereabouts just can't sing *d-t-d* or *m-f-m* — full advantage of that fact ought to be taken, and as many strong pentatonic tunes as possible made available. But of course tunes using the full diatonic scale are sung, if not always correctly, all over our field; and the natural musical ability of African people is such that, with training, they can sing, and sing well, whatever a normal congregation in Britain or America can sing. My own conviction is that, if only given good hymns and good training, our Bechuana congregational singing could compare favourably with any in the world. We must have lots — a majority always — of the best European and American standard tunes. But let us be delivered from those miserable concoctions (like Mason's 'BOSTON' or Boyd's 'PENTECOST') which meander endlessly, bar after dreary bar, around the five notes of the minor fifth!

**DIFFERENCE IN LANGUAGE.** But — and it is a big 'but' — just here we run into a difficulty. For there is a fundamental difference between the Bechuana language (or Tswana, as it is called) and the English language. To understand this difference look, for example, at your own hymnbook. You will notice that the last word

in almost any line of poetry — or any couplet if the lines are trochaic — is a monosyllable; for example, word, Lord, food, peace, rest, work, done, thee, Him, song, know, hear, God. That is to say, all such lines of poetry end in a stressed syllable, generally as the second syllable of an iambic foot, or the first syllable of a (deficient) trochaic foot. In the music, this means that the time-lines always end on a strong beat, the first beat of a bar.

**WORDS, WORDS, WORDS.** Now Tswana is quite differently constructed. All syllables are open — end in a vowel; but more important, the stress always comes, whether in word, phrase or sentence, on the second-last syllable; not (with one class of exceptions) on the last syllable. Words are always of the type (to take translations of the English examples given above), lefhoko, Morena, dijo, kagiso, tapologo, tiro, dirile, wena, Ene, pina or sefhela, itse, utlwa, Modimo. And in each case the ending is trochaic; the stress comes on the second-last vowel, the final vowel being left unstressed.

**AFRICAN WORDS TO MUSIC.** Hence, to wed Tswana words to the vast majority of hymn-tunes, the tune must be modified, generally by the addition of another note after the original last note — after the strong-beat cadence. By this means the stressed Tswana syllable is made to fall on the cadence note, which now becomes the second-last note of the line or tune. Sometimes it is not suitable to add a note after the cadence note, in this manner; in which case a somewhat similar effect can be obtained by making the pre-cadence syllable long — that is, giving it length, if not stress. Both methods work; but it takes some skill and experience, as well as musical feeling, to employ them effectively. ('Kitaba cha Tuni' — Anglican, Zanzibar — S.P.C.K., 1937 — consists of 442 Western tunes adapted thus to Bantu rhythms; not always successfully.) And there are a few tunes — 'LOBE DEN HERREN' is an example (Cong. Praise 45, Church Hymnary 22) — which have true strong-weak endings. (This hymn is really dactylic, except for the last foot in each long line.) Such are treasure-trove to the missionary hymnologist; but they are very few and far between. Thus music which suits dactylic or amphibrachic poetry is always much more suitable, for African hymns, than that which suits iambic or anapaestic poetry.

**PRESENT AND FUTURE.** So the difficulties in producing good African hymns are neither few nor small. And one over-riding difficulty is that most of the work has still to be done by Europeans: as yet, very very few Africans are writing religious lyrics in their own language. That should not be surprising, when we consider the tiny handful of men and women, out of the many millions of European Christians, who have produced hymns that could be called great, or even good. For a fine hymn is a most remarkable thing, quite apart from its music. It is poetry which, from the



technical point of view, is of a very high order; it is also at the same time Christian thought and feeling, born only of Christian experience, so clear and deep that it can delight, or inspire, or humble those who read it. But not until real African Christian poets do emerge will the long struggle begin to end, and the Church of this great African people get the hymnody which it deserves.

## WHAT REMAINS FOR THE MODERN HYMN WRITER TO DO?

by ERIK ROUTLEY.

(The following article contains in summary the points made by the Editor in his address to the Society at Stratford on Avon, 29th September, 1953.)

Perhaps there is something to be said for an article on hymn writing by one who can lay his hand on his heart and swear that, if his next meal depended on it, he could not write a hymn. These observations are made with great diffidence; they are experimental rather than dogmatic, and they presuppose only a concern and love for the sacred art of hymn writing and an admiration for its practitioners in this age as well as in the past.

One way and other our editor of the new *Julian* will have to take account of about half a million hymns, — even if that number includes those he must decide not to notice. To judge by the turnover of the Hymn Society's file, at least one hymn is being written by an Englishman, in this present age, every week. Our concern here is to find, if it be possible, the main stream of great hymnody which runs clearly through the great ocean of hymnody in general. I am persuaded that that metaphor will do; the stream of great hymnody in the past is as clearly discernible as is the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic. The question for the hymn writer of the present day is, of course, whether he is in the Gulf Stream, whether he is in the ocean at large, or whether (if we may boldly suggest it) he has drifted into the Sargasso sea.

Like John Calvin, we must admit reprobation but attend to salvation. It is a good thing to recall the great things of the past, and to examine the distinctions of our fathers. If we do that, perhaps we shall be able to make a few tentative indications of the direction in which the stream is now flowing. Where are the great hymns and what made them great?

Not to go further back than Watts, you will find in Watts an epitome of the whole story. You will find the general ocean of utility stuff that has had its uses and that is now worn out; some of it still gets printed but probably would have been dropped if it had not Watts's name on it. Of this kind I venture to suggest that 'Lord of the worlds above', his version of Psalm 84, is a fair example, — blameless indeed, but not much above the general eighteenth century run. Then there is the driftwood which was not

even included among the four hundred or so in the original *Congregational Hymn Book*, suitable now only for ribald quotation. But the stream, the warm and strong stream, is distinguishable indeed. 'When I survey', 'There is a land of pure delight', 'Give me the wings of faith', 'Jesus shall reign' . . . these need no eulogy here. Charles Wesley is in exactly the same case. And in both authors there are great things which have never been popular, and could never be, but which provide illustrations of mastery the more lucid because of their freshness and freedom from congregational convention. To take put one verse from each, consider this from Watts's 'Nature with open volume' (CP 129):

Here his whole name appears complete  
Nor wit can guess, nor reason prove  
Which of the letters best is writ,  
The power, the wisdom, or the love.

Or (I cannot resist it) this from 'We give immortal praise' (CP 220):

Where reason fails with all her powers  
There faith prevails, and love adores.

And from Wesley:

Thy goodness and thy truth to me,  
To every soul abound,  
A vast, unfathomable sea

Where all our thoughts are drowned.

From these the stream flows on. Montgomery's 'Lift up your heads, ye gates of brass', Kelly's 'The head the once was crowned', Milman's 'Ride on, ride on in majesty', Binney's 'Eternal Light!', Stone's 'The church's one foundation' — consider these, which there is no space here to quote, and will you not agree that they have not merely popularity, not merely excellence of craftsmanship, but *distinction*, a luminous, individual greatness that marks them out and gathers them together in a community of splendour? Is it not hymns like these that lift hymnody out of the commonplace and assure it a place of merit and eminence from which it can direct and reconcile the powerful forces of theology and culture?

Now the humblest of modern hymn writers is not human if he does not aspire to find himself in that stream. He wants to write what will last, and what will help. Similarly your modern editor wants to find, from the present and the past, work of enduring distinction.

The late Stephen Leacock published a capital little book in 1944 entitled *How to Write*. Not the least interesting of its chapters, as you might expect, is that headed 'How to write Humour'. A sentence from that chapter is very much to the present point. 'If you examine comic verse', he says, 'with a view to writing it, you will see that the essence of its literary appeal lies in the extraordinary correctness, aptness and simplicity of its words and phrases'.



He goes on to show by quotations how true this is of all great comic verse, and how a good effort can be killed by a single pretentious line. That, I believe, is just what we want here. Read Wesley and Watts and Doddridge and Montgomery at their greatest, and what do you see but, in their use of words, *correctness, aptness and simplicity*? And we may as well say flatly and without reserve that of any ten bad hymns, or second-rate hymns you care to examine, nine will certainly be found to be depressed to the second class simply by reason of their misuse of language. The language may be too topical, too much 'of its age'. The eighteenth century hymn writers (as Canon Briggs has often, and to my gratitude, pointed out to me) were fond of metaphors from trade; 'transac-tion', 'interest', and similar words we usually forgive in the great-est hymns that make use of them, but no doubt they provide an impediment to popular understanding, and contribute to the ob-scurity of the many unknown hymns that contain them. The 'worms', which in Watts provide such diverting images for modern men, are another clear case of bondage to contemporary language. These words are not essentially 'simple'. The classic and impreg-nable defence against the drift of language is, of course, to make use, when you want vividness, of the language of Scripture; and this is very well, provided you are not enslaving yourself to the verbal tricks of the Authorised Version. For although that has been a sheet-anchor of pious diction for three hundred years, radical alterations are likely in our religious talking-habits as a result of the revisions achieved in America and projected in this country. For enduring greatness you will have to rely on the *thought* of Scripture rather than on the shifting and unreliable ground of seventeenth century words. 'Come, O thou Traveller' will, one feels, survive the searching tests of revised translations;<sup>1</sup> the line 'let priest and people weep' (a reference to the A.V. of Joel ii 17) may not. A certain amount of conventional reference in modern hymns to 'my heart', though thoroughly scriptural, tends in in-directness and a lack of simplicity; I doubt whether the writer gains anything by saying 'my heart' when he means nothing more than 'I'.

But to put the converse, I think there are many hymns which are raised from mediocrity to inspiration by a couple of lines that show 'correctness, aptness and simplicity' of diction and thought. An outstanding example is Lynch's 'O where is he that trod the sea', in which every verse has, I suppose, at least one poorish line, but which opens all heaven at the couplet

Twas springtide when he blessed the bread  
And harvest when he brake.

Lynch again, in 'Lift up your heads, rejoice', wrote a passage

<sup>1</sup> Except in the line that has already perished — 'To me, to all thy bowels move'.

which throws penetrating light on the doctrine of the Second Coming:

The God of glory comes in gentleness and might  
To comfort and alarm, to succour and to smite.

You have there, I think, not merely this linguistic virtue which Leacock was asking for, but also singular faithfulness to the *thought*, rather than the letter, of scripture.

Upon this George Every wrote a useful comment in that section of his *Christian Discrimination* (1940) which deals with hymns. 'We can no longer assume', says he, 'the kind of intimate acquaint-ance with the Bible which Charles Wesley and Bishop Wordsworth were able to assume'. The new translations are going to lend a new point to that comment. But he goes on, 'the general level of information, though not of education, is higher than of old'. In consequence he urges that hymn writers turn to T. S. Eliot, in whom he particularly observes a 'power to identify his poetry with the voice of the common Christian through all the ages, to say

Forgive us, O Lord, we acknowledge ourselves as types of the  
Common man

Of the men and women who shut the door and sit by the fire,  
Who fear the blessing of God, the loneliness of the night of God,  
The surrender required, the deprivation inflicted,  
Who fear the injustice of men less than the justice of God,  
Who fear the hand at the window, the fire in the thatch, the  
fist in the tavern, the push into the canal,

Less than we fear the love of God.'

That is from *Murder in the Cathedral*, and is, of course, rustic and medieval in its context. Yet it has the common mind, and even the contemporary common mind, in it more intimately than you will find in many modern hymns. And above all, it has the simple, apt and correct word all the way, the sinister picture, the luminous image.

Now it ought to be said that all this occurred to men a genera-tion and more ago. Robert Bridges in his Yattendon hymns led a crusade against the conventionality and dullness of anglican hymn-ody of the 'nineties. What is his masterpiece, 'The duteous day' but a gesture against the evening hymn that is concerned simply with invoking divine aid against bad dreams and things that go bump in the night? Bad dreams are real, and Bridges did not live to see the full horror of what could happen in the nights of 1940. But neither did those whom he attacked. 'The duteous day' is not merely an exquisite poem; it is a celebration of the astronomic and imponderable beauty of night. I believe Newman had the same thought in 'I loved the garish day', but I am not sure that any other hymn writer did before Bridges.

In another way, of course, this is just what that much abused volume *Songs of Praise* tried to do in its day. Whatever may, and



indeed must, be said against that book, for this one thing it must be held aloft and praised as the work of brave and Christian men, that it sought to clear away the dead wood in order that the true flower of Christian vocabulary might have room to flourish. That principle was good. Songs of Praise shows you with what aptness, correctness and simplicity the great Christian poets of the seventeenth century could speak, —

O make us apt to seek and quick to find,  
Thou God most kind;  
Give us love, hope and faith in thee to trust  
Thou God most just;  
Remit all our offences, we entreat,  
Most good, most great;  
Grant that our willing though unworthy quest  
May through thy grace admit us 'mongst the blest.

(SP 534)

They sought the modern and sub-modern poets to breathe fresh air into the stuffiness of conventional Christian diction, — recall this on heaven:

They come with shining faces to the house of the Lord;  
The broken and the weary that life has racked and scored;  
They come hurrying and singing to sit down at his board.  
They are young and they are joyful in the house of the Lord.

(SP 196)

The editors of that book ransacked the literature of devotion as far back as Shakespeare and as far forward as Donald Hankey and Studdert Kennedy. (Studdert Kennedy! There was a man for the apt and simple word: a word and a blow with him!) They carried on *English Hymnal's* work in giving a place to Chesterton and to the Americans — anything, whether it would go to a singable tune or not — to let in the light, anything to forge new tools with cutting edges to replace the old rusty ones.

Much of this was erratic. Some of it was too contemporary to last. Sometimes enthusiasm broke the queue and dogma was kept waiting to be served (as in the last line of Studdert Kennedy's famous hymn about the machines, SP 698). But when one looks through the modern hymn books of the 'fifties, the question remains, — has this gesture of *S.P.* been fully assessed and appreciated? Do our modern hymn writers want to do this kind of thing, or do they want to carry on in the style of Christopher Wordsworth (in George Every's admiration of whom some of us find it hard to share)? I do not at all want to be invidious. I very rarely see a hymn by a new author that tells me categorically that he has turned his back on modern needs. I can only say this, that here and there, but not universally and boldly enough, I believe we can pick out the course of the stream. John Arlott (BBC 435) has it; Timothy Rees (BBC 273) has it — and there he is singularly fortunate in

Herbert Murrill's music. (All this applies to music too, and the outlook there is, on the whole, bleaker than in the area we must here keep to). I find no new lines in the revised Hymns A. & M., but I do find a few tunes, that encourage hope. There is nothing, I think, in the revised Public School Book. I make bold to offer one or two hymns in *Congregational Praise*, but only one tune, that are cutting ice in the way I want. (Hymns 348, by Arthur Driver, 532 by Henry Carter, 117 by Canon Briggs, 342 by Elvet Lewis, and perhaps a few others; and I think we must find a place for one tune — the first at hymn 21. I have not room to quote these, and judgments may differ). One or two fresh and challenging hymns may be found quoted in the pages of my *Hymns and Human Life*, should anybody care to consult it.

No hymn writer achieves very often that life-giving power that is the concern of this paper. Yet no generation has yet passed without producing some clear indication of it. It is, I think, useless to try more specifically to isolate its constituents. We can say that blunted, journalistic, careless writing is a cardinal sin. We can say that narrowness of vision and specialisation of devotional sympathy is a sin. We can say that shockable conventionality is a sin. We can discern these and fight them when we see them — or what's a Hymn Society for? But we can be thankful for that disciplined simplicity, that athletic clarity which raises the truly great above the common run, and we can urge that it be cultivated. That is the writers' business. I am here content merely to draw attention to it.

## REVIEW

*Companion to Congregational Praise*, edited by K. L. Parry, with notes on the music by Erik Routley. (Independent Press, 30/-).

The names of the two persons responsible for this book give certain promise that it will prove good. It is, however, more than good; it is first class. For those looking for the principles by which the compilers of *Congregational Praise* were guided and the reasons for specific changes and choices, it could hardly be bettered. Moreover, it is an unrivalled mine of information on the hymns and their authors, the tunes and their composers, of a hymn-book of very high quality, and that gives it a value for all who are interested in hymnology. The word 'unrivalled' is used deliberately, because, especially on the musical side where every year research is bringing to light fresh facts, it supplies information not hitherto available (and in this regard it owes an inestimable debt to the kindness of the Rev. Maurice Frost who has put his profound learning fully at Dr. Routley's disposal). Its scholarship is admirable. So also are its style and its method of presentation, which are at once lively and judicious. The expert will find in it the sort of data he looks



for; the ordinary reader is likely to have his interest and enthusiasm aroused and his horizons widened in an exciting way.

This *Companion* follows closely the general plan and arrangement of the *Handbook to the Church Hymnary*. The main body of the book consists of notes on the words and music of every hymn in *C.P.*, followed by biographical notes on the authors and composers. The Editor has written the notes on the hymns and authors, Dr. Routley those on the tunes and composers.

Pages might be filled drawing attention to the felicities each of these writers has given us. Here, however, we can do little more than remark the restrained objectivity with which they skilfully combine loyalty to their colleagues in responsibility for the hymn book with loyalty to their consciences. The innocent are undisturbed; the not so innocent discern the poker face. If the reader wishes an illustration, let him turn to Mr. Parry's comment on an embarrassing little hymn (what were the compilers thinking of when they decided upon this importation?) beginning, 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me', or to Dr. Routley's biographical note on F. C. Maker (bearing in mind the part the Appendix plays in *C.P.*).

Just occasionally there are rather unconvincing defences of changes which some of us will feel need a lot of defending. Thus Mr. Parry says that A. C. Coxe's 'Saviour, sprinkle many nations' has been altered to 'Saviour, quicken many nations' 'as being nearer to the meaning of Isaiah 52:15'. But how irrelevant! The hymn-writer's inspiration was drawn from the Authorized Version. What has correct textual exegesis to do with the matter? On this principle, the compilers should have changed the third verse of Psalm 23 (Scottish Psalter) to read, 'Yea, though I walk in deep dark vale', in order to conform to what is probably the correct Hebrew pointing. Happily, they have done no such thing. Or, again, Dr. Routley's unsubstantiated statement that 'there is an unusually strong case . . . for including a simpler version' of *Neumark*, even if true, is hardly a compelling reason for excluding the Bach version which many of the Congregational churches had enjoyed for years.

One excellence must not go unnoticed. Here and there Dr. Routley writes a line or two on what to look out for in a particular tune, or on how a particular hymn should be sung, or on why one tune is preferable to another, or on when one and when another tune is to be preferred. These lucid notes are most valuable.

In an interesting comment on Watts's 'Eternal Power, whose high abode', Mr. Parry says of Watts's footnote — 'Tibi silet laus, O deus (Psalm 65:1)' — that this is 'apparently from some early version of the Psalm'. *Versio Hebraica Hieronymi*, where Ps. 65 begins 'Tibi silet laus Deus in Sion', would seem to be the answer; and, if so, it throws a pleasing shaft of light on Watts's scholarly habits.

Space allows scarcely more than a bare mention of other parts of the *Companion*. For General Introduction we are given the essay the Rev. A. G. Matthews wrote, and first published separately, to place *C.P.* in its historical perspective in the history of hymnody. It is of the rare quality to be expected from his pen. There follows a paper on the hymn books of Congregationalists (for whom the writer has a name all of his own) by the late Dr. A. J. Grieve, to whom Mr. Parry pays warm tribute in the Preface. It contains an immense amount of curious information, and, on p. xxxi, a sentence that would serve as a perfect warning example for would-be writers of English, which is a sign, among others, of the misfortune that Dr. Grieve did not live to revise his MS. Miss Elsie H. Spriggs follows with a brief and eminently sensible article on Children's Hymns. By implication, though doubtless not of express intent, it repudiates the deplorable 'Index of Hymns for Young People' in *C.P.*

In the course of the musical notes there are at appropriate points admirable excursions by Dr. Routley on the names of hymn-tunes, French church melodies, Bach chorales, gathering-notes, borrowings from the classical masters, Welsh hymn-tunes, metrical psalms, and the music of the chants. The second of these should be read, and modified, in the light of the Rev. C. E. Pocknee's researches, the results of which are given in a note at the end of the invaluable Chronological List of Sources cited in the Musical Notes.

Besides the above-mentioned Chronological List, there is an index of original first lines of translated hymns, an alphabetical index of tunes, and an index of first lines. There is, alas, no index of Scriptural references, which would have been a boon to ministers.

The Independent Press has produced a very fine book in a worthy manner.

E. R. MICKLEM.

#### CRIMOND

We have received a letter from the Reverend Alexander Chisholm, which throws further light on the controversy over this tune. The last we heard of it was in Bulletin No. 63, page 99.

Dear Dr. Routley,

In your 'Controversy' about CRIMOND on the Bulletin of the Hymn Society, dated Spring 1953, you suggest that Miss Irvine may have had only an idea of the tune in question, and that David Grant may have given such help as would justify his title to its composition.

I would point out two facts which seem to me to give Miss Irvine whatever merit is due.

In a letter of May 31st, 1911, her sister, Anne M. Irvine, not only says 'It was composed by my late sister', but, 'I have a copy of *The Precentor's Companion and Teacher's Indicator to the*



*Northern Psalter and Hymn Tune Book*, by William Carnie, Aberdeen, with tune CRIMOND in it, which was used in Crimond Church choir. I think it was William Carnie who got it harmonised by David Grant as noted in the *Psalter*'. If the tune was sung in Crimond, Anne Irvine would surely know that her sister had written the melody.

Another fact is that local tradition attributes the tune to Miss Seymour Irvine. I have met several people who can testify to this tradition.

The writer to *The Scotsman* asks why the sister did not give evidence sooner. It is rather unfair to say that she waited 36 years to tell a startled world that Grant and Carnie were imposters. She was asked to give any information she had on the matter, and it was in answer to this invitation that she gave the simple facts as she knew them. 'I shall be happy', she says, 'to tell you all I know about the tune CRIMOND . . . Hoping this information will be of use . . .' Some people do not rush into print to challenge claims that may be questionable, nor did she do so.

I have been in correspondence with the present holder of the letter, and hope that it may be deposited in King's College, Aberdeen.

I expect you know the rhyme which favours David Grant as the writer of the tune :

Then if our friend should ever dee,  
And seek the unkent valley-O,  
His epitaph it read shall be  
From Bon-Accord to Callae;  
Auld Fittie Bell shall mournfu' ring,  
While o'er his grave our heads we hing,  
And softly, slowly, sadly sing  
Sweet Crimond and then Raleigh-O.<sup>1</sup>

West Manse,  
Alloa, 20 v. 53.

Kind regards, Yours sincerely,

ALEX. CHISHOLM.

<sup>1</sup> RALEIGH is a tune attributed without dispute to Grant. Its resemblance to CRIMOND has slightly complicated this controversy! (Editor).

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

*Please Note* that Subscriptions for the year 1954 are now due, and may be remitted to the Treasurer in the envelope enclosed. Readers are reminded of the new regulation, approved by the Executive, by which a subscription of five guineas entitles the subscriber to life membership of the Society.

## SHEFFIELD 1954

Please note the date of the Sheffield Conference, in celebration of the death of James Montgomery — July 6—9, 1954.