

**A SHORT COMMENTARY
ON THE HYMNAL NOTED;
FROM ANCIENT SOURCES**

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A short commentary on the Hymnal noted; from ancient sources by John Mason Neale

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JOHN MASON NEALE

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ON

THE HYMNAL NOTED,

from Ancient Sources.

INTENDED CHIEFLY FOR THE USE OF THE POOR.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE little collection of hymns which we have just begun to use in this church, is very different, and is made on quite a different principle, from the other collections which you may have seen. I will explain how this is.

When the reformers drew up the Prayer Book which we now use, they did not sit down, and write it out of their own heads. They took the old Prayer Book of the Church of England, which was written in Latin; and they translated the new Prayer Book out of that; and admirably well they did it.

But there was one part which they did not translate; and that was the hymns. They tried more than once, but they could not succeed: and they had wisdom enough to

know that they were not successful. They only put one translation in the Prayer Book, the hymn *Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire*, in the Ordination Service. They left it as their wish, however, that others might arise in the English Church who should be able to translate the hymns which they left untranslated.

But as years went on, this their wish was neglected. Men put the psalms into verse, and sang *them* by way of hymns: forgetting that the psalms are best to be sung in a very different way, namely by chanting them.

At last people saw that hymns were wanted. But instead of looking back to the old hymns of the Church of England, they wrote new ones: and so a great number of "collections," that have no authority, came into the Church.

In the little book which we now use, the wish of the English Reformers has been carried out. The old hymns of the English Church are translated here, just as the old prayers of the English Church are translated in the Prayer Book; and they are given to

the old tunes, which was also the wish of the Reformers.

These hymns were not written by any one man, nor at any one time. They are offerings, cast into the treasury of the Church, slowly, and at different periods, during the space of a thousand years. The writers of most of them are unknown. Of those whom we do know, some are among the greatest Saints that God has raised up in the Church.

These very hymns, then, have consoled thousands of God's faithful servants in all kinds of circumstances, almost from the days of the Apostles to our own:—and if on this account only, they ought to be dear to us. But written as they were, not *to order*, not because they were wanted, but because the feelings of the writers were so warm at the moment that they *would* express themselves, written, as many of them were, by such great Saints,—they must have a depth and a fulness of meaning which cannot be expected in other hymns.

And this fulness of meaning makes them, just as it makes the collects of our Prayer

Book, sometimes difficult to be understood. For this reason the following explanation of them has been written.

The hymns themselves, being so different from those to which we are chiefly accustomed, will perhaps, at first sight, seem strange and cold. But the more they are studied, the more their value will be seen and felt. God grant that we may so use them as, in His good time, to be counted worthy of joining with their writers, and the thousands of faithful Christians whose comfort they have been, in that new song, which no man can learn, save the hundred and forty and four thousand, which are redeemed from the earth !

A Short Commentary
ON THE
HYMNAL NOTED.

I.

It is fit that, in ending the week, we should lift up our hearts to that Blessed TRINITY in Whom we live and move and have our being. The hymn therefore is addressed to the Three glorious Persons. 1. *Trinity of blessed light.* Not only because "GOD is light, and in Him is no darkness at all;" but because we receive spiritual light, when we are baptized in the Name of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST. 2. *Of princely might.* So we read in Psalm li. 12: "Stablish me with Thy *free, or princely, SPIRIT.*" We call on GOD not only as Almighty, and therefore able to help us; but as Princely, that is ready to bestow His blessings on us as a