

STUDIES OF FAMILIAR HYMNS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649715572

Studies of Familiar Hymns by Louis F. Benson

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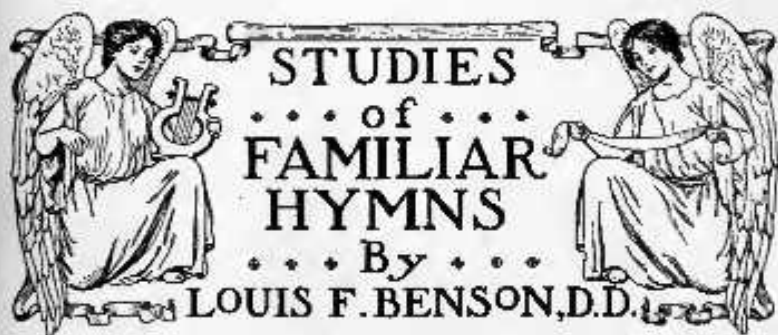
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LOUIS F. BENSON

**STUDIES OF
FAMILIAR HYMNS**



STUDIES
... of ...
FAMILIAR
HYMNS

... By ...
LOUIS F. BENSON, D.D.

H Y M N S
A N D
Spiritual Songs.

In Three BOOKS.

- I. Collected from the Scriptures.
II. Compos'd on Divine Subjects.
III. Prepared for the Lord's Supper.

With an **ESSAY**

Towards the Improvement of Christian Psalmody, by the Use of Evangelical Hymns in Worship, as well as the Psalms of *David*.

By *I. WATTS*.

And they sung a new Song, saying, Thou art worthy, &c. for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us, &c. Rev. 5. 9.
Soliti essent (i. e. Christiani) convenire, carmenque Christo quasi Deo dicere. Plinius in Epist.

L O N D O N,
Printed by *J. Haufreys*, for *John Lawrence*,
at the Angel in the *Poultry*. 1707.

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FAMILIAR HYMNS

BY
LOUIS F. BENSON, D.D.

EDITOR OF "THE HYMNAL, PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE
U. S. A.," "THE HYMNAL FOR USE IN CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCHES," "THE CHAPEL HYMNAL,"
AND "THE SCHOOL HYMNAL"

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PHILADELPHIA
THE WESTMINSTER PRESS

1903

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Published March, 1903

21613
1916

PREFACE

WHEN Dr. Ray Palmer, late in life, came to narrate the origin of his youthful hymn, "My Faith Looks Up to Thee," he explained that he would feel no little delicacy in so doing, "were it not that in one way and another it has happened that very inaccurate, and in some instances wholly apocryphal, things have been reported concerning it. It has furnished quite a striking illustration of the difficulty of transmitting verbally, with entire accuracy, a few simple facts, from one person to another." "Slight inaccuracies, rhetorical statements, and the imaginations of writers or speakers," he goes on to say, "have sometimes combined to form quite an unauthentic history of its origin."

Dr. Palmer's chagrin over the literature setting forth the history of his own hymn appears to have been shared, measurably, by many readers of the popular literature setting forth the history of the hymns in which they themselves happen to be interested. The frankness also of Dr. Palmer's criticism has been emulated by them—a frankness which has fulfilled itself (one would hope) in

expressing the opinion that the desire to tell a good story, the ambition to furnish a racy anecdote for homiletical purposes, is coupled, at times, with a weakening hold upon the realities.

'Twere pity if 'twere true: and the present writer is not solicitous to defend all that he has read upon the history of our hymns. Yet he would venture the remark (though it be no more than a plea of confession and avoidance) that the telling of the true story of a hymn is not so simple a task as some readers may have assumed it to be, but is, on the contrary, an undertaking requiring patient investigation at first hand.

One does not know the history of a hymn till he has traced it to its source and studied its original text and surroundings; till he has worked over its bearings, biographical and hymnological, and has tracked its subsequent career, textual and liturgical, by actual handling of the hymnals and other books in which it appears; till he has sought out and scanned such landmarks as remain to testify to its spiritual history, its use and influence over men.

Such investigations involve the pains of gathering, or of finding access to, extensive collections of hymn books, books of poetry, biographies, fugitive publications, and material of many sorts. A tedious task, no doubt, unless lightened by love! That some who have felt the call to narrate the story of our hymns have sought the goal by a shorter road affords, it may be, an explanation of

the "apocrypha" and the "anecdote" of popular hymnology.

Contemplating the simplicity of the results of his studies of familiar hymns as set forth in this book, the writer is almost ashamed thus to hint at the care of his preparation. It had been better, possibly, simply to say that while he has tried to be interesting, he has tried yet more to be trustworthy.

The general character and purpose of these Studies is explained by their origin. This book grew out of a series of six papers (expanding, under encouragement, to twenty-five) written for *Forward* and *The Wellspring*, the admirable periodicals of the Presbyterian and Congregational publishing houses, designed for young people and the family. For the book these Studies have been rewritten to a somewhat larger scale, but with an effort not to sacrifice too much of their original simplicity. The fact of their origin explains also the appending to each Study of "Some Points for Discussion": the hope having been (it still abides) that groups or societies of young people might be led to think over and discuss the message of the hymns they so often sing, sometimes, it may be, too thoughtlessly.

Between the hymns here studied there is no intended connection; each hymn being chosen for its own sake—for some distinction it had, but with an eye at the same time upon the veracious material for illustrating it at the writer's command. For that reason a chronological