

HYMNS AND THEIR STORIES

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Hymns and Their Stories by A. E. C. & Edgar C. S. Gibson

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A. E. C. & EDGAR C. S. GIBSON

**HYMNS AND
THEIR STORIES**

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AND THEIR STORIES.

BY
A. E. C.

WITH A PREFACE

BY
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PREFACE.

WE are told in Dr. Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* that "the total number of Christian hymns in the two hundred or more languages and dialects in which they have been written or translated is not less than four hundred thousand"—a fact which bears striking testimony to the position that the singing of hymns holds in the devotions of the Christian Church. And although hymns must always stand or fall by their own merits, and the origin and authorship of many of the noblest of them is unknown, yet there can be no doubt that the interest attaching to a hymn is greatly increased when we are able to refer them to their right authors, and assign them to particular occasions in their lives. We all know what a gain it is to the Psalms when we are permitted to associate them with definite incidents in the life of David, or to illustrate them from the events of the history of Israel. So is it with the hymns which we use in

our churches. In many cases there are traditions of no slight interest and beauty—in some cases authentic information is not wanting—in regard to the occasions on which they were composed ; while even to know the names of their authors, and the times at which they lived is sometimes sufficient to suggest associations which give fresh interest to familiar words. To give but a single example. Such hymns as “ Brief life is here our portion,” and “ Jerusalem, the golden,” receive a new significance when we recollect that they belong to the age of the Crusades, when “ men’s hearts were fired with love and devotion to that Master in Whose honour they bore the Red Cross, and Whose tomb they went to rescue from heathen spoilers.” With this thought in our minds, we can see at once that “ the hymns themselves speak of the time in which they were written—of the glories of the *New Jerusalem*, of peace after war, of rest after battle.”¹

It is no wonder then that the study of Hymnology has proved a fascinating one, and that the works which deal with it are very numerous. Never perhaps was greater interest taken in it than at the present day. In this country the works of Lord Selborne, the late Archbishop Trench, and John Mason Neale did perhaps more than

¹ See p. 60.

anything else to awaken this interest, and promote a knowledge of the subject, while quite recently a fresh impetus has been given to the study by the publication of Dr. Julian's great work already alluded to, the *Dictionary of Hymnology*, a work in which full information may be found on an enormous number of hymns, and on all subjects connected with them and their authors. This volume, however, is of course designed for the student rather than for the general reader, and is on too large a scale to be widely circulated. There was room, therefore, for a small work which should popularize the subject, and tell in simple language the story of the growth of Christian hymnody, assigning, as far as possible, to their proper dates and authors those universal favourites which find a place in all the hymn-books in common use. This work has been admirably done by A. E. C., who, in this series of papers, to which I have been asked to contribute a few words by way of Preface, has given a very careful sketch of the whole subject—stopping short designedly before the present day, so as to exclude reference to living writers in this country. Portions of some of these papers have already appeared in the *Dawn of Day*, but they have been considerably altered and added to, and are well worth preserving in a permanent form. They furnish an excellent introduction to a subject

which seems to grow in interest the more it is studied, and the stories collected in them will often be found to furnish new and delightful illustrations of the old truth that—

“A verse may find him whom a sermon flies,
And turn delight into a sacrifice.”

EDGAR C. S. GIBSON.

*Wells, Somerset,
July 7, 1894.*

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