

A review of
The Songs of Zion, Our Only Manual of Praise

By Rev. J. R. Lawson, Barnesville, New Brunswick

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This well-written Tractate is a reprint, with some omissions and additions, of articles which were inserted in a provincial Paper, on the subject of inspired Psalmody and modern hymns. We rejoice sincerely that the esteemed author has been induced to put his clear Scriptural thoughts and able convincing argument in a permanent form, for general circulation. The issue of the Pamphlet is at present most seasonable; as the subject of the Church's praise is engaging the attention of many thoughtful minds and the deliberations of ecclesiastical assemblies. There is a wide-spread dissatisfaction with many of the hymns which have been long in use; and the conviction is, in many cases, becoming deeper, that the only safe resting place is a return to primitive apostolic practice, in the exclusive employment of the songs of inspiration in Divine worship. The author justly remarks—"The songs of the Church must exert an equally powerful influence on her creed and her piety." Throughout the Tractate, the matter discussed is stated with singular clearness, and, in a brief compass, is reasoned out with much candour and cogency. The question is thus stated in the opening :—

"We have in the Bible a book called 'the Book of psalms,'—a book given by inspiration of God, for the special purpose of being used in His praise. Ought we to use that book exclusively in our Saviour's worship, or are we at liberty to sing whatever we please in lieu of it, or in addition to it, provided it be scriptural in its matter."

After some preliminary remarks, the writer lays down this proposition—"The Psalms of David, in the best metrical translation available, or chanted in prose, should be used in the service of praise, to the exclusion of all other compositions, whatever may be their literary, poetical, or doctrinal excellencies." The argument in support of this fundamental statement is that, 1. "The inspired Psalms are quite sufficient for all the purposes for which a manual of praise is required." 2. "The Psalms of David have the authority of a Divine appointment." 3. "No other book of spiritual songs has the same divine authority." The objections to the exclusive use of the inspired songs are fully considered, and ably refuted. After a fair vindication of the Scottish metrical version of the Psalms, Mr. Lawson presents the following satisfactory "concluding observations." "In singing the Psalms we are sure that we are singing what is acceptable to the Lord. The exclusive use of the inspired Psalms would powerfully tend to the promotion of Christian union; it would promote Congregational singing; and would cause the authority of the word spoken to be more deeply and universally recognized." We freely give this excellent Tractate, which the Publisher has issued in a neat and attractive form, our warmest recommendation; its wide circulation cannot fail to prove highly beneficial to the Church at the present crisis.