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A Review of
A Plea for the Songs of Zion;
or, the Book of Psalms the only Inspired and Divinely
Appointed Matter of Praise.

By the Rev. William Hanna,

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This is the second faithful testimony against the corruption of worship, emanating from ministers of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland, within a very brief period. We hail these productions as proof that even the younger ministers in that Church are truly up to the mark in this and kindred subjects. Being aware that many of the General Assembly ministers use the Psalms of David exclusively in the worship of God, we have been surprised that none of them have lifted a written testimony against the innovations of their brethren in the matter of hymn-singing. We are aware that the Rev. Dr. Cooke and others have spoken out on this subject in courts of the Church; but what we would desiderate, is a free discussion, through the medium of the press, followed by judicial action in the courts, supreme and subordinate.

The present time seems especially favourable for a calm review of the practice of the Church. The revival movement was introduced by a return to the use of an inspired Psalmody. Those awakened seemed to think that nothing else was so adapted to their experience. Had this early spiritual taste been fostered by ministers and others conducting revival meetings, the exclusive use of the Psalms might easily have been re-established. This, however, has not been the case. Through the agency of ministers and revival leaders, hymns have been scattered broadcast upon the community, and several pamphlets have appeared in their defence. To meet and counteract this tendency, the Rev. Messrs. Chancellor and Hanna have entered the lists in behalf of the purity of worship. Both have found ample scope, and have done their work well. We had an opportunity of reviewing the pamphlet of the former (vol. iv., p. 587), and now beg to call attention to that of Mr. Hanna.

He presents his argument for the exclusive use of the inspired Psalmody under the following heads:—"The Book of Psalms, a collection of Inspired Songs"—"The design of the Book of Psalms"—"The Psalms employed as matter of praise in the Temple and in the Synagogue"—"Scripture authority for the use of the Psalms under the present dispensation"—"The use of uninspired Hymns in Divine Praise entirely devoid of scriptural warrant"—"The voice of the early Church in favour of the Psalms and against the use of Hymns"—"The History of the Christian Church in regard to the use of the Psalms and the introduction of Hymns; together with a historical account of our Metrical Version, and concluding argument for the exclusive use of the Inspired Psalmody." The Pamphlet, as a whole, is judiciously and calmly written; while the arguments presented are luminous and conclusive. Its careful perusal will tend to confirm those who

cannot conscientiously unite in the singing of hymns, and is sufficient to convince those who, through ignorance or prejudice, have substituted them for the inspired Songs of Zion.

We look upon the advocates of a human Psalmody as the greatest enemies to the union and uniformity of the Church of Christ. With such it is even now, as with the Corinthians, reproved by the Apostle, to whom he said, "How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." Hymn-singing has ever been an effective means of giving currency to false doctrine; while false doctrines and unscriptural practices have been the fruitful source of divisions in the Church. The authorized use of hymns raises an effectual barrier in the way of union. Our author truly remarks that "the number and variety of human hymns now in use is almost incredible." There are Congregational, Baptist, Unitarian, English Presbyterian, United Presbyterian, Methodist, and New Connection Methodist hymn-books. What is this but that Babel-confusion condemned by the Apostle! There must be a return to the inspired Psalmody ere the unity and uniformity of the Church can be realized. The Book of Psalms presents a permanent basis for the union and uniformity of the Church in the matter of praise. Depart from this and there is no limit to disunion—no end to confusion. As a specimen of the ability with which our author conducts his argument, we give the following extracts. Though they contain only a small part of the proof adduced by Mr. Hanna, the baseless character of one of the most plausible arguments for hymn-singing is very satisfactorily proven.

The passages of Scripture adduced by many, as settling the question in favour of the use of uninspired hymns are, "Be filled with the spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. v. 18, 19.), and the corresponding prescription of duty (Col. iii. 16).

"From a close and careful examination of these two passages," says our author, "it will appear evident that they afford no foundation for the use of hymns.

"The terms—*Psalmos, hymnos, ode*—employed in the original, are the same in both passages, and correspond to the titles given to the Psalms in the Septuagint and in the original Hebrew. 1. The titles prefixed to the Psalms in our Hebrew Bibles are considered by many of equal authority with the Psalms themselves. On this point the learned Professor Alexander, of Princeton, remarks — 'They (the titles) are found in the Hebrew text, as far as we can trace its history, not as addenda, but as integral parts of the composition.' These titles are *Mizmor*, *Shir*, and *Tehilla*, and a few without any title. 2. In the Septuagint version, a Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was in common use at Ephesus and Collosse, we have *Mizmor* translated *Psalmos*, *Shir* translated *ode*, and eighteen Psalms with the title *Halleluja*, which corresponds precisely with the Greek term *Hymnos*. 3. Mark how nearly these terms agree with the words of the Apostle. In the Septuagint, there are *Psalmos, ode*, and *alleluja*, equivalent to *hymnos*; and in the original of the New Testament, the words employed by Paul are *Psalmos, ode, hymnos*. When, therefore, the Apostle commanded the Ephesians and Colossians to sing praise to God in 'psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs,' he was using the very terms by which the Psalms, according to their titles, were designated in that version of the Old Testament, which was in common use among them."

In respect of authority for this interpretation of the passage, Mr. Hanna adds, as the conclusion of a valuable chapter of his work,—

"That these Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, are all contained in 'the Book of Psalms,' is maintained by writers of the highest distinction. Dr. Owen, and twenty-five others (among whom are to be found the most illustrious divines that have ever adorned the Church), express their opinion on this point in the following words:—'To us David's Psalms seem plainly intended by these terms of Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, which the Apostle useth' (Eph. v. 19; Col. iii. 16). The learned Dr. Gill, in his commentary, remarks—'The hymns are only another name for the Book of Psalms,' and, 'by spiritual songs are meant the same Psalms of David and Asaph.' 'Macknight limits 'the Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs,' mentioned by the Apostle, to those which were recorded in the Scriptures, and to such as were dictated by the Spirit.'¹ Calvin, Beza, Bloomfield, Brown, Home, Durham, Bengel, and many other eminent writers, maintain the same view, viz., that the realms, hymns, and spiritual songs, mentioned by the Apostle, are all included in the Book of Psalms. From what has been adduced, the intelligent and impartial reader will easily perceive that the mere fact of the matter of praise being designated by three terms—Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs—does not afford the shadow of evidence that the hymns or spiritual songs spoken of by the Apostle are uninspired, or in any respect different from the Psalms. And a close examination of the two passages reviewed, affords the most convincing evidence that the hymns and spiritual songs are all included in the Book of Psalms; and that, when the Apostle used the language of these verses to the Ephesians and Colossians, he was speaking of the whole of the Book of Psalms in the very terms with which these early Christians were most familiar."

We cordially recommend the pamphlet to our readers. The subject demands the careful study of every friend of truth and unity.

¹ See Gill, *The True Psalmody*, pp. 95, 96.