

# OUR MONTHLY.

A

## RELIGIOUS AND LITERARY MAGAZINE.

JANUARY—1870.

### THE THEBAN LEGION.

BY PROF. W. M. BLACKBURN.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### VICTOR'S FAITH TESTED.

THE April days of the Christian year 276 made damp the tents of the Roman legions who lingered in their winter-quarters at Tarsus. Most of the men were homesick, restless, and eager for the march into Italy.

"If a bath in this old town gave Alexander the Great a cold, and threw him into a nearly fatal fever," said the rough Maximian, "then what of us poor fellows who are drenched through day and night?"

"As soon as our good emperor recovers his health," replied Probus, "we shall be ready to move."

The emperor was Tacitus, who bore the name of the great Roman historian, and who claimed to be his descendant. He was an aged man, learned, mild, generous, just, temperate; the enemy of all pomp, an admirer of the simple manners of the ancient Romans, a reformer of abuses, and a rigid economist in national affairs. He had won the esteem of all Christians by his tolerance. His predecessor, Aurelian, had not been content to extend to them the freedom enjoyed for nearly twenty years, and had signed new edicts of

persecution. But death removed the persecutor, and Tacitus made void the cruel edicts. He had reigned but six months, and a fever was now consuming his life.

"If we strike tents," said Maximian, "we shall have hard marches. What roads, swamps, torrents, and mountains! Come, Victor, why don't you pray to Paul, your god, who you say was born in this ancient city? Pray to him and have these rains stopped."

The rude scoff was pleasing to many a soldier, and the laugh was raised.

"I do not worship Paul," meekly answered Victor. "Was Paul crucified for me? Nay; it was Paul's Lord who died and rose again. I only wish my brave commander would read the letters of the great apostle, and learn whom to worship."

"Can you never cease talking of Paul?" said Maximian, angrily, and starting as if he would drive the Christian soldier from the tent.

"I can never cease to honor and love him, for under his preaching my forefathers were converted from paganism, and to this day their children keep the Christian faith. Some of them sealed their testimony to Christ with their blood. They were burned—they were butchered!"—

## THE MUSIC OF THE SANCTUARY.

BY REV. L. J. HALSEY, D. D.

WHOSO offereth praise glorifieth me, saith the Lord, in that inspired psalmody which bears the name of David, and has become the song-book of the ages. Reverential and adoring praise is the highest, holiest public service a united congregation can render to the Triune God. But, in order to be acceptable, it must be spiritual. Whether private or public, individual or collective, the prime essential of all true praise is that it should be presented to God with the spirit and the understanding of the worshiper. Offered to a pure spiritual God, it must be a pure, spiritual sacrifice. For the Lord "abhors the sacrifice where not the heart is found."

But, of necessity, it must take an outward form. It must express itself through the organs of our material bodies. It is a service of the lips, as well as of the heart. The tongue, "the glory of our frame," with its living breath, must offer this incense of praise. Human speech is its first great vehicle of utterance. Articulate speech, by which man is distinguished from all other creatures of God in this lower world, must lend its powers to the expression of this praise. Language, in its highest, noblest form is needed—language flowing forth in the sweetest harmonies of numbers—language lifted heavenward on the conjoined wings of poetry and music. Thus in all ages of the church—back to Paul and Silas in their midnight dungeon—to David on the hills of Zion—to Moses and Miriam on the Red Sea's shore—nay doubtless back to Adam and Eve in Eden, the children of God have been accustomed to praise him by calling to their aid two of the most exalted and spiritual of all the human arts—namely, poetry and mu-

sic; while the proclamation of his word has claimed still another—Eloquence. All the fine arts ought to be subservient to this highest act of man, the worship of God. Three of them, music, poetry, and eloquence, always have been, and still are, closely allied with the highest interests of Christianity. As the truth of God ought to be preached in the highest style of human eloquence, so his praise ought to be composed in the noblest numbers of lyric poesy, and celebrated in the divinest strains, the human voice and the genius of music can attain. Nor can Music and Poetry, even as human arts, ever assert for themselves so lofty and useful a mission as when thus humbly ministering at God's altars, and lifting up his praises in the great congregation.

There is perhaps nothing done on earth more exalted, more ennobling, more soul-stirring, and soul-subduing, than the worship of the sanctuary, when it is rightly conducted. A great congregation, standing in solemn and united concert before God, every voice joining in the praise, and mingling in one grand chorus of song, is a scene on which angels might look with rapture. Such a scene is well calculated to move even these cold earthly hearts of ours to sympathy and tears. In seasons of revival, when every mind is awed and chastened by a sense of God's presence, and a common interest impels the whole people to the house of prayer, until every seat and aisle and window of the sanctuary, and even the steps of the pulpit, are crowded with devout worshipers, or anxious inquirers; when the minister preaches like an inspired prophet, or an angel from God, and the people hear as if they stood on the confines of the eternal world; who has not felt the

sympathetic wave of feeling which is poured like a baptism from heaven over the vast assembly, as some old and familiar song of Zion is struck to its loftiest and its deepest scores, and rolled out upon the night, and upward to the sky, by a thousand willing voices? Who has not felt his heart dilated and moved heavenward by the very remembrance of such scenes? Who has not felt, at such times, the joys of God's salvation, and caught something of that new and higher life which he would feel if the millennial day had dawned and heaven had begun below?

As to how far the human voice may seek succor from other instruments—stringed instruments or organs—in its utterance of God's praise, that is a question which ought to be very easily settled. With the Book of Psalms in our hands, calling upon every thing that hath breath and the whole inanimate creation to praise him, and with the example of our Savior and his apostles in the New Testament, in constant attendance upon the worship of the temple, where all manner of instruments of music had been used since the times of Solomon, we should certainly be unwarranted in saying there is anything wrong in the principle of instrumental music in the worship of God's house. For although that Jewish dispensation was to pass away, and the Christian Church to be inaugurated under a more simple and spiritual worship, still it could hardly be possible, that a usage of such long continuance was to be set aside forever on the ground that it is wrong, when there is not one syllable in the New Testament which even hints that it is wrong, and especially when in the closing book, the church of the redeemed in heaven, are represented under symbols and images drawn from the old Jewish worship, not only as singing the "song of Moses and the Lamb," but as having "harpers with their harps."

But admitting as we may, and must, the intrinsic lawfulness of instrumental accompaniments in our church-music, it does not thereby follow that it

is always wise to adopt them. It is one of those things which are so liable to abuse and perversion, that the wisest course, in many cases, is not to resort to it at all. But if resorted to, the rule is clear, that all such accompaniments ought to be used in entire subordination to the human voice—not as a substitute for the voice to silence it, or a master to overpower it, but simply as an aid to guide, support, and give it more power.

There is no instrument on earth so powerful and so well adapted to the expression of God's praise as the human voice, especially when it is the united voice of a great congregation, lifted up as the sound of many waters. Now, most obviously, whatever of instrumental accompaniment contributes to develop, to cultivate and to swell the volume of that living voice of a worshipping congregation—whatever, the more and the better, enables the people, all the people, to sing God's praises in the sanctuary, is beneficial, and ought to be used. And on the other hand, it is equally obvious, that whatever, be it flute, viol, pealing organ or choir of artistic singers, has the opposite effect, that is, to suppress, drown, stifle, silence the living voices of the people, is injurious, and ought not to have place for a moment. For praise is, in its very nature, precisely that part of public worship which belongs to the people as their solemn right, their sacred and delightful duty. It is directly and essentially the act of the whole congregation speaking to God in the voice of melody. The song is but a form of prayer—of adoration, thanksgiving and petition, in their various metrical expression. It is the part, above all others, which must be offered by the people. It is the one part which has been most expressly reserved for them, and assigned to them. The congregation, as such, can not preach—has no right to preach; it can not pray except in silence as the minister leads its devotions; it can not administer the sacraments, and can partake of, or receive them, only in silence. Unless, therefore, it makes itself heard in the collective voice of

song, it is from the opening to the close of the worship utterly silent and dumb before God. Is this right? Is this silence, put upon the lips of a worshipping assembly, according to any scripture of the Old Testament or the New? Assuredly not. God's praise is not to be performed by proxy. He has given his people voices, and requires them to speak his praise. He demands the calves, not of the stall, but of their lips, for sacrifice. The tongue, the glory of our frames, the noblest, and the most wonderful instrument and organ of the human soul, he requires to sing aloud his praise. That part of public worship is not delegated to the minister as preaching is, nor can it be delegated to instruments of music, or to hired choristers, or even to a part of the congregation more skillful than the rest. Instruments, and choristers, and choirs of trained singers may lead the way; but only where and as the people follow. They have no right to go one jot or tittle faster than the people can go. For them to make all the music however splendid, and arrogate all the praise however well performed; to sing such tunes, or to sing them in such a way as to silence every voice of the congregation but their own; however entertaining and charming it may be to ears critical and polite, that listen to it as they are accustomed to listen to any other concert, professional, theatrical, or amateur—this can be regarded in no other light, when we look at it seriously, than as a fraud upon God's people, an usurpation upon their rights, an outrage upon all the proprieties of divine worship, and a departure from the simplicity and spirituality of the Gospel, which the apostles and primitive Christians would not have tolerated a single Sabbath. It is to rob the people of that part of the service which is assigned to them and which God has fitted them to take part in, by endowing them with voices and the love of melody. It is to sacrifice all the ends of devotion to the one end of artistic beauty. Nor is it any argument or excuse for this exclusion of the people from their part

in the public praise, to say that they have uncultivated ears, and can not take part in this elevated, artistic and scientific music of modern professional choirs. For who makes that sort of music necessary in our ordinary and untrained congregations? Is the Lord pleased only with our science and art? Is the sole end and object of public worship to cultivate the science of music, and please the gifted few who have art or genius enough to appreciate it? Who makes it necessary that any congregation should praise God in a higher and more difficult style of song than they are capable of offering, so that despairing of doing it themselves, they must single out some half a dozen proxies to sing for them? Is the Great King in Zion so in love with scientific music, that he had rather listen to some difficult complex strain of the great composers sung by a few star voices, amid all manner of flutes, harps, sacbuts, psalteries, and dulcimers, than listen to those simple and familiar melodies which all the people might sing together, and sing with all the more spirit and understanding, because they were not thinking at all of their splendid performance? If not, who is? Is that sort of music to be sung, and that style adopted, which pleases every tenth person in the congregation, to the disrelish and dissatisfaction of the nine, and in which perhaps one of every hundred can participate with rapture, while the ninety-nine can not take part in it at all? Is that the rule—that the standard of congregational singing? Who then is to be consulted as to what sort of music, and what mode of singing, is to be adopted in each particular church? Whose taste, whose pleasure, whose edification, is to be consulted? Clearly there can be but one rule. *The majority of the people must be consulted; and that standard of song, or of musical performance, must be adopted which the people are equal to, and no other.* It would be absurd to take a lower level; and it is just as absurd to aspire to a higher. Let the standard vary every where to suit the capabilities of the worshippers. Let them part

praise God with such as they have; and not such as they have not. If they are all, or nearly all, well-trained musicians, who can sing the higher scores of organ music, let them do so. If they are plain people, untrained even as to the notes of the gamut, let them sing plain and simple melodies, such as they can sing, such as all men can sing, such as even children can sing. And if there should be any artistic souls offended with this, let them do one of two things—either go where they will be more at home in

the song, or else teach the people music and prepare them to sing on a higher scale.

Let the people praise God in the song; let all the people praise him. This is the rule, and the only proper rule for church-music. We care not who composes, who leads, or who handles the organ—if Mozart were the composer, Sontag the singer, and Thalberg the organist, that is no Scriptural mode of rendering God's praise, where the living voice of God's people is not heard.

## SHAKESPEARE AS A CHRISTIAN POET.

BY E. D. MANSFIELD, LL.D.

Each change of many-colored life he drew,  
Exhausted worlds and then imagined new.

IF I were asked what books would contain in the smallest space and at the least cost, the largest amount of knowledge and instruction, I would say, the Bible, Shakespeare, and Geometry. The first I would take for the revelation of moral truth, the second for its pictures of human nature in actual life, and the third for that logic which God has put in the structure of the universe, and which strengthens the human mind. I say this, having studied the Bible and Geometry well, but having studied Shakespeare much less, no doubt, than many persons. In fact, no poet in our language, and probably no writer, has been the subject of so much comment and criticism as Shakespeare. There are many glossaries, innumerable notes, and elaborate histories written upon Shakespeare. The admiration for his works has extended to all civilized lands, and some of the best criticisms upon him have been written in other languages; but it is not at all necessary to read all this critical literature, or even to read all that he has written, to understand that great poet. His great plays and his great characters are well known to all readers of English literature, and by many

persons are read like the novels of Walter Scott, many times. They are referred to by writers, lawyers, and clergymen, for those beautiful quotations, which utter the deep pathos, and the profoundest convictions of our human nature. That these are true we all feel, and, for that reason, we refer to these utterances of Shakespeare, as we do to some passages of the Bible, not merely for their beauty, but for their truth. Perhaps it would be well for us to ask, what is the foundation truth, or, as we may say, the moral fiber of Shakespeare's mind, which made him the utterer of those profound sentiments which find a response in every human being, and which we all recognize as true and natural? You say Shakespeare is a poet of nature, and this is true; for certainly without a great sympathy with nature, he would not be a great poet. Horace says, a poet comes from nature. He must be born to poetry. But has the poetic temperament, or sympathy with nature, or even the highest culture, ever made a poet. Who went beyond mere poetry to utter the solemn truths of ages, and touched the religious heart of man, and carried him upward to a spiritual world? Was it Horace with his Roman wit, and elegant literature? Was it Byron with