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HYMNODY OF THE CHURCH

The Hymnody of the Christian Church. By Louis F. Benson, D.D. George H. Doran Co.; \$2.00.

The book contains the lectures given on the Stone Foundation at Princeton Theological Seminary in the early part of 1927.

Dr. Benson is one of the greatest authorities on hymns and hymnology in the Christian Church at the present day. Dr. Benson is not only an authority on the history, text and functions of hymns, but has sufficient poetic genius to be a writer of good verse and the author of some good hymns. No one who has not given time and study to hymnody can even imagine the breadth of the field traversed in such a book as this. Happily, Dr. Benson has given most of his life to the study of this, his speciality, and when he speaks, it is as one who has thoroughly covered the subject in all of its reaches and ramifications.

Few, if any, have given such study to the textual criticisms of the hymns, and until one reads this book, he is not aware how vast a field is opened up on this one subject of text.

Dr. Benson began his career in hymnology with a very high regard for the sacredness of the original text, but finds on the practical side a very evident need of occasional emendations. On the propriety of emending an original text, there has been great diversity of opinion and practice among hymn collectors and makers of hymn books. In this matter, our author has preserved a well-balanced attitude, and perhaps few, if any, hymnologists have exceeded him in the painstaking care with which he has searched for original texts.

Dr. Benson apparently feels that our hymns have been too much clouded by visions of death and confession of sin. It would probably be a mistake to rule out all such. Poetry deals largely with human experiences, and whatever enters deeply into our religious experience would naturally find a place in our hymns.

The question of hymn tunes finds a place in the book as essential to a thorough discussion of the subject. It is evident that the author has little sympathy with the well-known gospel hymns and prefers the staid and solemn style of earlier productions. Perhaps a golden mean is the best solution. The hymn book should meet a variety of demands and dispositions. We are not all cast in the same mold. If any criticisms can be cast on the hymnal of which the author is the editor, they are chiefly two—the unsingable nature of much of the music, and the very very meager use of the chorus and refrain.

D. S. C.