

HYMNS, ORIGINAL OR TRANSLATED?

AS an old "hymn-tinker," sere if not yellow, may I presume to discuss the subject of hymns? I suppose all hymnodists begin with zeal and end with knowledge, as even I, the least, but I hope not the last, since there is still room on top. There is room chiefly for original hymns. We have too many of the wrong sort and not enough of the right sort, and the career of Father Faber is an expensive object-lesson. For every good hymn he gave us we have three bad ones, and I venture to suggest that all his hymns could well be done without except *O Purest of Creatures* and *Faith of Our Fathers*. Perhaps I speak without the book, but even on second thoughts I cannot recall any indispensable hymns of his except that on St. Benedict. Would that he had always wrought up to this standard! But he set bad headlines for worse men *and* women than himself. Not only this, but he shelved Caswall and obscured Newman. Now Caswall was our best translator, of distinctly higher quality than Neale (who is not "ours"), and some of his original hymns, e.g. *Joy, joy, the Mother comes*, are models of what is wanted. I do not for a moment admit that he reaches the heights of Newman, but he is better than anyone else I know of, after Matthew Bridges. And only after Matthew Bridges at his best.

The case for translated hymns is that they give the best models to the originator of solemn song. The Latin originals in use in the liturgy have passed through the fine sieve of many centuries and innumerable trained minds, so that we heirs of the ages inherit their well-pondered and right worshipful judgment in this matter. But translators' ways are unsearchable. Why, for instance, did both Neale and Caswall insist on translating the *Vexilla Regis*, when the martyr-church of this country sang its own version in the very

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fires of persecution, always increasing the beauty of its recension for a full century and a half? This is a version more beautiful than the original, yet the thing keeps on being translated by all and sundry. Not only are the translations made, they are even published. And the Westminster Hymnal, for sentimental reasons, inserts a bad version of a certain hymn just when the best and only true one was gaining ground. Is there any finality, or any unquestionable court to settle these very vexing questions?

Now here is a case in point for which, not being dead yet, I crave some tolerant treatment. Not in the first boiling-over of zeal, but after acquiring a little saddening wisdom at my own and others' expense, I set to produce a version of the most difficult perhaps of all liturgical hymns, not in ignorance of former translations, but in conscious and conscientious emulation. *Habetis confitentem reum!* Caswall's version is easily the best: Neale is not himself here, and is scarcely literary. But neither has any female rhymes (small blame to them), and I do not think that Caswall, with his much superior music, meant it to be sung. I did and do mean this version for places where they sing, and I may say that not the rhyme and the metre are the real trouble, but the poise and balance of the line. Neale starts with shortness of breath, and so does Caswall. Caswall recovers, but Neale gets worse:

PANGE LINGUA FOR PASSION-TIDE

I [story
TELL, my tongue, the wondrous
Of salvation's crowning fight;
Tell the Cross's awful glory
And thy Lord's redeeming
might, [gory
How He stood, forespent and
Forcing Hell to broken flight.

I
PANGE lingua gloriosi
Proelium certaminis:
Et super Crucis trophaeum,
Dic triumphum nobilem:
Qualiter Redemptor orbis
Immolatus vicerit.

Blackfriars

2

Our almighty Maker, grieving
At our primal Parent's fall,
When by taste of fruit deceiving
He became the devil's thrall,
Destined, for our souls' retrieving
One Tree's Fruit to pay for all.

3

So the deep, all-wise Creator
Wrought in order all His will,
Tricked the many-sided traitor,
Knot by knot undid the ill,
And from bane of Adam's nature
Did its medicine distil.

4

When the years revolving slowly
Told the ripe and sacred prime,
God the Son, the Lord most holy
Left the Father's seat sublime
And made flesh from maiden
lowly
Entered on His human time.

5

Wailing in the narrow manger
Lies the Lord of all the lands :
Mary binds the heavenly Stranger
Straitly in the swaddling bands
And from all mischance and
danger
Ties God's little feet and hands.

6

Thirty years the time fulfilling
Bring the fated moment nigh,
And the Victim, freely willing,
Self-devoted, ripe to die,
Crown'd and fastened for the
killing
On the Cross is lifted high.

7

Drenched with gall, behold Him
waning [wide
Nail and thorn and spear-head
Drain the Body uncomplaining ;
Blood and water from His side
On the universe come raining,
Oh ! the sin-submerging tide !

2

De parentis protoplasti
Fraude Factor condolens,
Quando pomi noxialis
Morsu in mortem corrui,
Ipse lignum tunc notavit,
Damna ligni ut solveret.

3

Hoc opus nostrae salutis
Ordo depoposcerat,
Multiformis proditoris
Ars ut artem falleret :
Et medelam ferret inde,
Hostis unde laeserat.

4

Quando venit ergo sacri
Plenitudo temporis,
Missus est ab arce Patris
Natus orbis Conditor :
Ac de ventre virginali
Caro factus prodiit.

5

Vagit infans inter arcta
Conditus praesaepia :
Membra pannis involuta
Virgo mater alligat,
Et manus, pedesque et crura,
Stricta cingit fascia.

6

Lustris sex qui jam peractis
Tempus implens corporis,
Se volente natus ad hoc,
Passioni deditus,
Agnus in Crucis levatur
Immolandus stipite.

7

Felle potus ecce languet
Spina, clavi, lancea :
Mite corpus perforatur,
Sanguis, unda profuit :
Terra, pontus, astra, mundus,
Quo lavantur flumine !

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8

Faithful Cross, thy roseal
splendour [trees :
Shames the greening forest-
Never yet did woodland render
Bloom or leaf or bud like these.
Nails and wood, how sweet and
tender
With the burden of our ease.

9

Stoop thy branches, tree aspiring,
Let unbend thy stubborn
whim ;
Of thy native rigour tiring
Gentler be in every limb :
King of kings thy wood is hiring
Be not over-stern with Him.

10

Thou alone wast well appointed
World-redeeming Fruit to
bear ;
By thee only, Ark true-jointed
Shipwreck'd souls to haven
steer :
Thee the bleeding Lamb anointed
O'er and o'er with mantling
cheer.

11

Glory evermore redounding
To the sacred Triune Name !
Father, Son, and Spirit sounding
Let the ransom'd choirs ac-
Universal joy abounding, [claim
Equal honour, equal fame.

8

*Crux fidelis, inter omnes
Arbor una nobilis :
Nulla silva talem profert
Fronde, flore, germine :
Dulce lignum dulces clavos,
Dulce pondus sustinet.*

9

*Flecte ramos arbor alta,
Tensa laxa viscera :
Et rigor lentescat ille,
Quem dedit nativitas :
Ut superni membra Regis
Miti tendas stipite.*

10

*Sola digna tu fuisti
Ferre saeculi pretium,
Atque portum preparare
Nauta mundo naufrago :
Quem sacer cruor perunxit,
Fusus Agni corpore.*

11

*Gloria et honor Deo
Usquequaque altissimo,
Una Patri, Filioque,
Inclyto Paraclito :
Cui laus est et potestas
Per aeterna saecula. Amen.*

JOHN O'CONNOR.