

incredible. For between these two there can eventually be no logical halting-place for the honest mind. Either in the Old Testament we have genuine history—the record of Divine dealings with a chosen people—or we have literary creation, the inspiration and origin of which cannot be explained.



The "Te Deum" as a Missionary Hymn.

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THE *Te Deum*, the great hymn of praise of the Western Church, as the still more ancient *Gloria in Excelsis* in the Communion Office is the great hymn of praise of the Eastern Church, has for centuries been recognized as the noblest and completest expression of all that worship means to believers in Christ. The average worshipper of to-day, descended from many generations of Christians in a Christian land, is vaguely conscious of its uplifting grandeur, but misses much of its import unless he inquires into its origin and history, and looks beyond his own religious life and his own little bit of Christendom.

Our Prayer Book quotes its opening words in Latin, and immediately mistranslates them. To the student of Church History or Comparative Religion this mistranslation is as significant and instructive as is the difference in the wording of the First Commandment in the Bible and in the Church Catechism. For it means that the sixteenth century failed to understand the *Te Deum* fully, having outlived the hopes and conflicts which gave it birth. But we are privileged to live in an age when similar hopes are reawakened for regions beyond Christendom, in which old conflicts are renewed as they have scarcely been renewed for fifteen hundred years. We shall understand it best by endeavouring to enter into its meaning for a Hindu, a Japanese, a Chinese, or an African, newly won to the faith, and still surrounded by the symbols of Hinduism, Buddhism, or Paganism.

Its missionary import is not to be seen by applying a few of

its phrases to missionary enterprise, but by grasping the conditions that produced it, and considering what truths appealed most strongly to the generation of Christians who first raised heart and voice to God in its jubilant strains, and what aspirations touched them most deeply. As we try to think their thoughts, its message to our own age will ring out unmistakably.

The *Te Deum* has been used in public worship ever since the fifth century. An order in the rule of Cæsarius, Bishop of Arles, A.D. 527, that it should be sung every Sunday at Matins is the earliest mention of it that has been found; and we do not know whether it was originally written in Greek or in Latin. Vers. 11-13, "The Father . . . the Comforter"; and vers. 24-26, "Day by day . . . without sin," occur in a morning hymn of the Eastern Church preserved in the Codex Alexandrinus (fifth century); and in the seventh century it preceded the Lesson from the New Testament, as it does now. Alcuin (A.D. 735-804) mentions it twice; and in the Sarum Breviary, which was drawn up by Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury, in the latter part of the eleventh century, it is appointed to be used every Sunday except during Advent and from Septuagesima to Easter.

An ancient Irish book of hymns tells us that it was composed in A.D. 387 by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, for the baptism of Augustine, afterwards Bishop of Hippo, and sung by them in alternate verses on that occasion. We should like to connect it with so notable an event; but in the opinion of Dr. John Duncan and other scholars it must have been written earlier (though it may have been used then), and is probably to be attributed to Hilary of Poitiers about A.D. 350. Others, again, attribute it to Hilary of Arles about A.D. 440, while Dr. Burns argues learnedly for the authorship of Niceta of Remisiana, whose works he has edited.

Our inquiry seems, then, to leave us disappointed and baffled. Not so; for whatever its exact date, and whoever its author was, the *Te Deum* gathers up the dominant thoughts of the Church at a very memorable time. During the century that began with the Emperor Constantine's public profession of Christianity and

ended with the edict of the Emperor Theodosius II. that all heathen temples were to be destroyed or turned into Christian churches, the great goddess Diana, whom all Asia and the world worshipped, with all the other gods and goddesses of the old Greek and Roman world, were once and for ever deposed from their magnificence; and for more than fourteen centuries no human being has offered them homage. Paganism died then, hard but utterly, in the very centre of the world's life and greatness, and only our long familiarity with the event as a fact of remote history blinds us to its wonderful character. As Principal Cairns remarks, "Another conquest so complete and absolute does not mark the history of the world."

From the triumphant close of the first great era of the Church's missionary activity the *Te Deum* emerges, and in this fact we have the clue to its meaning. Our age ought to hear again, as did its own age when the local and national gods of heathendom fell into disrepute and oblivion, the militant ring in its victorious assertion of monotheism, of the Unity, the universal sovereignty of the one true God, and the challenge in its claim that the one religion for the whole world is the religion of Christ. For Christianity, which once superseded the old classic heathenism and the paganism of the new Europe that rose on the ruins of the Roman Empire, is now engaged in a yet more formidable task; is at close quarters, as never before, with the Paganism of Africa, the Hinduism and Buddhism of the Far East, and the Mohammedanism of the Near East.

The first European who ever beheld the Pacific Ocean—Bilboa, the Portuguese explorer, in 1513—gave voice to his emotion in the words of the *Te Deum*. We who have lived to see the Pacific fringed with Christian Churches may well find in its lofty psalmody both utterance and inspiration, as we go on to consider it verse by verse.

It falls into three parts:

- (a) The Hymn: an Ascription of Praise (vers. 1-10).
- (b) The Creed: a Confession of Faith (vers. 11-19).
- (c) The Prayer: a Petition and Intercession (vers. 20-29).

So it utters in turn the emotional, intellectual, and ethical side of the Christian life, including every aspect of Christian worship, every great truth of the Catholic faith, every desire and petition for daily conduct ; it carries us out of ourselves, and our own limited circle, into the blessed company of all faithful people, praising God in all ages of Christendom ; it strengthens our faith by calling on us to proclaim it with no uncertain sound ; finally, it brings us into God's presence in humble prayer for ourselves and for others.

(a) *The Hymn of Praise.*—Reaction from superstitious modes of devotion has, for Reformed Christendom, sometimes unduly emphasized the idea that we go to church to receive instruction and to ask for general or particular blessings ; so that one hears of people choosing their church mainly because they approve the teaching of its vicar ; or staying away from a service because "only the curate" is to occupy the pulpit ; or asking if they cannot say their prayers at home. The *Te Deum* recalls us to the undivided Church of early days, who summoned her members to Divine service, not only to get, but first of all to give to God the worship which is His due (Ps. xxix. 1, 2).

"We praise Thee *as God.*" It is the declaration of those to whom grace has been given in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity with the faith in One God once peculiar to one obscure race, now professed by nearly half mankind, and promulgated more widely than ever before to the other half (*cf.* 1 Cor. viii. 6). We acknowledge that the Jehovah of Israel is this One God.

In ver. 2 the thought widens out from "this congregation here present" to the great Catholic Church on whose adoration the sun never sets ; goes even further to a dim thought of the One God as in some sense their Father among those who as yet worship Him in ignorance (Acts xvii. 23, 28).

Ver. 3 looks beyond all Christendom, and even all humanity, to the unnumbered hosts of intelligent beings, in a universe of which the heavens as yet searched out by the keenest-eyed astronomers may be but a fragment. We hymn the only Being

who is to be worshipped, and to whom worship is due from every other being (Ps. cl. 6).

Ver. 4 links our praise to that of the Cherubim and Seraphim. As we get away from the grotesque distortion of these mysterious creatures into winged women or baby boys with wings instead of bodies in conventional representations of the Ark or favourite pictures, Comparative Religion seems to furnish a key to their real significance. As in the heathen philosophy of old to which Lucretius gave its finest expression, so in Hinduism and Buddhism to-day, the gods themselves appear subordinate to an impersonal inexorable "Nature." But the Cherubim symbolize the whole frame of Nature, summed up in the king of beasts, the king of cattle, the king of birds, and man himself, the whole of the great orders and powers of the visible world prostrate in homage before the Creator of all things visible and invisible.

The "Holy, Holy, Holy" of ver. 5 celebrates, as the supreme Divine attribute, holiness, which outside Judaism and Christianity is hardly ever attributed to Divine beings. It recalls Isaiah's vision in which Israel's instruction as to the holiness of God culminated; it recalls St. John's vision in which the Trisagion is filled with new meaning as an acknowledgment of the glory of the Eternal Trinity; it recalls the *Ter Sanctus*, of our Communion Office, that *Eucharistia* of immemorial antiquity, found in all extant liturgies both of East and West, and traceable almost up to the Apostolic Age. And ver. 5 recalls also a great day in the religious history of the world, the day on which King David brought the Ark up to Jerusalem, and established the worship of the One True God as the religion of an ordered State for the first time, and wrote the famous *Domini est terra* Psalm. The great name JEHOVAH SABAOTH dates from that day (though anticipated in 1 Sam. i. 3, 11, xvii. 45), and occurs afterwards some 260 times in the Old Testament, rising from its original sense, "God of armies," to "Lord of hosts" in protest against that worship of the heavenly bodies which seems to have been the oldest idolatry. St. John uses one of its two

Greek equivalents in the Septuagint nine times in his Apocalypse, where it is very inadequately rendered by "Almighty."

In ver. 6 the ascription of praise to God All Sovereign comes to a climax in one of the grandest sentences ever shaped.

The field of vision narrows in ver. 7, where thought reverts to the Church, by means of which the manifold wisdom of the Creator of heaven and earth is to be manifested (Eph. iii. 10). Three phrases set forth vividly its corporate life and its historical continuity. "The glorious company [or "choir," as the Sarum Breviary has it] of the Apostles." Here we think of the Apostolic Church as represented by its twelve foundation-stones (Eph. ii. 20); or, using the word in its larger etymological sense, of all those sent out by God into the world (John xx. 21).

"The goodly fellowship of the Prophets." Here we think of the pre-Apostolic Church of the Old Testament (Matt. xi. 13; Luke x. 24); or, using the word in its larger etymological sense, of all those charged with messages from God, telling *for* Him, *foretelling*, and telling *forth* His word. (So Dean Vaughan unravelled the whole connotation of "prophet," popularly used in a very limited sense.)

Lastly, we pass from the companions of Christ and the forerunners of Christ to those "who believed in Him through their word," "the white-robed army of Martyrs" (that is the correct translation). Here we think of the post-Apostolic Church, through nearly 2,000 years of its life; or, using the word in its larger etymological sense, of all who are witnesses to God (Acts i. 8; Rev. ii. 13, R.V. and A.V.).

There is a sense in which every Christian should be an apostle, a prophet, and a martyr. Certainly all missionaries sent forth by God, with messages from God, to bear witness to God, are apostles, prophets, and martyrs; being the truest representatives of the Church, as they build up the kingdom of Christ in the world to-day.

"The Holy Church throughout all the world" of ver. 10 may be regarded as summing up the three preceding verses.

Before us lies a copy of the *Te Deum* in Greek, in which the word used is *οἰκουμένη* (i.e., "the inhabited earth," in the New Testament "the Roman Empire"). But one would like to believe that if the *Te Deum* had a Greek original, now lost, the word there was *κόσμος*, and that we are entitled to follow out the thought of the foregoing verses, and unite our praise with that of the whole Church, Militant and Triumphant.

"In concert with the holy dead,
The warrior Church rejoices."

Here ends the first part of the *Te Deum*, leaving the worshipper with a stimulating consciousness of being a unit in such a whole, cheered by a sense of fellowship in the mighty army of the Church of God, humbled also by a new realization of his own insignificance.

(b) *The Confession of Faith*.—Having asserted our faith as monotheists in the face of heathendom, we now assert it as Christians in the face of Judaism and Islam, and also of manifold heresies continually recrudescing in Christendom. "To the heathen," says Dr. Adolf Saphir, "God is anonymous; to the Jew He is Jehovah; to the Church He is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." With more than the vague thought of Divine Fatherhood that was in the mind of Aratus or Cleanthes as quoted by St. Paul, with more than the vague thought that the Holiest of men must have been God's Son, we declare that we worship One God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; and then profess our faith in the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In ver. 14 there is a second echo of the greatest day of King David's life, and of the twenty-fourth Psalm. Remembering that in Scripture the word "glory" always refers more or less directly to the visible symbol of the Divine Presence that brooded over the Ark, we do not merely acclaim Christ as a glorious King, but acknowledge Him as the true Shekinah, who once tabernacled among men (John i. 14, Greek).

Very beautifully do vers. 15 and 16 sum up the infinite con-

descension of Him who became Man, being God from all eternity to all eternity. The literal translation is "When for our deliverance Thou tookest on Thee the nature of man" (2 Cor. viii. 9).

To those who would really understand ver. 17 and Hebrews ii. 15, on which it is based, study of any non-Christian eschatology may be recommended. One could easily multiply testimonies from missionaries in all parts to the effect that dread of what may come after death secures more than aught else a hearing for their message. The verse also illustrates the comprehensive theology of the *Te Deum*. The Catholic doctrine of the Church is followed by the Evangelical doctrine of justification by faith. But "the kingdom of heaven" is surely to be understood, not of Paradise, but of the Church on earth. For the Christian, eternal life begins in this world, according to St. John.

The creed closes on the triumphant note of the living Christ in glory, and testified to Him in days and in places where the infant Christ or the dead Christ was too exclusively before the devout.

Nor should this note of triumph die away into the minor key in ver. 19, as the music to the *Te Deum* sometimes suggests. We are addressing, not a weird impersonal Karma, or an arbitrary Tyrant, as Buddhist or Moslem conceive of future retribution, but the gracious Son of God, to whom judgment has been committed, because He is likewise the Son of man (John v. 25-27). And we dare, as the psalmist dared, to anticipate with holy exultation that judgment when all wrong shall be righted, when evil shall for ever be overcome of good (Ps. xcvi.).

(c) *The Prayer*.—Notice once again how the *Te Deum* preserves the balance of truth. Our hearts have been enlarged, our aspirations have been kindled, by taking part in a great corporate act of worship; we have soared up into the very heaven of heavens, glorifying God with all creation, confessing Christ with the Catholic Church of all ages. Now we fall at

His feet in utter humility, in contrition and supplication. Even for those who believe, judgment is a solemn thing, and religion is a personal matter. God deals with us, not in communities, but as persons individually responsible to Him.

We plead that He has redeemed us with His precious blood, that we are His servants, His people, His heritage. We believe in Him and belong to Him. We ask Him to have mercy (the New Testament word used by the Publican implies the whole doctrine of the Atonement), to govern us (in Latin, the metaphor is that of the steersman; in Greek, that of the shepherd), to keep us without sin.

And because we always have more to thank God for than to ask Him for, these supplications are interrupted by a fresh burst of praise, as we pass to the closing petition. For while profession of faith against unbelief and cries for mercy are of this life, worship and praise are "ever world without end," the everlasting element of religion in the life to come.

"Have mercy upon us as our trust is in Thee" is a heart-searching prayer, echoing our Lord's teaching, "According to your faith be it unto you." The limit is on our side, not on God's. Then, at the end, we pass from the plural of common praise and prayer to the singular, and leave the one soul alone with God, as the strain ceases. "Non confundar in æternum" were the dying words of the heroic missionary Francis Xavier. One would fain keep the ambiguity of the Latin, for there are times when faith bows low, imploring, "Let me never be confounded," and times when faith soars up, crying in joyful confidence, "I shall never be confounded."

How many devout souls through long ages, when meagre and cold preaching starved and superstitious rites bewildered, must have been fed, nevertheless, with the finest of the wheat through the rich and full theology and the inspiring poetry of this greatest of hymns!

