

Godhead. Thus thousands who would find it impossible to follow an abstract theological argument come naturally "to think rightly of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ" by the mere fact that they learn to pray: "By Thine Agony and bloody sweat; by Thy Cross and Passion; by Thy precious Death and Burial; by Thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension, Good Lord deliver us."—  
(From the Church Times.)

## HYMNS.

### A PLEA FOR A WISER SELECTION.

(By the Bishop of Chelmsford.)  
(Reprinted from the "Chelmsford Diocesan Chronicle.")

I have had in mind for a long time to say something on the subject of our hymns, and the holiday month, when our minds turn to some lighter subjects, may not be an inappropriate occasion for expressing myself on this matter.

In the first place, I am astonished at the very narrow choice of hymns to which we now seem to have restricted ourselves. I recognise that in my own case this choice seems a good deal narrower than it probably is, for when I visit churches it is generally a special occasion of some sort or other.

However that may be, I find that the number of hymns that are sung on occasions when I visit churches is limited to about a dozen, and to this may be added half a dozen others at Confirmation services.

I do not think we pay nearly enough attention to the whole question of the selection of our hymns. I am not speaking of the musical side of the matter. That is a subject to which our Musical Director is no doubt turning his attention. The hymns are an invaluable adjunct to our worship, and I am confident that a little more time and care given in their selection, and the increasing of the number with which our people are familiarised, are matters which would well repay the most careful attention.

Why, for instance, should such a hymn as "O God, our help in ages past" be worked to death as is the case to-day? Whenever there is a service of national or civic import-

ance, when the Mayor comes to church and we want to be a little religious but not too much so, this hymn seems to be regarded as quite essential. Or again, if we are expressing our thanksgiving for anything, it seems that the choice is restricted to "Praise, my soul" and "Now thank we all our God." The former of these hymns I frequently sing twice a Sunday, and I have even once sung it three times on the same day. Of course, it is an excellent hymn, probably indispensable; and that is true of the other dozen or so hymns which I am continually singing. Bread and butter is an essential article of food, but we do not want always to be eating bread and butter!

It might be a very good thing to make a rule that for the next twelve months we shall eliminate from our repertoire the following hymns:—

"All people that on earth do dwell."

"We love the place, O God."

"City of God."

"Ye watchers and ye holy ones."

"Now thank we all our God."

"Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven."

"O God, our help in ages past."

"The Church's one foundation."

"Lead us, Heavenly Father."

I am not going so far as to make positive suggestions. In this, as in all matters, it is much safer to adopt the attitude of the purely negative critic. I would only say that there is an abundance of first-class hymns with which our people should be familiarised.

The second point that I want to make in this connection is that great caution should be displayed in the choice of our hymns, for it must be remembered that popular religion is very largely derived from the hymns which we sing. A great many of our hymns may be over-sentimental. This is a comparatively small matter. But some of our hymns are deplorable in their teaching. One of the most distressing illustrations is the view which certain of our most popular hymns give regarding death. One of these hymns tells us that after death we shall be "lying each within our narrow bed," and another tells us that we shall be "asleep within the tomb."

This conception of churchyards and cemeteries as places where dead people are sleeping may be widely held by ignorant people, but it is not the teaching of the Christian religion, and it is a lamentable thing that we should be making this prevailing ignorance darker still by singing hymns which teach false views. Here is another illustration:—

On that happy Eastern morning,  
All the graves their dead restore;  
Father, sister, child and mother,  
Meet once more.

And perhaps worst of all is the children's hymn, which instructs children as follows:—

But we believe a day shall come  
When all the dead will rise,  
When they who sleep down in the  
grave  
Will ope again their eyes.  
So when the friends we love the  
best

Lie in their churchyard bed,  
We must not cry too bitterly  
Over the happy dead.

It is to me an extraordinary thing that the talented lady who wrote: "Once in Royal David's city" and "There is a green hill far away" should have perpetrated such an atrocity as this.

Hymns of this description have given the greatest possible assistance to Spiritualism, as it is called. Opponents of the Christian religion lay hold of these crude and ignorant expressions and charge the Church with appalling doctrines of the kind taught in these verses, and then come forward with their own point of view as something better than what they maintain the Christian faith teaches. It is of the greatest importance that we should not only rigorously exclude hymns of this description from our worship, but we should make it our business systematically to show what the Christian faith has to tell us regarding the state of the departed. It is true, of course, that it has not pleased God to tell us all that we would perhaps like to know, but it is perfectly certain that God has revealed to us that our departed are not buried in churchyards and cemeteries, but that they "with Christ, which is far better," or "with Him in Paradise," but dead and buried they certainly are not.

(To be Continued.)