

I joy'd when to the house of God,
Go up, they said to me.
Jerusalem, within thy gates
our feet shall standing be.
Jerus'lem, as a city, is
compactly built together:
Unto that place the tribes go up,
the tribes of God go thither:

To Isr'el's testimony, there
to God's name thanks to pay.
For thrones of judgment, ev'n the thrones
of David's house, there stay.
Pray that Jerusalem may have
peace and felicity:
Let them that love thee and thy peace
have still prosperity.

Therefore I wish that peace may still
within thy walls remain,
And ever may thy palaces
prosperity retain.
Now, for my friends' and brethren's sakes,
Peace be in thee, I'll say.
And for the house of God our Lord,
I'll seek thy good away.

Psalms 122

A testimony to the Scottish Metrical Version:

"No version has ever been made which adheres so closely to the Scripture. It proceeds on the principle of giving every thought in the original, and nothing more; and in this it has succeeded to an extent which is marvellous, and which can be realised only by one who has tested it through careful comparison. It meets with some stones of stumbling, and suffers some dislocation of words by adhering to the line laid down; but there is abundant compensation in the life and energy, the picturesqueness and colour, which it preserves by close contact with the old Hebrew soil. The thought stands out clear, distinct, forceful, not wrapt up in wordy paraphrases where David himself would have had difficulty in recognising his meaning, or liquefied into weak sentimentalisms from which his manly nature, to take no higher view, would have turned away ashamed. This too may be said, that those portions which the heart feels that it needs in its sorrowful hours, over which it leans and pores in its deep musings, or from the summits of which it mounts as on eagles' wings in its moments of joy, have a tenderness, a quaint beauty, a majesty in their form, peculiar to that age of the English language in which they were framed."

(Dr. John Ker, in *The Psalms in History and Biography*.)

RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER READING:

J.L. Clugston, *The Making and Marring of the Scottish Psalter*,
Reformer Print, Sydney.
Millar Patrick, *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody*, Oxford
University Press.

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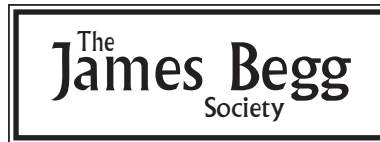
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The Scottish Metrical Version of the Psalms 1650

by Philip Rainey

PSALM-SINGING has been a feature of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. As Reformed Christians we believe that the worship of God is not left to man's imagination but is regulated by God Himself. This is what we call the Regulative Principle: God makes known in His Word how His people are to worship Him. But even those of us who accept this principle and sing only the Psalms, do we ever stop to think about the Psalter – the version of the Psalms – which we use? It is a sad fact that all too many Reformed Christians today do not. We fail to appreciate the treasure we hold in our hands, when we worship God, in the form of the Scottish Metrical Version of the Psalms. This short article is an attempt to rectify this failure.

1) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Scottish Metrical Version of 1650 (S.M.V.) has a noble pedigree. It can trace its lineage right back to the Protestant Reformation and to the very first Psalters of the Reformation. This is one of the reasons why Presbyterians ought to value their Psalter. This point is confirmed by the fact that some of the versions in our Psalter were carried over from the Reformation Psalters.

In 1539 John Calvin printed nineteen Psalms in Strasbourg. This was the Strasbourg Psalter, the fountain-head from which Reformed Psalmody flowed forth. It was the Reformer's desire to give the people their rightful place in worship which the Romish Church had denied them. When Calvin returned to Geneva he saw to it that the Psalter was completed, as it was in 1562.

Calvin's Geneva became a refuge for those persecuted for their faith during the reign of Mary Tudor (1553-1558). One of these was the Scottish Reformer John Knox, who along with other exiles produced a Book of Order for use in the English Congregation at Geneva. This included fifty-one Psalms, this number growing to eighty-seven in the third edition of the Psalter. This Psalter is known as the Anglo-Genevan Psalter. The preface to the Psalter makes it clear how it was the Reformers' concern to translate the Psalms as literally as possible. Bearing in mind they had some Psalm-versions already to hand, they say:

"In this our Enterprise we did only set God before our Eyes; and therefore weighed the Words and Sense of the Prophet, rather considering the Meaning thereof than what any Man had written. And chiefly being in this Place, where as most perfect and godly Judgement did assure us, and Exhortations to the same encourage us, we thought it better to frame the Rhyme to the Hebrew Sense, than binde the Sense to the English Meeter."

The eighty-seven versions of the third edition of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter were the basis for the First Scottish Psalter. Knox brought these Psalms back with him from Geneva and in 1562 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland directed that the Psalter should be completed. The Psalter was completed in 1564, it being the direct forbear of our present Psalter.

Our present Psalter (S.M.V., 1650) arose out of the conviction that although the Psalter of 1564 was a faithful translation of the original, its variety of metre was too difficult for the common people. As a consequence of the Second Scottish Reformation it was decided to reform religion in the three kingdoms, hence the Westminster Assembly of Divines 1643-47. The Westminster Assembly produced a new Psalter which was a revision of one by Francis Rous. But before accepting it the Kirk subjected it to a thorough examination and revision taking some two years and four months. The result was our present Psalter, the S.M.V. of 1650.

2) APPRAISAL

There are three things we may say about the S.M.V. of 1650.

Faithfulness to the Original

The most important point about our Psalter is its faithfulness to the original Scripture. Unlike modern Psalters the S.M.V. is not a paraphrase, but a translation. This is the case with all the Reformation Psalters. We have already noted the attitude of Knox and his associates to the translation of the Psalms. Consciously and deliberately our Reformed forefathers produced translations of the Psalms. The fact that they were translations into verse (or metre) does not mean paraphrase. What it does mean is contraction and dilation of Hebrew words and phrases. For example the contraction of: "For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted" to "For he despis'd not nor abhor'd th' afflicted's misery" (Psalm 22:24). The preservation of the force of the Hebrew is the outstanding feature of our Psalter and the reason why we should prefer it above all others.

Authorisation

The S.M.V. received the sanction of the civil power in 1650 as well as that of the Church. This sanction, which excluded the use of any other version in Scotland, was confirmed by the Revolution Settlement of 1688-90 which re-established Presbyterianism in Scotland.

Unity in Doctrine and Worship

The S.M.V. has been a powerful force for liturgical and doctrinal unity in both Scotland and Ireland where it alone was the Church's songbook for over two centuries. It is surely no accident that when the Churches began to produce their own revisions we have seen "individualism" win the day with the Presbyterian Churches each having their own Psalter, and worse still in some cases their own collections of uninspired songs.

3) CONCLUSION

What then ought we to do? It is our fervent hope that if you are a member of a church which still uses the S.M.V. of 1650 you will have a greater appreciation of the spiritual treasure you hold in your hands. You may be sure that when you sing praise from it you sing the words of God. And you need not

be ashamed of its connections. This is truly a Reformed Psalter. These were the songs of the martyrs, the songs of our Reformed and Presbyterian forefathers. May God grant that they will continue to be our songs today.

Some selections from the Scottish Metrical Version of 1650:

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green: he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.
My soul he doth restore again;
and me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
ev'n for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
yet will I fear none ill:
For thou art with me; and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.
My table thou hast furnished
in presence of my foes;
My head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me:
And in God's house for evermore
my dwelling-place shall be.

Psalm 23

O God, give ear unto my cry;
unto my pray'r attend.
From th' utmost corner of the land
my cry to thee I'll send.
What time my heart is overwhelm'd
and in perplexity,
Do thou me lead unto the Rock
that higher is than I.

For thou hast for my refuge been
a shelter by thy pow'r;
And for defence against my foes
thou hast been a strong tow'r.
Within thy tabernacle I
for ever will abide;
And under covert of thy wings
with confidence me hide.

For thou the vows that I did make,
O Lord my God, didst hear:
Thou hast giv'n me the heritage
of those thy name that fear.

Psalm 61, 1-5