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### **The History Of English Poetry**

From The Close of the Eleventh To The Commencement of the Eighteenth  
Century

**Warton, Thomas**

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Section XXVII. Effects of the Reformation on our poetry. Clement Marot's Psalms. Why adopted by Calvin. Version of the Psalms by Sternhold and Hopkins. Defects of this version, which is patronified ...

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## S E C T. XXVII.

**T**HE reformation of our church produced an alteration for a time in the general system of study, and changed the character and subjects of our poetry. Every mind, both learned and unlearned, was busied in religious speculation; and every pen was employed in recommending, illustrating, and familiarizing the Bible, which was now laid open to the people.

The poetical annals of king Edward the sixth, who removed those chains of bigotry which his brother Henry had only loosened, are marked with metrical translations of various parts of the sacred scripture. Of these the chief is the versification of the Psalter by Sternhold and Hopkins: a performance, which has acquired an importance, and consequently claims a place in our series, not so much from any merit of its own, as from the circumstances with which it is connected.

It is extraordinary, that the protestant churches should be indebted to a country in which the reformation had never begun to make any progress, and even to the indulgence of a society which remains to this day the grand bulwark of the catholic theology, for a very distinguishing and essential part of their ritual.

About the year 1540, Clement Marot, a valet of the bed-chamber to king Francis the first, was the favorite poet of France. This writer, having attained an unusual elegance and facility of style, added many new embellishments to the rude state of the French poetry. It is not the least of his praises, that La Fontaine used to call him his master. He was the inventor



of the rondeau, and the restorer of the madrigal : but he became chiefly eminent for his pastorals, ballads, fables, elegies, epigrams, and translations from Ovid and Petrarch. At length, being tired of the vanities of profane poetry, or rather privately tinctured with the principles of Lutheranism, he attempted, with the assistance of his friend Theodore Beza, and by the encouragement of the professor of Hebrew in the university of Paris, a version of David's Psalms into French rhymes. This translation, which did not aim at any innovation in the public worship, and which received the sanction of the Sorbonne as containing nothing contrary to sound doctrine, he dedicated to his master Francis the first, and to the Ladies of France. In the dedication to the Ladies or *les Dames de France*, whom he had often before addressed in the tenderest strains of passion or compliment, he seems anxious to deprecate the raillery which the new tone of his versification was likely to incur, and is embarrassed how to find an apology for turning faint. Conscious of his apostacy from the levities of life, in a spirit of religious gallantry, he declares that his design is to add to the happiness of his fair readers, by substituting divine hymns in the place of *chansons d'amour*, to inspire their susceptible hearts with a passion in which there is no torment, to banish that fickle and fantastic deity CUPID from the world, and to fill their apartments with the praises, not of the *little god*, but of the true Jehovah.

E voz doigts sur les espinettes  
Pour dire SAINCTES CHANSONNETTES.

He adds, that the golden age would now be restored, when we should see, the peasant at his plough, the carman in the streets, and the mechanic in his shop, solacing their toils with psalms and canticles : and the shepherd and sheperdes, reposing in the shade, and teaching the rocks to echo the name of the Creator.

Le



Le Laboureur a sa charruë,  
 Le Charretier parmy le ruë,  
 Et l'Artisan a en sa boutique,  
 Avecques un PSEAUME OU CANTIQUE,  
 En son labour se soulager.  
 Heureux qui orra le Berger  
 Et la Begere au bois estans,  
 Fair que rochers et estangs,  
 Apres eux chantant la hauteur  
 Du sainct nom de createur\*.

Marot's Psalms soon eclipsed the brilliancy of his madrigals and sonnets. Not suspecting how prejudicial the predominant rage of psalm-singing might prove to the ancient religion of Europe, the catholics themselves adopted these sacred songs as serious ballads, and as a more rational species of domestic merriment. They were the common accompaniments of the fiddle. They were sold so rapidly, that the printers could not supply the public with copies. In the festive and splendid court of Francis the first, of a sudden nothing was heard but the psalms of Clement Marot. By each of the royal family and the principal nobility of the court a psalm was chosen, and fitted to the ballad-tune which each liked best. The dauphin prince Henry, who delighted in hunting, was fond of *Ainsi qu'on oit le cerf bruire*, or, *Like as the Hart desireth the water-brooks*, which he constantly sung in going out to the chase. Madame de Valentinois, between whom and the young prince there was an attachment, took *Du fond de ma pensée*, or, *From the depth of my heart, O Lord*. The queen's favorite was, *Ne vueilles pas, O Sire*, that is, *O Lord, rebuke me not in thine indignation*, which she sung to a fashionable jig. Antony king of Navarre sung, *Revenge moy, pren le querelle*, or, *Stand up, O Lord, to revenge my quarrel*, to

\* Les OEUVRES de Clement Marot de Lyon, 1551. 12mo. See ad calc. TRANSDUCTIONS, &c. p. 192.

the



the air of a dance of Poitou<sup>b</sup>. It was on very different principles that psalmody flourished in the gloomy court of Cromwell. This fashion does not seem in the least to have diminished the gaiety and good humour of the court of Francis.

At this period John Calvin, in opposition to the discipline and doctrines of Rome, was framing his novel church at Geneva: in which the whole substance and form of divine worship was reduced to praying, preaching, and singing. In the last of these three, he chose to depart widely from the catholic usage: and, either because he thought that novelty was sure to succeed, that the practice of antiphonal chanting was superstitious, or that the people were excluded from bearing a part in the more solemn and elaborate performance of ecclesiastical music, or that the old papistic hymns were unedifying, or that verse was better remembered than prose, he projected, with the advice of Luther, a species of religious song, consisting of portions of the psalms intelligibly translated into the vernacular language, and adapted to plain and easy melodies, which all might learn, and in which all might join. This scheme, either by design or accident, was luckily seconded by the publication of Marot's metrical psalms at Paris, which Calvin immediately introduced into his congregation at Geneva. Being set to simple and almost monotonous notes by Guillaume de Franc, they were soon established as the principal branch in that reformer's new devotion, and became a characteristic mark or badge of the Calvinistic worship and profession. Nor were they sung only in his churches. They exhilarated the convivial assemblies of the Calvinists, were commonly heard in the streets, and accompanied the labours of the artificer. The weavers and woollen manufacturers of Flanders, many of whom left the loom and entered into the ministry, are said to have been the capital performers into this science. At length Marot's psalms formed an appendix to the catechism of Geneva, and were interdicted to the catholics under the most

<sup>b</sup> See Bayle's *Dict.* V. *MAROT*.



severe penalties. In the language of the orthodox, psalm-singing and heresy were synonymous terms.

It was Calvin's system of reformation, not only to strip religion of its superstitious and ostensible pageantries, of crucifixes, images, tapers, superb vestments, and splendid processions, but of all that was estimable in the sight of the people, and even of every simple ornament, every significant symbol, and decent ceremony; in a word, to banish every thing from his church which attracted or employed the senses, or which might tend to mar the purity of an abstracted adoration, and of a mental intercourse with the deity. It is hard to determine, how Calvin could reconcile the use of singing, even when purged from the corruptions and abuses of popery, to so philosophical a plan of worship. On a parallel principle, and if any artificial aids to devotion were to be allowed, he might at least have retained the use of pictures in the church. But a new sect always draws its converts from the multitude and the meanest of the people, who can have no relish for the more elegant externals. Calvin well knew that the manufacturers of Germany were no judges of pictures. At the same time it was necessary that his congregation should be kept in good humour by some kind of pleasurable gratification and allurements, which might qualify and enliven the attendance on the more rigid duties of praying and preaching. Calvin therefore, intent as he was to form a new church on a severe model, had yet too much sagacity to exclude every auxiliary to devotion. Under this idea, he permitted an exercise, which might engage the affections, without violating the simplicity of his worship: and sensible that his chief resources were in the rabble of a republic, and availing himself of that natural propensity which prompts even vulgar minds to express their more animated feelings in rhyme and music, he conceived a mode of universal psalmody, not too refined for common capacities, and fitted to please the populace. The rapid propagation of Calvin's religion, and his numerous proselytes, are a strong proof of his address in planning such a sort of service. France  
and



and Germany were instantly infatuated with a love of psalm-singing: which being admirably calculated to kindle and diffuse the flame of fanaticism, was peculiarly serviceable to the purposes of faction, and frequently served as the trumpet to rebellion. These energetic hymns of Geneva, under the conduct of the Calvinistic preachers, excited and supported a variety of popular insurrections; they filled the most flourishing cities of the Low-countries with sedition and tumult, and fomented the fury which defaced many of the most beautiful and venerable churches of Flanders.

This infectious frenzy of sacred song soon reached England, at the very critical point of time, when it had just embraced the reformation: and the new psalmody was obtruded on the new English liturgy by some few officious zealots, who favoured the discipline of Geneva, and who wished to abolish, not only the choral mode of worship in general, but more particularly to suppress the *TE DEUM*, *BENEDICTUS*, *MAGNIFICAT*, *JUBILATE*, *NUNC DIMITTIS*, and the rest of the liturgic hymns, which were supposed to be contaminated by their long and antient connection with the Roman missal, or at least in their prosaic form, to be unsuitable to the new system of worship.

Although Wyat and Surrey had before made translations of the Psalms into metre, Thomas Sternhold was the first whose metrical version of the Psalms was used in the church of England. Sternhold was a native of Hampshire, and probably educated at Winchester college. Having passed some time at Oxford, he became groom of the robes to king Henry the eighth. In this department, either his diligent services or his knack at rhyming so pleased the king, that his majesty bequeathed him a legacy of one hundred marks. He continued in the same office under Edward the sixth, and is said to have acquired some degree of reputation about the court for his poetry. Being of a serious disposition, and an enthusiast to reformation, he was much offended at the lascivious ballads which prevailed among the courtiers: and, with a laudable design to check these indecencies, undertook



undertook a metrical version of the Psalter, "thinking thereby, says Antony Wood, that the courtiers would sing them instead of their sonnets, *but did not*, only some few excepted." Here was the zeal, if not the success, of his fellow labourer Clement Marot. A singular coincidence of circumstances is, notwithstanding, to be remarked on this occasion. Vernacular versions for general use of the Psalter were first published both in France and England, by laymen, by court-poets, and by servants of the court. Nor were the respective translations entirely completed by themselves: and yet they translated nearly an equal number of psalms, Marot having versified fifty, and Sternhold fifty-one. Sternhold died in the year 1549. His fifty-one psalms were printed the same year by Edward Whitchurch, under the following title. "All such Psalms of David as Thomas Sternholde late grome of the kinges Maiestyes robes did in his lyfe tyme drawe into Englyshe metre." They are without the musical notes, as is the second edition in 1552. He probably lived to prepare the first edition for the press, as it is dedicated by himself to king Edward the sixth.

Cotemporary with Sternhold, and his coadjutor, was John Hopkins: of whose life nothing more is known, than that he was a clergyman and a schoolmaster of Suffolk, and perhaps a graduate at Oxford about the year 1544. Of his abilities as a teacher of the classics, he has left a specimen in some Latin stanzas prefixed to Fox's MARTYROLOGY. He is rather a better English poet than Sternhold; and translated fifty-eight of the psalms, distinguished by the initials of his name.

Of the rest of the contributors to this undertaking, the chief, at least in point of rank and learning, was William Whyttingham, promoted by Robert earl of Leicester to the deanery of Durham, yet not without a strong reluctance to comply with the use of the canonical habiliments. Among our religious exiles in the reign of Mary, he was Calvin's principal

<sup>c</sup> ATH. Oxon. i. 76.



favorite, from whom he received ordination. So pure was his faith, that he was thought worthy to succeed to the congregation of Geneva, superintended by Knox, the Scotch reformer; who, from a detestation of idols, proceeded to demolish the churches in which they were contained. It was one of the natural consequences of Whyttingham's translation from Knox's pastorship at Geneva to an English deanery, that he destroyed or removed many beautiful and harmless monuments of antient art in his cathedral. To a man, who had so highly spiritualised his religious conceptions, as to be convinced that a field, a street, or a barn, were fully sufficient for all the operations of christian worship, the venerable structures raised by the magnificent piety of our ancestors could convey no ideas of solemnity, and had no other charms than their ample endowments. Beside the psalms he translated\*, all which bear his initials, by way of innovating still further on our established formularly, he versified the Decalogue, the Nicene, Apostolic, and Athanasian Creeds, the Lord's Prayer, the *TE DEUM*, the Song of the three Children, with other hymns which follow the book of psalmody. How the Ten Commandments and the Athanasian Creed, to say nothing of some of the rest, should become more edifying and better suited to common use, or how they could receive improvement in any respect or degree, by being reduced into rhyme, it is not easy to perceive. But the real design was, to render that more tolerable which could not be entirely removed, to accommodate every part of the service to the psalmodic tone, and to clothe our whole liturgy in the garb of Geneva. All these, for he was a lover of music, were sung in Whyttingham's church of Durham under his own directions. Heylin says, that from vicinity of situation, he was enabled to lend considerable assistance to his friend Knox in the introduction of the presbyterian hierarchy into Scotland. I must indulge the reader with a stanza or two of this dignified fanatic's divine poetry

\* Among them is the hundreth, and the hundred and nineteenth.

from



from his Creeds and the Decalogue. From the Athanasian Creed.

The Father God is, God the Son,  
 God Holy Ghost *also*,  
 Yet are there not three Gods *in all*  
 But one God and *no mo*.

From the Apostolic Creed.

From thence shall he come for to judge,  
 All men both dead and quick ;  
 I in the holy ghost believe,  
 And church that's catholick.

The Ten Commandments are thus elosed.

Nor his man-servant, nor his maid,  
 Nor ox, nor ass *of his* ;  
 Nor any other thing that *to*  
 Thy neighbour *proper is*.

These were also verified by Clement Marot.

Twenty-seven of the psalms were turned into metre by Thomas Norton\*, who perhaps was better employed, at least as a poet, in writing the tragedy of GORDOBUCKE in conjunction with lord Buckhurst. It is certain that in Norton's psalms we see none of those sublime strokes which sir Philip Sydney discovered in that venerable drama. He was of Sharpenhoe in Bedfordshire, a barrister, and in the opinion and phraseology of the Oxford biographer, a bold and busy Calvinist about the beginning of the reign of queen Elisabeth. He was patronised by the Protector Somerset; at whose desire he translated an epistle addressed by Peter Martyr to Somerset, into English, in 1550. Under the same patronage he probably translated also Calvin's Institutes.

\* Marked N.



Robert Wisdome, a protestant fugitive in the calamitous reign of queen Mary, afterwards archdeacon of Ely, and who had been nominated to an Irish bishoprick by king Edward the sixth, rendered the twenty-fifth psalm of this version<sup>f</sup>. But he is chiefly memorable for his metrical prayer, intended to be sung in the church, against the Pope and the Turk, of whom he seems to have conceived the most alarming apprehensions. It is probable, that he thought popery and mahometanism were equally dangerous to christianity, at least the most powerful and the sole enemies of our religion. This is the first stanza.

Preserve us, Lord, by thy dear word,  
From POPE and TURK defend us, Lord!  
*Which both would thrust out of thy throne*  
Our Lord Jesus Christ, thy dear son!

Happily we have hitherto survived these two formidable evils! Among other orthodox wits, the facetious bishop Corbet has ridiculed these lines. He supposes himself seized with a sudden impulse to hear or to pen a puritanical hymn, and invokes the ghost of Robert Wisdome, as the most skilful poet in this mode of composition, to come and assist. But he advises Wisdome to steal back again to his tomb, which was in Carfax church at Oxford, silent and unperceived, for fear of being detected and intercepted by the Pope or the Turk. But I will produce Corbet's epigram, more especially as it contains a criticism written in the reign of Charles the first, on the style of this sort of poetry.

TO THE GHOST OF ROBERT WISDOME.

Thou once a body, now but ayre,  
Arch-botcher of a psalm or prayer,

<sup>f</sup> See Strype's CRANMER, p. 274. 276. 136, with T. C. It is not known to whom these initials belong.  
277. PSALMS 70, 104, 112, 122, 125,  
and 134, are marked with W. K. PSALM

From



From Carfax come !  
 And patch us up a zealous lay,  
 With an old *ever and for ay*,  
 Or *all and some*.

Or such a spirit lend me,  
 As may a hymne down sende me  
 To purge my braine :  
 But, Robert, looke behind thee,  
 Lest TURK or POPE do find thee,  
 And go to bed againe <sup>s</sup>.

The entire version of the psalter was at length published by John Day, in 1562, attached for the first time to the common prayer, and entitled, "The whole Booke of Psalmes collected into English metre by T. Sternhold, J. Hopkins, and others, conferred with the Ebrue, with apt Notes to sing them withall." Calvin's music was intended to correspond with the general parsimonious spirit of his worship: not to captivate the passions, and seduce the mind, by a levity, a variety, or a richness of modulation, but to infuse the more sober and unravishing ecstasies. The music he permitted, although sometimes it had wonderful effects, was to be without grace, elegance, or elevation. These apt notes were about forty tunes, of one part only, and in one unisonous key; remarkable for a certain uniform strain of sombrous gravity, and applicable to all the psalms in their turns, as the stanza and sense might allow. They also appear in the subsequent impressions, particularly of 1564, and 1577. They are believed to contain some of the original melodies, composed by French and German musicians. Many of them, particularly the celebrated one of the hundredth psalm, are the tunes of Goudimel and Le Jeune, who are among the first composers of Marot's French psalms<sup>h</sup>. Not a few were probably

<sup>s</sup> *POEMS*, Lond. 1647. duod. p. 49. and accuracy by Hawkins, *HIST. MUS.*  
<sup>h</sup> See this matter traced with great skill iii, 518.

imported:



imported by the protestant manufacturers of cloth, of Flanders, and the Low Countries, who fled into England from the persecution of the Duke de Alva, and settled in those counties where their art now chiefly flourishes. It is not however unlikely, that some of our own musicians, who lived about the year 1562, and who could always tune their harps to the religion of the times, such as Marbeck, Tallis, Tye, Parsons, and Munday, were employed on this occasion; yet under the restriction of conforming to the jejune and unadorned movements of the foreign composers. I presume much of the primitive harmony of all these antient tunes is now lost, by additions, variations, and transpositions.

This version is said to be *conferred with the Ebrue*. But I am inclined to think, that the translation was altogether made from the vulgate text, either in Latin or English.

It is evident that the prose psalms of our liturgy were chiefly consulted and copied, by the perpetual assumption of their words and combinations: many of the stanzas are literally nothing more than the prose-verses put into rhyme. As thus,

Thus were they stained with the workes  
Of their owne filthie way;  
And with their owne inventions did  
A whoring go astray<sup>1</sup>.

Whyttingham however, who had travelled to acquire the literature then taught in the foreign universities, and who joined in the translation of Coverdale's Bible, was undoubtedly a scholar, and an adept in the Hebrew language.

It is certain that every attempt to clothe the sacred Scripture in verse, will have the effect of misrepresenting and debasing the dignity of the original. But this general inconvenience, arising from the nature of things, was not the only difficulty which our versifiers of the psalter had to encounter, in common

<sup>1</sup> PSALM cvi. 38.

with



with all other writers employed in a similar task. Allowing for the state of our language in the middle of the sixteenth century, they appear to have been but little qualified either by genius or accomplishments for poetical composition. It is for this reason that they have produced a translation entirely destitute of elegance, spirit, and propriety. The truth is, that they undertook this work, not so much from an ambition of literary fame, or a consciousness of abilities, as from motives of piety, and in compliance with the cast of the times. I presume I am communicating no very new criticism when I observe, that in every part of this translation we are disgusted with a languor of versification, and a want of common prosody. The most exalted effusions of thanksgiving, and the most sublime imageries of the divine majesty, are lowered by a coldness of conception, weakened by frigid interpolations, and disfigured by a poverty of phraseology. Thomas Hopkins expostulates with the deity in these ludicrous, at least trivial, expressions.

Why dost withdrawe thy hand aback,  
And hide it in thy lappe?  
O plucke it out, and be not slack  
To give thy foes a rappe\*!

What writer who wished to diminish the might of the supreme Being, and to expose the style and sentiments of Scrip-

\* Ps. lxxiv. 12. Perhaps this verse is not much improved in the translation of king James the first, who seems to have rested entirely on the image of *why withdrawest thou not thine hand*, which he has expressed in Hopkins's manner.

Why dost thou thus withdraw thy hand,  
Even thy right hand restraine?  
Out of thy bosom, for our good,  
Drawe backe the same againe!

In another stanza he has preserved Hopkins's rhymes and expletives, and, if pos-

sible, lowered his language and cadences. Ps. lxxiv. 1.

Oh why, our God, for evermore  
Hast thou neglected us?  
Why *smoaks* thy wrath against the sheep  
Of thine owne pasture *thus*?

Here he has chiefly displayed the *smoking* of God's wrath, which *kindles* in Hopkins. The particle *thus* was never so distinguished and dignified. And it is hard to say, why his majesty should chuse to make the divine indignation *smoke*, rather than *burn*, which is suggested by the original.

ture,



ture, could have done it more skilfully, than by making David call upon God, not to *consume his enemies* by an irresistible blow, but to give them a rap? Although some shadow of an apology may be suggested for the word *rap*, that it had not then acquired its present burlesque acceptation, or the idea of a petty stroke, the vulgarity of the following phrase, in which the practice or profession of religion, or more particularly God's covenant with the Jews, is degraded to a *trade*, cannot easily be vindicated on any consideration of the fluctuating sense of words.

For why, their hearts were nothing bent  
To him, nor to his *trade*<sup>1</sup>.

Nor is there greater delicacy or consistency in the following stanza.

Confound them that apply  
And seeke to worke my shame;  
And at my harme do laugh, and cry,  
So, So, *there goeth the game*<sup>m</sup>.

The psalmist says, that God has placed the sun in the heavens, "which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber." Here is a comparison of the sun rising, to a bridegroom; who, according to the Jewish custom, was ushered from his chamber at midnight, with great state, preceded by torches and music. Sternhold has thus metrified the passage<sup>n</sup>.

In them the Lord made for the sun,  
A place of great renown,  
Who like a bridegroom ready trimm'd  
Doth from his chamber come.

The translator had better have spared his epithet to the bridegroom; which, even in the sense of *ready-dressed*, is derogatory to

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 37.

<sup>m</sup> Ps. lxx. 3.

<sup>n</sup> Ps. xix. 4.

the



the idea of the comparison. But *ready-trimm'd*, in the language of that time, was nothing more than *fresh-shaved*. Sternhold as often impairs a splendid description by an impotent redundancy, as by an omission or contraction of the most important circumstances.

The miraculous march of Jehovah before the Israelites through the wilderness in their departure from Egypt, with other marks of his omnipotence, is thus imaged by the inspired psalmist. "O God, when thou wentest forth before the people, " when thou wentest through the wilderness: the earth shook, " and the heavens dropped at the presence of God; even as " Sinai also was moved at the presence of God, who is the God " of Israel. Thou, O God, sentest a gracious rain upon thine " inheritance, and refreshedst it when it was weary. — The " chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of an- " gels; and the Lord is among them, as in the holy place of " Sinai." Sternhold has thus represented these great ideas.

When thou didst march before thy folk  
The Egyptians from among,  
And brought them from the wilderness,  
*Which was both wide and long:*

The earth did quake, the raine pourde downe,  
*Heard were great claps of thunder;*  
The mount Sinai shooke in such sorte,  
*As it would cleave in sunder.*

Thy heritage with drops of rain  
Abundantly was *wash't*,  
And *if so be* it barren was,  
By thee it was *refresh't*.



God's army is two millions,  
 Of warriors good and strong,  
 The Lord also in Sinai  
 Is present them among\*.

If there be here any merit, it arises solely from preserving the expressions of the prose version. And the translator would have done better had he preserved more, and had given us no feeble or foreign enlargements of his own. He has shewn no independent skill or energy. When once he attempts to add or dilate, his weakness appears. It is this circumstance alone, which supports the two following well-known stanzas<sup>p</sup>.

The Lord descended from above,  
 And bowde the heavens high;  
 And underneath his feet he cast  
 The darknesse of the skie.

On Cherubs and on Cherubims  
 Full roiallie he rode;  
 And on the winges of all the windes  
 Came flying all abrode.

Almost the entire contexture of the prose is here literally transferred, unbroken and without transposition, allowing for the small deviations necessarily occasioned by the metre and rhyme. It may be said, that the translator has testified his judgment in retaining so much of the original, and proved he was sensible the passage needed not any adventitious ornament. But what may seem here to be judgment or even taste, I fear, was want of expression in himself. He only adopted what was almost ready done to his hand.

To the disgrace of sacred music, sacred poetry, and our established worship, these psalms still continue to be sung in

\* Ps. lxxviii. 7. seq.

<sup>p</sup> Ps. xviii. 9, 10.



the church of England. It is certain, had they been more poetically translated, they would not have been acceptable to the common people. Yet however they may be allowed to serve the purposes of private edification, in administering spiritual consolation to the manufacturer and mechanic, as they are extrinsic to the frame of our liturgy, and incompatible with the genius of our service, there is perhaps no impropriety in wishing, that they were remitted and restrained to that church in which they sprung, and with whose character and constitution they seem so aptly to correspond. Whatever estimation in point of composition they might have attracted at their first appearance in a ruder age, and however instrumental they might have been at the infancy of the reformation in weaning the minds of men from the papistic ritual, all these considerations can now no longer support even a specious argument for their being retained. From the circumstances of the times, and the growing refinements of literature, of course they become obsolete and contemptible. A work grave, serious, and even respectable for its poetry, in the reign of Edward the sixth, at length in a cultivated age, has contracted the air of an absolute travestie. Voltaire observes, that in proportion as good taste improved, the psalms of Clement Marot inspired only disgust: and that although they charmed the court of Francis the first, they seemed only to be calculated for the populace in the reign of Lewis the fourteenth\*.

To obviate these objections, attempts have been made from time to time to modernise this antient metrical version, and to render it more tolerable and intelligible by the substitution of more familiar modes of diction. But, to say nothing of the unskilfulness with which these arbitrary corrections have been conducted, by changing obsolete for known words, the texture and integrity of the original style, such as it was, has been destroyed: and many stanzas, before too naked and weak, like a

\* Hist. Mod. ch. ccvii.



plain old Gothic edifice stripped of its few signatures of antiquity, have lost that little and almost only strength and support which they derived from antient phrases. Such alterations, even if executed with prudence and judgment, only corrupt what they endeavour to explain; and exhibit a motley performance, belonging to no character of writing, and which contains more improprieties than those which it professes to remove. Hearne is highly offended at these unwarrantable and incongruous emendations, which he pronounces to be *abominable* in any book, "much more in a sacred work;" and is confident, that were Sternhold and Hopkins "now living, they would be so far from owning what is ascribed to them, that they would proceed against the innovators as CHEATS'." It is certain, that this translation in its genuine and unsophisticated state, by ascertaining the signification of many radical words now perhaps undeservedly disused, and by displaying original modes of the English language, may justly be deemed no inconsiderable monument of our antient literature, if not of our antient poetry. In condemning the practice of adulterating this primitive version, I would not be understood to recommend another in its place, entirely new. I reprobate any version at all, more especially if intended for the use of the church.

In the mean time, not to insist any longer on the incompatibility of these metrical psalms with the spirit of our liturgy, and the barbarism of their style, it should be remembered, that they were never admitted into our church by lawful authority. They were first introduced by the puritans, and afterwards continued by connivance. But they never received any royal approbation or parliamentary sanction, notwithstanding it is said in their title page, that they are "set forth and ALLOWED to be sung in all churches of all the people together before and after evening prayer, and also before and after sermons: and moreover in private houses for their godly solace and comfort,

\* GLOSS. ROB. GL. p. 699.

" laying



“ laying apart all ungodly songs and ballads, which tend only “ to the nourishing of vice and the corrupting of youth.” At the beginning of the reign of queen Elifabeth, when our ecclesiastical reformation began to be placed on a solid and durable establishment, those English divines who had fled from the superstitions of queen Mary to Franckfort and Geneva, where they had learned to embrace the opposite extreme, and where, from an abhorrence of catholic ceremonies, they had contracted a dislike to the decent appendages of divine worship, endeavoured, in conjunction with some of the principal courtiers, to effect an abrogation of our solemn church service, which they pronounced to be antichristian and unevangelical. They contended that the metrical psalms of David, set to plain and popular music, were more suitable to the simplicity of the gospel, and abundantly adequate to all the purposes of edification : and this proposal they rested on the authority and practice of Calvin, between whom and the church of England the breach was not then so wide as at present. But the queen and those bishops to whom she had delegated the business of supervising the liturgy, among which was the learned and liberal archbishop Parker, objected, that too much attention had already been paid to the German theology. She declared, that the foreign reformers had before interposed, on similar deliberations, with unbecoming forwardness : and that the Common Prayer of her brother Edward had been once altered, to quiet the scruples, and to gratify the cavils, of Calvin, Bucer, and Fagius. She was therefore invariably determined to make no more concessions to the importunate partisans of Geneva, and peremptorily decreed that the choral formalities should still be continued in the celebration of the sacred offices<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See CANONS and INJUNCTIONS, A. D. 1559. NUM. xlix.

S E C T.