

“Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”

By ROBERT D. KALIS

FOUR LINES known generally as the DOXOLOGY are probably the most universally sung of any stanza in the English language. Thomas Ken (1637-1711), their author, originally wrote the words as the last stanza of his “Morning” and “Evening” hymns. These two hymns stood for many years near the head of the list of great hymns of the church.

He wrote them for the devotional use of the boys at Winchester College (Prep School) where he himself had studied as a youth and where he served, after his graduation from Oxford University, as chaplain. The following advice was given in his *MANUAL OF PRAYERS FOR SCHOLARS*, “Be sure to sing the Morning and Evening Hymns in your chamber devoutly, remembering that the Psalmist upon happy experience assures you that it is a good thing to tell of the lovingkindness of the Lord early in the morning and His truth in the night”. Included in the *MANUAL* was a “Midnight Hymn” which also had as its last stanza the familiar DOXOLOGY. This hymn was recommended for the students meditation during their

sleepless hours or when perchance they awoke in the night. The use of these hymns in later years had a profound influence on George Whitefield, the famous evangelist, who as a boy attended Winchester College.

After ministering to several congregations, Thomas Ken was made chaplain to the profligate King Charles II in 1680. The bold preacher never compromised in his preaching to the king, who in turn respected “the good little man” as he called him. On one occasion when the “merry monarch” desired to use the chaplain’s house as the temporary dwelling for some of his worthless friends including the notorious Nell Gwynne, his mistress, Ken forbade it with the words, “Not for a king’s kingdom”. Instead of provoking the wrath of the king, he earned his respect and was soon promoted to a place of honor. The king was heard to say at chapel time, “I must go and hear the good little man tell me my faults”.

When in later years Ken was removed from his position by another king for political reasons, he retired without bitterness to live the rest of his days in communion with the Lord.

For many years he characteristically headed all his letters, “All glory be to God”. Though reduced to poverty he had learned to be content with such things as he had, namely: his Bible, his lute, his lame horse, and his shroud which he always carried with him and which he put on a few hours before his death. At his own request he was buried without pomp or form at sunrise, the service consisting chiefly in the singing of the 14 verses of his “Morning Hymn”, of which the DOXOLOGY is the last stanza.

No one has since succeeded in compressing into four short lines so full a measure as we find in this well-known Doxology. Thomas Ken’s poetic desire has been remarkably fulfilled.

*And shall the well-meant song I leave
behind*

*With Jesus’ lovers some
acceptance find,*

*‘Twill heighten e’en the joys of
heaven to know*

*That in my verse, saints sing
God’s praise below.*

The tune to which the DOXOLOGY is usually sung, known as “Old Hundredth”, was composed by Louis Bourgeois, musical editor of the *GENEVA PSALT-*

ER, which was published in 1551. Originally written as the tune for Psalm 134, it became better known as the tune for which William Kethe arranged Psalm 100 in verse. Hence the title "Old Hundredth".

While all Germany had been "singing itself into Luther's doctrine" and sending offerings of praise heavenward in the hymns of Paul Gerhardt, the reformed branch of the Protestant Church under Calvin and Zwingli was denied this opportunity. These reformers frowned on choirs, organs, and every ecclesiastical art. In their view God should be worshipped only by hymns which were divinely inspired, namely the Psalms of the Old Testament. So then while hymnody was developing in the German Lutheran Church, Psalmody developed in the Reformed Church. The English-speaking church held with this latter branch and the Geneva Psalter became their "song-book".

The French edition of the Geneva Psalter was probably the first Protestant book of worship brought to the shores of America. A group of French Huguenots, in order to escape persecution, formed a colony in South Carolina and Florida in 1565. They undoubtedly used the Geneva Psalter in their worship. The group was unfortunately massacred by Spaniards, not because they were French, but because they were Protestants.

Governor Bradford brought also a Geneva Bible to these shores which almost certainly contained the Psalter. He wrote of those who landed from the MAYFLOWER in 1620, "Being thus . . . brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of heaven who

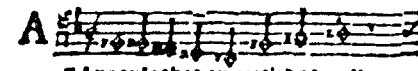
had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof". Certain it is that "ALL PEOPLE THAT ON EARTH DO DWELL", Psalm 100 in verse by William Kethe to Louis Bourgeois' tune, was well known to the Pilgrim band that comprised the Bay Colony. Samuel Eliot Morrison, in his "HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE", has chosen this song as representative of the historic period following the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. It is the only hymn of the Geneva Psalter that is still in common use and that is still published in most hymnals.

Here, then, are two hymns, linked by a single melody, full of praise to God, *for* which, and *by* which we may bring our sacrifice of thanksgiving.

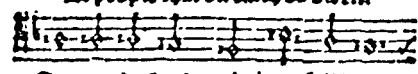
A choice verse from each of Thomas Ken's Morning and Evening Hymns is included.

*Direct, control, suggest this day,
All I design, or do, or say;
That all my powers, with all their
might
In thy sole glory may unite.*

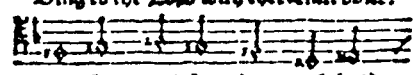
*Oh may my soul on thee repose,
And may sweet sleep mine eyelids
close,
Sleep that shall me more vigorous
make
To serve my God when I awake.*

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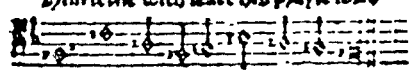
All people that on earth do dwell.



Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:



**Him serve with fear his people loud
tell, Come ye before him and adore.**



The Song, Old Hundredth, in the Geneva Psalter