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The psalmody and the public prayers of a Christian community are the most unequivocal and infallible exponents of its piety and spiritual intelligence. Indeed, the sacred song and the social prayer are but the express image and living form of the pious emotions, religious taste, spiritual discernment, than holy affections of those who unite in them. If the Christian can best exhibit his faith by his works, he can also most satisfactorily verbally demonstrate his piety and humanity in the praises which he sings, and in the prayers and thanksgivings which he offers.

The Christian Hymn Book, next to the Bible, moreover, wields the largest and mightiest formative influence upon the young and old, upon saint and sinner, than of any other book in the world. Poetry, and especially good religious and moral poetry, emanates as much from the heart as from the head, and partakes so much of the spirit of its author, that it insinuates itself into the soul with more subtlety and power than any other language of mortals, either pictured to the eye, or presented to the ear. “Allow me,” said some one, “to write the ballads for a nation, and I care not who enacts its laws.” Permit me, I also say, to dispense the psalmody of a community, and I care not who dictates its creed or writes out its catechism. If the hymn-book is daily sung in the family, and in the social meetings of the brethren, it must imbue their souls with its sentiments more than all the other labors of the pulpit or the press.

For these reasons, no book ought to be got up with more religious care and consideration than the volume of psalmody. No task requires a more cultivated spiritual taste—a more enlarged and comprehensive mind—a more intimate acquaintance with the spirit of the Bible and the hallowed breathings of its saints, than the psalmody of a Christian church (Introduction, 13–14).