

JOHN LEIGHTON, BINDING DESIGNER, AND THE *LYRA GERMANICA*

THE DESIGNS FOR BINDINGS of trade editions published during the Victorian era are now attracting an increasing amount of attention, and their value — both as works of art and as important elements in the history of book production — is being appreciated. The 1860s are the most prolific period for such bindings, and there are several major guides to them, including Ruari McLean's *Victorian Publishers' Book Bindings* (London, 1974) and *Victorian Book Design* (London, 1972), Percy Muir's *Victorian Illustrated Books* (London, 1971), and Gleeson White's *English Illustration: The Sixties* (London, 1906).

Variant bindings within the one edition are reasonably common, but in the instance of *Lyra Germanica* there are a number of interesting variations, not only in binding but also in illustrations and the text. Furthermore *Lyra Germanica* presents an impressive example of the artistry of the eminent binding designer, John Leighton (1822–1912), for not only are the covers from his hand but there are also examples of his work among the illustrations and vignettes within the book contributed by a variety of notable book illustrators. While it is generally accepted that Leighton was the most prolific binding designer,¹ no records exist which might establish the true output of other artists, such as Albert Henry Warren (1830–1911), William Harry Rogers (1825–73) and Robert Dudley (1858–91) — the last the great friend of Myles Birket Foster. Still others, like Charles Bennett, who was active in the 1850s and 60s, are yet to have their bindings recorded, and many distinguished covers are unsigned and remain to be identified, particularly in the period 1840–60.²

Lyra Germanica — an anthology of hymns — was first published by its author, Catherine Winkworth, in July 1855. A second edition, including some additional text, was issued in November 1855. The latter forms the basis for the first edition of *Lyra Germanica* supervised by John Leighton and published in 1861 by Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer (London).

Miss Catherine Winkworth was born in London 13 September 1827. She left England when aged eighteen to live in Dresden for a year. Learning German there, she became interested in hymnology, and subsequently became the foremost translator of German hymns into English. Throughout her life she was particularly interested in the education of women, helping to establish Bristol University Collège and other institutions admitting girls, and acting as Secretary of the Committee on Higher Education for Women. She died suddenly 1 July 1878 while visiting a relative in France.

The *Lyra Germanica* of 1861 (which is paged xx + 272) was reissued in 1862, 1863, 1864 and 1865. In 1868 it was again re-issued being described on p.ii as the '5th edition'. The title page describes the text as being 'Hymns for the Sunday and Chief Festivals of the Christian Year'. The hymns were selected by Miss

Winkworth from Chevalier Bunsen's *Versuch eines allgemeinen Gesang und Gebetbuchs* of 1833. The anthology includes many of the best known and loved hymns in Germany translated into English, such as Luther's famous version of the 46th Psalm ('A sure stronghold, our God is He'), the hymn 'In the midst of life', and a favourite of John Wesley, 'Commit thou all thy ways'.

The 1861 (1st) and 1868 ('5th') editions have the same covers, although variants occur on the 1868 backstrip. The cover (measuring from the hinge) is 235 x 170mm., and it is in cloth, green morocco-grained, with a crimson cloth mandorla onlay, blocked in gold on front and back. The boards are bevelled and are signed 'J.L.', the monogram of John Leighton. The spine is blocked in gold. The binder's ticket is 'Edmonds and Remnants, London'.³ All edges are gilt.

Mr. Robin de Beaumont has described this as a fine Leighton binding, and when found in good condition — unfortunately a rare occurrence now for bindings of such fragility — it is an impressive example of binding design as an art form.⁴ The interlacing of the frieze for the onlay is enhanced by the green surround and leads with flowing ease through to the title, blocked in gold on red. By lengthening the headpiece to the central figure, Leighton masterfully unites the centre of the cover with the title and evokes the theme of the text.

The wood engravings were executed by such renowned craftsmen as J. Swain, J. Cooper, George and Edward Dalziel and T. Bolton, as well as de Witt, Green, Harral, Murden, Pearson and Leighton's brother, Harry. The designs are by E.Armitage(5), J.Flaxman(2), M.Lawless(3) and S.Marks(4), with an outstanding illustration on page 182 by the artist Charles Keene. Leighton also is represented by several full-page illustrations, in addition to the vignettes and his page-decorations. Gleeson White has drawn attention to the significance of the engravings by Bolton — after the Flaxman bas-relief (p.114): he considers this as the 'same block Bohn includes in his supplementary chapter to the 1861 edition of Chatto and Jackson's *History of Wood Engraving* as a specimen of the first experiment in Mr. Bolton's new process for photographing on the wood.'⁵ As this innovation is literally epoch-making, this really beautiful block — with its companion (p.133) — is of the highest historic interest. Geoffrey Wakeman adds a particular note of interest in stating that the negative used was taken by John Leighton.⁶

The new edition of 1868 has the same cloth cover as that already described for the 1861/1868, though variations do occur in the colour of the backstrip, and sometimes the back is blind stamped.⁷ It is paged xii + 254 and all edges are gilt. The 1868 was also issued in a brown leather binding, of the same dimensions as the cloth. The design is unsigned but can be attributed to Leighton, who again supervised the entire publication. In the copy examined, both front and back are stamped partly blind, partly in black, ruled and with a centre panel of interlacing diagonals; the boards are bevelled. The backstrip has the title blocked in gold and has raised bands. The design is restrained and ideally suited to the text. McLean

has suggested that Leighton rarely used a repeating pattern — as here — but his Moxon series are examples of the practice. This series was published by Moxon and Co., the first, in 1868, being *A Selection from the Works of Tennyson*. Other selections of various poets were the subject of later books in the series, including Browning's and Locker's. The cover used in all these series was a diaper pattern designed by Leighton.⁸ The copy of *Lyra Germanica* under discussion has no binder's ticket, but the original marble endpapers are present.⁹ No advertisement pages are present in the leather-bound copies, but they are sometimes found in the cloth-bound copies.¹⁰ The title page is printed in red and black, and the chapter headings and numerous vignettes are again Leighton's, as are many of the engraved illustrations. Yet here he has created new designs which show his versatility while still maintaining therewith the purpose of the book. The pages abound with examples of his style, the text gracefully enclosed in double decorated lines of black. His designs give the book a unity of spirit, whereas the work of the other illustrators, fine though it is, seems to lack that harmony with the hymns, here the text of Winkworth's anthology of 1858.

In this new 1868 edition the engravers are again outstanding, including Swain, Whymper, the Dalziel Brothers, Heath, Cooper and Bolton. There are six engravings after Armitage, and the Pre-Raphaelite master, Ford Madox Brown, contributes three superb drawings: on page 45 is the 'Sower'; 'At the Sepulcher' on page 38 is more traditional in style; but the outstanding brilliance of 'Abraham', on page 174, puts Brown into the twentieth-century world of Farleigh and Gibbings (the small child and the aged Abraham contrast in movement and expression in true beauty of line, and the skill of Swain's engravings adds to the quality of this unique art work).

These two editions of *Lyra Germanica* show the influence of John Leighton as the dominant interest. Though there is a major historical interest in the first use of photography on wood and in the excellent illustrations of Keene and Madox Brown, it is Leighton's binding designs and his overall wedding of the design to the text which further demonstrate that the Victorian era saw books presented with an artistry which had not been seen before and which has not been seen since in trade publications.

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NOTES

¹ Sybille Pantazzi, 'John Leighton 1822-1912', *The Connoisseur* 152 (April 1963), pp.262-73.

² McLean, Ruari. *Victorian Publishers' Book Bindings in Cloth and Leather* (London, 1974), p.14. Ruari McLean is the leading authority on Victorian-era book publications; author of *Victorian Book Design*, *George Cundall: A Victorian Publisher* etc.; consultant to the National Magazine Co., & other firms; formerly typographical adviser on the *Observer* newspaper; Honorary Typographical Adviser to Her Majesty's Stationery Office in succession to Sir Francis Meynell.

³ Copy from author's private collection.

⁴ Robin de Beaumont, Catalogue 4, 1982, p.37. Robin de Beaumont is an antiquarian bookseller, 25 Park Walk, Chelsea, London. He has been associated with McLean since the early 1960s in respect of Victorian books; he contributed from his own collection many of the bindings illustrated in McLean's *Victorian Publishers' Book Bindings*; author of 'Sixties Illustrators', *Discovering Antiques* Part 68 (Jan. 1972), pp.1617-21; he has contributed from his own collection to McLean's *Victorian Publishers' Book Bindings in Paper*, to be published in London early 1983; also see note 10.

⁵ Gleeson White, *English Illustration; The Sixties: 1855-70* (London, 1906), p.113.

⁶ Geoffrey Wakeman, *Victorian Book Illustration* (London, 1973), p.78. Geoffrey Wakeman is Senior Lecturer in Bibliography, Loughborough School of Librarianship; author of *Typographica Naturalis: A History of Nature Printing, Aspects of Nineteenth Century Illustration*, etc.

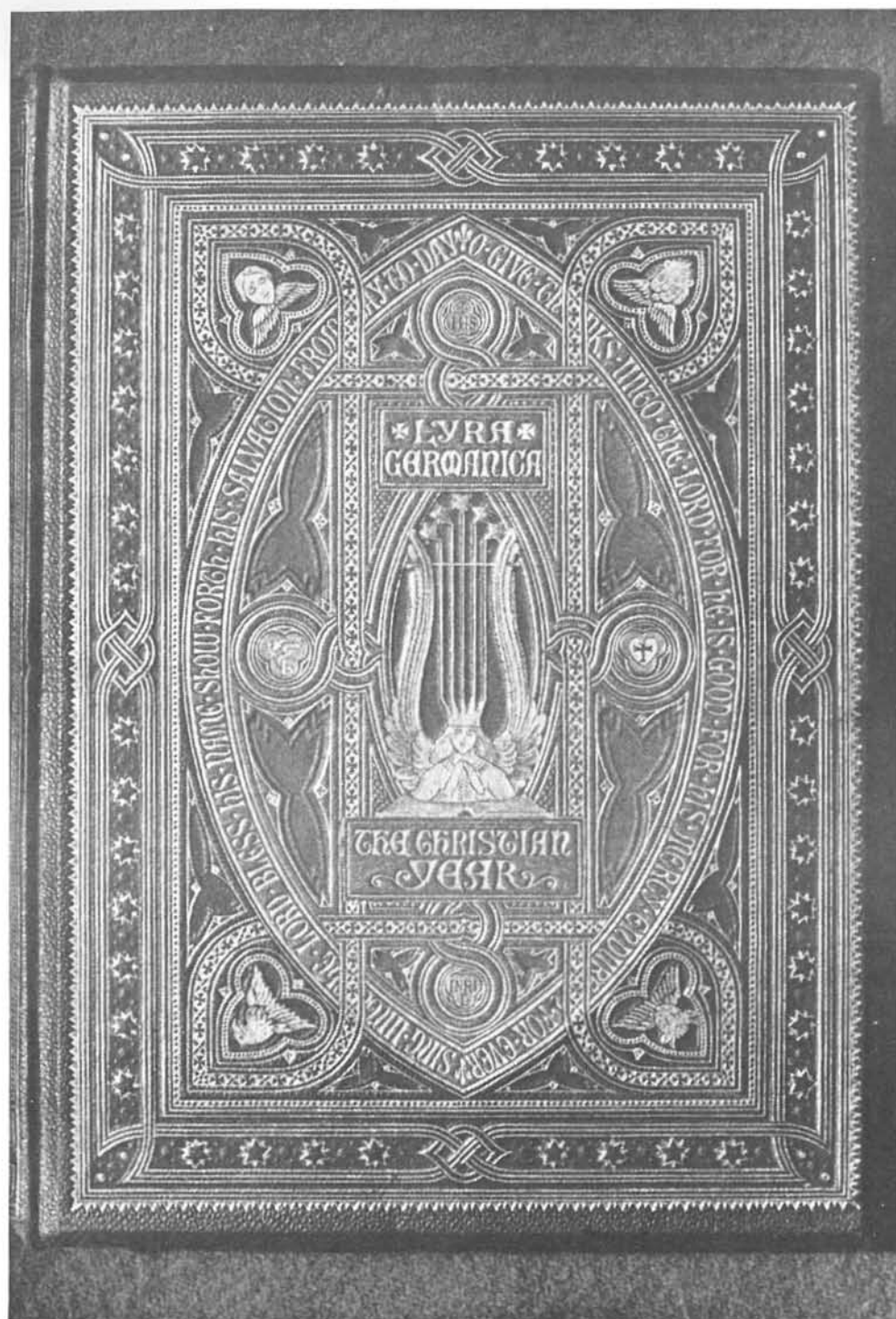
⁷ McLean, *Victorian Publishers' Book Bindings*, p.131.

⁸ McLean, *Victorian Publishers' Book Bindings*, p.122. Sybille Pantazzi (see note 1) states (p.265): 'one of the rare instances in which Leighton uses a diaper or repeating pattern, in this case based on the fleur de lys.'

⁹ Copy from author's private collection.

¹⁰ Stanley Gibbons Antiquarian Books, Catalogue 1, Spring 1979, p.36. Stanley Gibbons Antiquarian Books commenced in September 1978, being part of Stanley Gibbons International, 393 Strand, London. The latter is associated with stamp collecting, coins and banknotes (since 1970), antique maps (since 1975) and scripophily (since 1978). Catalogue 1 was prepared by Robin de Beaumont and designed by Ruari McLean.

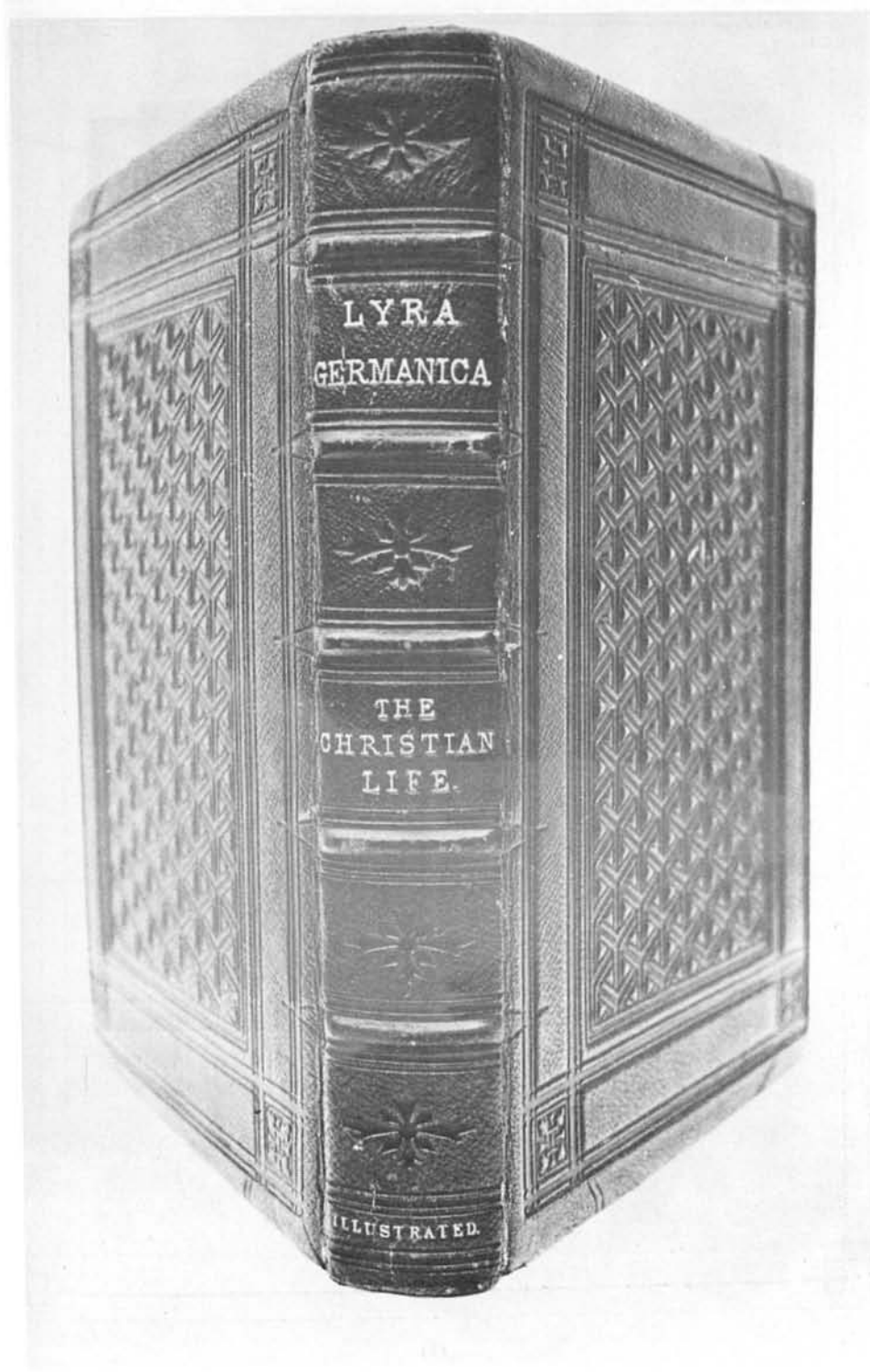
The following illustrations are all from the '5th' edition of 1868: the front cover, cloth binding; leather binding; page 114; page 133; page 45; page 38; page 174.



LYRA
GERMANICA

THE CHRISTIAN
YEAR

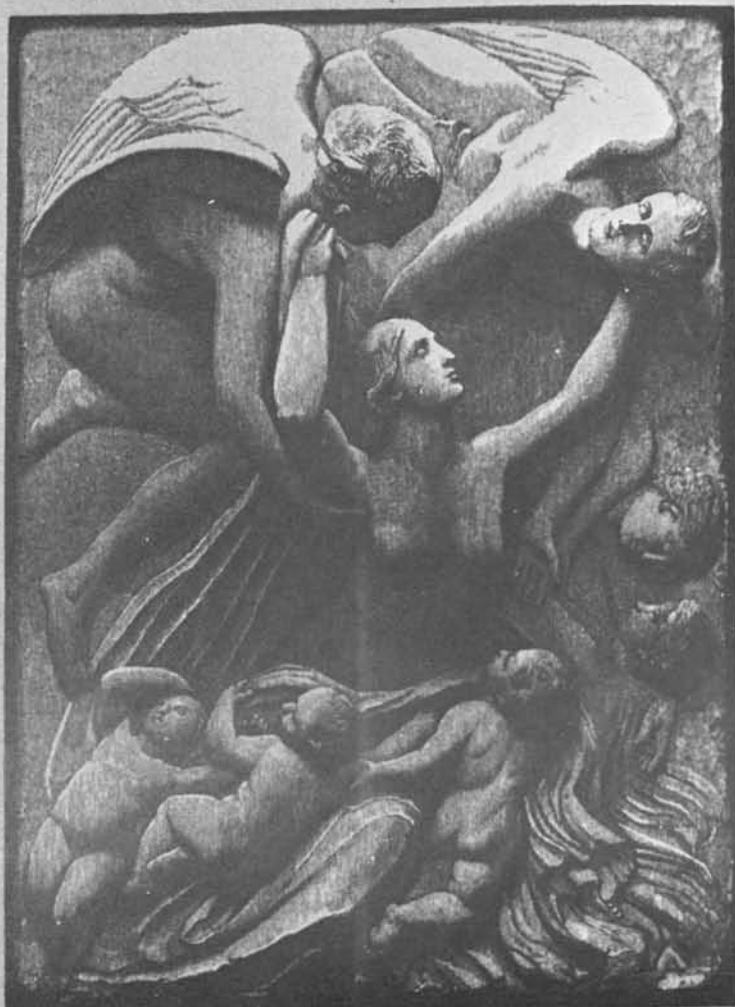
THE LORD BLESS HIS SAINTS
THAT HE WILL SAVE THEM FROM ALL
HANDS AND BRING THEM TO HIS
HEAVENLY KINGDOM OF GLORY
AND HONOR FOR EVER AND EVER
AMEN



LYRA
GERMANICA

THE
CHRISTIAN
LIFE.

ILLUSTRATED.



Heavenward ever would I haste,
When Thy table, Lord, is spread ;
Heavenly strength on earth I taste,



When my foe puts forth his might,
And would tread me in the dust,
To this rock I take my flight,
And I conquer him through trust.

* LIBRA GERMANICA *

Now let the mourner
grieve no more,
Though his beloved
sleep,
A happier meeting shall
restore
Their light to eyes
that weep.

Now every heart each
noble deed
With new resolve may
dare,
A glorious harvest shall
the seed
In brightest regions
bear.

He lives, His presence
hath not ceased,
Though foes and fears
be rife ;
And thus we hail in
Easter's feast
A world renew'd to
life !

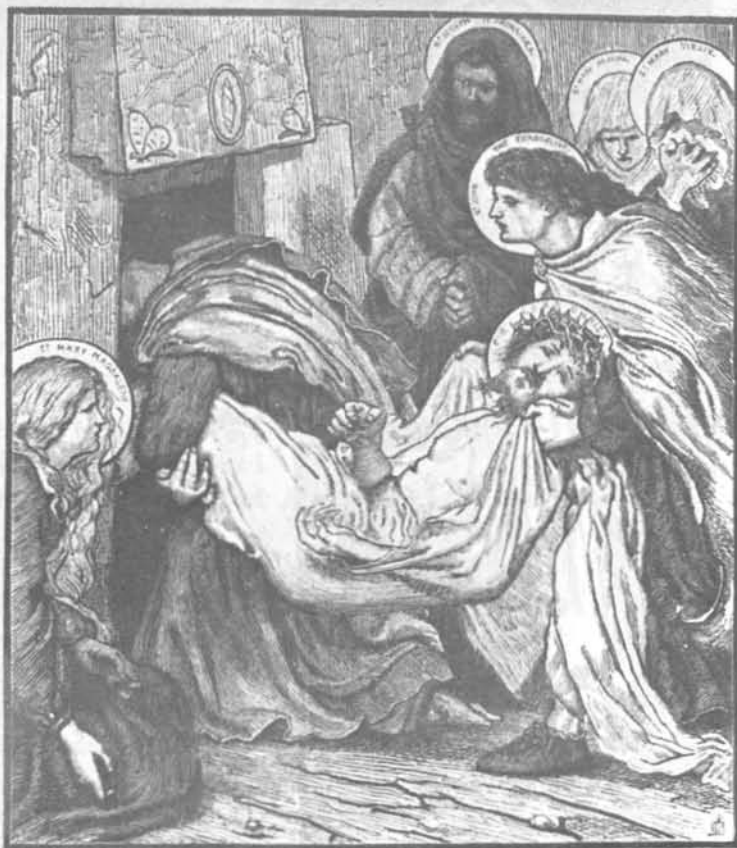
* ROVALIS. *

1772-1801.



HE THAT SOWETH TO THE SPIRIT
SHALL OF THE SPIRIT REAP
LIFE EVERLASTING.
GAL VI. 8.

* IZRA GERMANICH *



O Blessed Rock !
Soon grant Thy flock
To see Thy Sabbath morning !
Strife and pain will all be past
When that day is dawning.

VICTOR STRAUSS.

* ABRAHAM *



†† SEEST THOU HOW
FAITH BROUGHT WITH HIS
WORKS, & BY WORKS WAS
FAITH MADE PERFECT? †

† Jas. ii. 22. †

†
* II *
†

Faith
that Worketh
by Love.

Who keepeth not
God's word, yet saith,
I know the Lord, is wrong ;
In him is not that blessed
faith
Through which the truth is
strong ;
But he who hears and keeps
the word,
Is not of this world, but of
God.

The faith His word hath
caused to shine
Will kindle love in thee ;
More wouldst thou *know* of
things divine,
Deeper thy *love* must be ;
True faith not only gives
thee light,
But strength to love and
do the right.

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