

The Psalms the Puritan Founders Sang

1956

THE BAY PSALM BOOK. Facsimile of the First Edition of 1640. With a Companion Volume, **THE ENIGMA OF THE BAY PSALM BOOK.** By Zoltan Haraszti. Chicago: *The University of Chicago Press.* \$10.

Reviewed by
PERRY MILLER

THOUGH the Puritan founders of Massachusetts Bay set themselves to "purify" their ecclesiastical observance of all the ceremonial which they believed the Church of England had sinfully preserved from the papal epoch, still they had an order of service. In this the central act was the preacher's sermon, yet it also called, on what seemed New Testa-

ment authority, for the congregation to sing a psalm. Clearly, divine providence never expected yeomen and merchants to chant in Hebrew. Wherefore the immense importance of creating a version in English, verbally following the original even when put into meters and rhymes with which the people could cope.

In 1640 the newly imported hand-press in Cambridge produced "The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre." The work of a committee of the colony's clergy, it was issued in seventeen hundred copies, of which today only eleven survive. In 1947 one of these fetched \$151,000 in the New York book mart.

Zoltan Haraszti, keeper of rare

books at the Boston Public Library, offers a clean facsimile of the book, along with a charming exposition both historical and bibliographical. With great persuasiveness he argues that the preface—a *locus classicus* of the Puritan esthetic—was written by John Cotton rather than by Richard Mather, to whom tradition has long ascribed it. Furthermore, Mr. Haraszti surveys the whole story of Puritan psalm-singing and of the beginnings of the Cambridge Press; his account may be happily greeted as the definitive word on the entire subject of the Bay's Book of Psalms.

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