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The Language of Christian Worship

IN these days we are witnessing a challenge to the whole structure, contents and purpose of worship; both the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches have shown themselves increasingly ready to investigate their own traditions and free themselves from a rigidity which had for too long held them fast. Now the churches are trying to shape their whole life and thought and worship in a way that will have meaning to their own members and make an impact on those outside. But there is one problem which most liturgical reformers in this country have so far shirked: the language of the liturgy.

Professor G. D. Kilpatrick admits this quite bluntly in his book *Remaking the Liturgy*. Justifying his retention of the sixteenth and seventeenth century language of the Book of Common Prayer in what is otherwise a drastic proposed revision, he says "We have revolution enough on hand already. . . . Little of its structure or contents can remain unchanged. It seemed wise at this stage to be content with this revolution without adding to it a second revolution of language."¹ Other revisions have also stopped short at this point.² Yet, however much we may admire the English of the Prayer Book or the Authorized Version for their literary merits, this must not be the decisive criterion of language for the liturgy. "Nor have we any right to require of Christian people subservience to a period liturgy on the grounds of its literary quality. . . . Those of us who feel at home with the literary pieces of any period must not make this an essential condition of Christian worship. If we try to, we will be turning our religion into the worship of a coterie."³

The primary need in liturgical language is for intelligibility, while avoiding what is inept, trivial or irreverent. To keep the language of worship as a preserve of an élite who have been brought up to learn Tudor English is directly contrary to Paul's instructions to the church at Corinth, where he argues for intelligibility from the position of "the plain man" (N.E.B.) or "anyone in the position of an outsider" (R.S.V.).⁴

Now language is used in worship in three ways in relation to the congregation: it can be directed *to* them, as in scripture and sermon, or spoken *for* them (on their behalf), as in the prayers, or used *by* them, as in hymns. The need for revision of scripture has long been recognized, and the new translations and modern versions of the Bible are being increasingly used in public worship. So the Word of God is frequently proclaimed in modern English and we may be sure will be increasingly so when the New English Bible transla-

tion of the Old Testament is published. As far as public prayers are concerned, as we have seen, revisers have been more slow to experiment in this field, either by way of free composition, or by producing contemporary versions of older liturgies. From the Roman Catholic Church we have Michel Quoist's *Prayers of Life*; Guy Daniel has given us modern translations of the Collects and Holy Communion service from the Book of Common Prayer in his *The Enemy is Boredom*. There have been several others; and most recently there has been published *Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship* by a group of Congregational Ministers, edited by Caryl Micklem.⁵ Slowly, then, public prayers are coming to be spoken in the language of today, as indeed they range widely over every concern of modern life.

But what about the language used by the congregation itself? Strangely enough the very part of the service in which the congregation corporately has most opportunity of making its response, namely the singing of praise, is still for the most part tied to words, images and thought forms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries! And so we have the incongruous situation that while God's Word is read in modern English, and the minister, as mouthpiece of the congregation, may address God in the language of today, the "plain man", as Paul calls him, is still required to speak mostly in archaic terms. What then are the difficulties that cause the reform of the language of congregational praise to lag behind that of other parts of the service? And what signs of progress are there?

The difficulties must not be underestimated. For one thing, hymns cannot very well be "modernized"; we must take them or leave them as they are, except for minor emendations. Again, we cannot discard the old hymns until we have sufficient contemporary hymns to take their place, and the twentieth century has not yet proved itself a very prolific period of hymn-writing. Further, most congregations have a built-in resistance to learning anything new, especially a hymn. But over and above these, there are other more fundamental difficulties.

(a) *Rhyme and Metre*. A hymn must of necessity be capable of being sung to a reasonably simple tune by a company of people. This imposes upon the writer the discipline of writing short verses, in a fixed metre and with a simple rhyming pattern. Irregular lines, long verses and varying metres are useless in hymns. By contrast there is something about contemporary methods of expression in verse which is quite incompatible with this regular shape and rhyming which traditionally (though not invariably) is required in a hymn. It is, of course, possible to dispense with rhyme, as in Douglas Walmsley's hymn :

Father, O hear us, seeking now to praise thee;
Thou art our hope, our confidence, our Saviour,

Thou art the refuge of the generations,
 Lord God almighty⁶

where the metre is strong; or to substitute a subtle form of assonance for a rhyme, as in Jan Struther's

We thank You, Lord of heaven,
 For all the joys that greet us,
 For all that You have given
 To help us and delight us.⁷

But if, as a concession to contemporary forms of verse, hymns are to be written in a much freer form they will make far greater demands on those who sing them. Are our congregations prepared for this?

(b) *Language.* The language of all the classic hymn-writers has been inextricably bound up with the phrases and cadences of the Authorized Version. The hymns of Wesley and Watts, for instance, abound in scripture references and allusions unmistakable to those of us who were brought up on the Authorized Version. But the widespread use of modern translations both in the home and the pulpit means that the next generation will be quite unfamiliar with many of these. A modern hymn, therefore, that draws upon scripture will best not be tied to the language of a once familiar version, but only to the underlying thought and argument of scripture; these truths are best expressed in words and images that belong to the contemporary world.

By the same token, it is argued by some liturgical reformers that "thou" and "thee" and other features of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century syntax and accidentance must go. The compilers of *Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship* claim that "thou" contributes little except "a sense of unreality and distance to any worshipper not already so accustomed to the usage that he mentally discounts it anyway".⁸ There may indeed be a temptation to keep some of these archaic usages for their evocative value, as G. D. Kilpatrick points out, but "we shall have to balance any gains of this kind against the distance we introduce between liturgy and congregation".⁹

One of the most notable (and very successful) attempts at this is in the English translation of the Psalms by The Grail, which stays close to the literary form and poetic rhythm of the Hebrew, but uses the language of ordinary folk, as in Psalm xxiii. (Grail 22):

If I should walk in the valley of darkness no evil would I fear.
 You are there with your crook and your staff; with these you
 give me comfort.¹⁰

Set to the music of Joseph Gelineau, these are being heard increasingly in worship.

The use of "you" and "your" when addressing God, in the fixed

metre of a normal hymn-structure could, on the other hand, easily lead to irreverence and bathos. This has been completely avoided, however, in Jan Struther's hymn "Lord of all hopefulness"¹¹ which seems altogether appropriate for ceremonial worship, even with its touch of friendship and familiarity in the last line of each verse.

(c) *Images*. Here there is a difficulty of a much deeper and more intractable kind. If we are to speak of the unspeakable God, we must use images. And images cannot be meaningful without the functioning of the imagination. The imagination, in fact, is "the realm where speechless man meets unspeakable God and visualizes the encounter in images".¹² Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hymn-writers had no difficulty about this. They had a whole set of images already at hand, and clearly understood by the people who sang their hymns. Many of them came straight from the Authorized Version of the Bible, others from the conventions of the age in which they lived. These latter we may well expect to become obsolete in a later age. The eighteenth-century hymn-writers, for instance, were fond of images from trade. Their hymns are liberally sprinkled with such metaphors as "transaction", "interest", and so on. We who are familiar with these usages are not disturbed by them, but what does a literal-minded teen-ager of today understand by

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?¹³

There is no doubt that such contemporary images of a distant past do now impede popular understanding of some hymns.

But what about Bible images? Does their association with Scripture give them a more lasting validity? Can we claim that "the stage-conventions of faith, so to speak, remain the same"¹⁴ though ordinary folk no longer accept or understand them? I think we can, given imagination and a feeling for poetry. Both of these are necessary for the interpretation of Biblical images.

Take, for example, the image of "Rock", which occurs frequently in the book of Psalms, e.g. "He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved"¹⁵ and which has been transferred to many hymns:

On the rock of ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose?¹⁶

and

Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee.¹⁷

Neither of these references would be self-explanatory to anyone not familiar with this common Biblical image. It can, however, be interpreted by other images drawn from contemporary life, which immediately give it meaning, as in these verses by Donald Hughes:

The certainties of old
Fail our uncertain day,
The waves of unbelief have rolled
And carried them away.

However fierce the shock,
However dark the night,
Still from the everlasting rock
Shines the eternal light.¹⁸

Here the contemporary image of a lighthouse makes the scriptural image come alive.

When we come to certain doctrinal hymns, we are again faced with the question of the validity of some of the Biblical images used. Must we demythologize our hymn books? Ascensiontide would be all the poorer without Charles Wesley's magnificent hymn

Hail the day that sees him rise
To his throne above the skies¹⁹

but this is full of the "three-decker universe" imagery, not to mention the graphic image borrowed from Psalm xxiv :

Lift your heads, eternal gates !

If we are to sing of the Ascension in these terms, we must bring our imagination and sense of poetry to our aid ; or else sing quite straightforwardly of the *meaning* of it all in the way that H. W. Harris has done :

Christ Jesus joined humanity
Although He was divine.
He snatched no high equality,
But shared a life like mine :
Poured out Himself for all mankind,
Emptied of privilege ;
Took human shape and human mind,
The likeness of an age.

The sinful plans and proud pretence
Of those He came to save
He faced with meek obedience
As humbly as a slave.
Accepting even death for us
He looked with joy ahead :
Despised the shame, endured the cross
And triumphed from the dead.

The Father gave the greatest name
To His obedient Son ;

And so His title rightly came,
 The height of heights was won :
 That every knee might duly bend
 With heaven and earth's accord,
 And tongues confess, world without end,
 "Our Jesus Christ is Lord".²⁰

We may well also ask whether the "soldier-army" image is any longer tenable for modern Christians. Of course, St. Paul used it,²¹ and Wesley and others transferred it to their hymns :

Soldiers of Christ, arise
 And put your armour on.²²

But soldiers wearing breastplates and carrying shields and swords are only picturesque relics of the past; the horrors of nuclear warfare make us think very differently about war and fighting from the way the early Christians may have thought. The fight against "principalities and powers" can better be expressed in such contemporary words as those of Henry Carter :

Give me to see the foes that I must fight,
 Powers of the darkness, throned where thou shouldst reign,
 Read the directions of thy wrath aright,
 Lest, striking flesh and blood, I strike in vain.²³

This image was even carried over into children's hymns in the nineteenth century when the most common themes for children to sing about were the powers of temptation and the perils of succumbing :

O day by day each Christian child
 Has much to do, without, within,
 A death to die for Jesus' sake,
 A weary war to wage with sin.²⁴

One feature of the twentieth century is that the writers of children's hymns have not hesitated to use images that are familiar to the child's world, and intelligible to him. One of the most notable of these is Mrs. Lesbia Scott's "I sing a song of the saints of God",²⁵ with its quite natural mention of church, trains, shops and tea all in the same breath. A similar hymn which breathes the spirit of realism throughout, for city children anyhow, is Miss Doris Gill's

Come, let us remember the joys of the town,
 Gay vans and bright buses that roar up and down,
 Shop windows and playgrounds and swings in the park,
 And street-lamps that twinkle in rows after dark.²⁶

though the last line of even this comparatively modern verse is

already out-of-date in these days of sodium lighting! These may seem very mundane things to form the basis of children's praise, but the fact remains, as Dr. Erik Routley has reminded us, that "many are brought to wonder at God's grace through the cultivation of the faculty of wonder at a lower level".²⁷

These, then, are some of the difficulties that face us in reforming the language of our liturgy, especially so far as our hymns are concerned. Since hymns are primarily about God and not ourselves, there are bound to be difficulties of language, for language can itself only hint at the mystery of God. It still, however, remains vital for the worshipper to be able to recognize the hints, and understand the poetic imagery which language must fall back on.

It will be obvious from some of the examples I have already quoted that, although so much of our hymnody is still expressed in the metrical form, language and imagery of an age that is long since gone, there have been and are a good many hymn-writers who have reacted against the stiff, ecclesiastical style of much eighteenth and nineteenth century hymnody, and achieved a notable break-through. This radical revision in the Church's attitude to hymns has, in fact, been going on since the beginning of this century, and in an age which is not notable for its strong faith, is all the more remarkable.

Robert Bridges was the first to begin this crusade against the conventionality and dullness of the Church's nineteenth-century literary culture. At last a poet of the first rank gave his attention to writing hymns! At the turn of the century he published *The Yattendon Hymnal*,²⁸ a collection of 100 hymns containing forty-four of his own compositions, some of them translations. His masterpiece is surely "The duteous day now closeth"²⁹ a hymn which, as Routley says, "is a celebration of the astronomic and imponderable beauty of night" and "a gesture against the evening hymn that is concerned simply with invoking divine aid against bad dreams and things that go bump in the night".³⁰

In 1905 there appeared a book of unquestionable merit, which has, however, long since passed out of general use. It was *Worship Song*, edited by a Congregational minister, W. Garrett Horder. Horder was not himself a hymn-writer but his knowledge of hymns was monumental. Like Bridges, he had a high regard for literature and in his hymn book he was looking primarily for poetry and relevance to life—both of which he put above what would have been regarded as "sound dogma". His selection of hymns was based on the conviction that worshipping Christians ought to be critical of such imagery and language as were private to Christian devotion and unintelligible to educated humanists. He steered clear of any references to the "blood" image, even in his Passiontide hymns; he has no hymns on the Ascension, except only those relating to Christ's High Priesthood, but he included such little-known hymns (as they then were) as Addison's "The spacious firmament on high",³¹

Palgrave's "O thou not made with hands"³² and many hymns by American authors, such as Whittier's "Dear Lord and Father of mankind"³³ and Chadwick's "Eternal Ruler of the ceaseless round",³⁴

The tide had clearly turned and English hymnody was now emerging from its poverty stricken condition of the previous century. In the following year, 1906, came the greatest revolution of all, with the publication of the *English Hymnal*, edited by a young priest Percy Dearmer and a young composer Vaughan Williams, who between them caused a refreshing breeze, and sometimes a gale, to blow through the worship of the Church of England. (It took us Baptists over fifty years to appreciate this, and only with the publication of our new hymn book in 1962 did we reap the advantages of Dearmer's and Vaughan Williams' revolution, as a study of our hymn book and its *Companion* will readily show.) Regrettably, we missed one of the gems of the *English Hymnal*, G. K. Chesterton's hymn

O God of earth and altar
Bow down and hear our cry

with its trenchant second verse :

From all that terror teaches,
From lies of tongue and pen,
From all the easy speeches
That comfort cruel men,
From sale and profanation
Of honour and the sword,
From sleep and from damnation,
Deliver us, good Lord!³⁵

This hymn owes little to Biblical imagery; it nevertheless uncovers the heart of the Christian faith in its relationship to personal and national life, in a way in which, for example, the shallow, humanist optimism of Symonds' "These things shall be!"³⁶ never does.

Dearmer's next main contribution to English hymnody came twenty years later with the publication of *Songs of Praise* (1925) and its enlarged edition (1931). The book has been much maligned. When it was introduced into Exeter Cathedral where Dr. Thomas Armstrong was organist, a well-known Devon resident was asked whether he liked the new book. His answer was vigorous and negative: "No. Too much damned poetry!" Nevertheless, it sought to cut out all the dead wood it possibly could so that the true flower of Christian vocabulary could blossom. And in many places it succeeded. If it had given us nothing more than Russell Bowie's hymn on the theme of Christ's coming into our modern world in judgement, it would have been justified (this is another one we missed in the *Baptist Hymn Book*).

Lord Christ, when first thou cam'st to men,
 Upon a Cross they bound thee,
 And mocked thy saving kingship then
 By thorns with which they crowned thee;
 And still our wrongs may weave thee now
 New thorns to pierce that steady brow,
 And robe of sorrow round thee.

New advent of the love of Christ,
 Shall we again refuse thee,
 Till in the night of hate and war
 We perish as we lose thee?
 From old unfaith our souls release
 To seek the Kingdom of thy peace,
 By which alone we choose thee.

O wounded hands of Jesus, build
 In us thy new creation;
 Our pride is dust, our vaunt is stilled,
 We wait thy revelation :
 O Love that triumphs over loss,
 We bring our hearts before thy Cross,
 To finish thy salvation.³⁷

Or this, from Katherine Hinkson's hymn on heaven, "I would choose to be a doorkeeper, In the House of the Lord" :

They come with shining faces
 To the House of the Lord;
 The broken hearts and weary
 That life has racked and scored :
 They come hurrying and singing
 To sit down at his board,
 They are young and they are joyful
 In the House of the Lord.³⁸

Much of *Songs of Praise* was too "far-out" to be of lasting value but its fresh and unconventional spirit was still alive in some of the new hymns that appeared in the 1950s and 60s, in the spate of new hymn books that have been published since 1951. Timothy Rees, author of "God is Love : let heaven adore him" (B.H.B. 52) has given us also a most moving hymn on the passion of Christ and the modern world :

O crucified Redeemer
 Whose life-blood we have spilt,

of which two verses are worth quoting in full :

Wherever love is outraged,
 Wherever hope is killed,
 Where man still wrongs his brother man,
 Thy Passion is fulfilled.
 We see thy tortured body,
 We see the wounds that bleed,
 Where brotherhood hangs crucified,
 Nailed to the cross of greed.

We hear thy cry of anguish
 We see thy life outpoured,
 Where battlefield runs red with blood,
 Our brothers' blood, O Lord.
 And in that bloodless battle,
 The fight for daily bread,
 Where might is right and self is king,
 We see thy thorn-crowned head.³⁹

On an entirely different theme, we might also mention the hymn of John Arlott (better known for his cricket commentaries):

God whose farm is all creation
 Take the gratitude we give⁴⁰

and any of the hymns of G. W. Briggs, the most prolific of this century's successful hymn-writers, who is known to us by his hymn on the life and ministry of Christ, "Son of the Lord most High" (B.H.B. 129), but deserves to be more widely known also for his hymn on Science:

God, who hast given us power to sound
 Depths hitherto unknown:
 To probe earth's hidden mysteries,
 And make their might our own:

Great are thy gifts: yet greater far
 This gift, O God, bestow,
 That as to knowledge we attain
 We may in wisdom grow.

Let wisdom's godly fear dispel
 All fears that hate impart;
 Give understanding to the mind,
 And with new mind new heart.

So for thy glory and man's good
 May we thy gifts employ,
 Lest, maddened by the lust of power,
 Man shall himself destroy.⁴¹

Hymns for Church and School (1964) was the first hymn book to include this, the compilers of which have also given us two new verses for the hymn "Hills of the north, rejoice" to replace the now out of date verses on the East and West which all other hymn books have :

Lands of the East, arise,
 Yours is the first bright dawn :
 Open the seeing eyes,
 Greet you the world's true morn.
 The God of all, whom you would know
 And seek on high, seeks you below.

Shores of the utmost West,
 See the full journey done :
 Prairie and lake are blest
 Bright with the setting sun.
 Far spreads the word that Jesus died,
 Yet lives and reigns—the Crucified!⁴²

The most recent hymn book to be published is *The Cambridge Hymnal* (1967), a book, like the previous one, primarily for the use of schools. It has been specifically prepared with a common criticism of hymnody in mind, that the inclusion of some hymns "in the fat books commonly used, could only continue while attention to meaning was suspended".⁴³ The result is a book of eclectic devotional lyrics, which contains none of the hymns I have so far quoted in this article but does include two short pieces by W. H. Auden, two "primitive American" hymns, and a wealth of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century verse; and while it includes Watts' "Come let us join our cheerful songs", it omits his "When I survey the wondrous Cross". The book is hardly what the editor claims for it : "a first step in the re-examination of the meaning of hymns",⁴⁴ for this re-examination has been going on the whole of this century, as we have seen. But it is a significant contribution to it, and time will tell how lasting.

A final word must be said about the growing number of new hymns written within the last few years and not yet published in any permanent collection. Many of these are being written for the present day and with no longer life in mind. They do not seek to reach beyond the contemporary situation in which they are written. In both words and music they attempt to give expression to temporary but real religious impulses. Some striking songs of this kind have been written by Sydney Carter, a journalist and devotee of folk-music, who has applied to religious writing the modern technique of irony and satire. One of his songs, "Lord of the dance" which begins :

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,⁴⁵

carries this comment by the author : "Christ is often pictured metaphorically as a Shepherd or King : why not as an actor or a dancer? His whole life, it seems to me, is the expression in dramatic form of the way things are and were and will be".⁴⁶

Three other collections have come from Scotland. The Scottish Churches' Music Consultation has issued *Dunblane Praises* (volume I 1965, volume II 1967), and Douglas Galbraith and Ronald Beasley have compiled a collection called *Sing!* (1965). Amongst the areas of concern in the Church today which find expression in some of these hymns is, for example, the disunity of the Church, on which an excellent hymn has been written by Brian Wren :

Lord Christ, the Father's mighty Son,
Whose work upon the cross was done
All men to receive,
Make all our scattered churches one
That the world may believe.

To make us one your prayers were said,
To make us one you broke the bread
For all to receive;
Its pieces scatter us instead :
How can others believe?

O Christ, forgive us, make us new !
We know the best that we can do
Will nothing achieve,
And, humbled, bring our prayers to you
That the world may believe.

We will not question or refuse
The way you work, the means you choose,
The pattern you weave,
But reconcile our warring views
That the world may believe.⁴⁷

In the same collection a hymn by David Goodall relates the Incarnation and Crucifixion to the sins of churchmen and non-Christians alike :

When the pious prayers we make
are a wall of pride
lest the faithful few awake
to the world outside;
when a man won't mix with a race
which he disapproves,
only God descends to make clean the face
of the world he loves.⁴⁸

It is clearly impossible that we should any longer go on believing that the only appropriate language in which we can worship God is that of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. We must welcome, therefore, this reformation of the language of our worship that is a mark of this present century, even though it seems to proceed hesitantly. But this much must still be said. If in an age which is more scientific than poetic we no longer understand, as previous generations did, that mystery can only be conveyed by metaphor, then we may discard many of the old hymns but we shall produce no great new ones. And if we have no better language to use than the woolly and worldly scepticism which passes these days for the accents of faith, we shall be doing nothing to enrich the Church's liturgy.

NOTES

1. G. D. Kilpatrick, *Remaking the Liturgy*, Fontana Library, 1967, p. 129.
2. cf. G. Cope, J. G. Davies and D. A. Tytler, *An Experimental Liturgy*, London 1958; J. A. T. Robinson, *Liturgy Coming to Life*, London, 1960; G. Macgregor, *The Coming Reformation*, London, 1960.
3. Op. cit., p. 97.
4. I Cor. xiv. 16.
5. For a fuller list of books of such prayers see the introduction to *Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship*, London, 1967, p. 7.
6. Baptist Hymn Book No. 345.
7. B.H.B. No. 34.
8. Op. cit., p. 9.
9. Op. cit., p. 99.
10. *The Psalms: a new translation*, Grail Publications, London, 1963.
11. B.H.B. No. 631.
12. T. H. Keir, *The Word in Worship*, London, 1962, p. 67.
13. B.H.B. No. 426.
14. Keir, op. cit., p. 66.
15. Psalm lxii. 6.
16. B.H.B. No. 257.
17. B.H.B. No. 458.
18. From an unpublished hymn by Donald Hughes, headmaster of Rydal School.
19. B.H.B. No. 167.
20. From an unpublished hymn.
21. Ephes. vi. 13-17 and II Tim. ii. 3.
22. B.H.B. No. 508.
23. B.H.B. No. 564.
24. Revised Baptist Church Hymnal No. 761.
25. B.H.B. No. 259.
26. Methodist School Hymn Book No. 261.
27. E. R. Routley, *Hymns Today and Tomorrow*, London, 1966, p. 85.
28. Compiled for the Parish Church of Yattendon, Berks.
29. B.H.B. No. 707.
30. *Hymn Society Bulletin*, Vol. III, No. 66, p. 151.
31. Worship Song No. 623; B.H.B. No. 74.
32. W.S. No. 195; Rev. B.C.H. No. 453.
33. W.S. No. 402; B.H.B. No. 50.
34. W.S. No. 388; B.H.B. No. 358.

35. English Hymnal No. 562.
36. B.H.B. No. 196.
37. Songs of Praise No. 562.
38. S.P. No. 196.
39. B.B.C. Hymn Book No. 85.
40. B.H.B. No. 726.
41. Hymns for Church and School No. 313.
42. H.C.S. No. 188.
43. The Cambridge Hymnal, preface by the Literary Editor, p. v.
44. *Ibid.*, p. vi.
45. Sydney Carter, *Nine Carols or Ballads*, London, 1964.
46. Note on sleeve of Record "Songs of Faith and Doubt"—Argo EAF 48.
47. Dunblane Praises Vol. 1, No. 3.
48. Dunblane Praises Vol. 1, No. 5.

ERIC P. SHARPE

The Henton Lecture

"A Welsh Man of God" was the intriguing title of the first Henton Lecture, delivered at this year's Annual Meeting. As it was through his generosity that the lectureship came into being, it was especially fitting that Dr. G. Henton Davies should himself deliver the inaugural lecture, which he did at the Society's request.

A large company, including many Welshmen, listened with close attention as he spoke of the Rev. James Griffiths, the pastor of his youth, and his "father in God". Griffiths came to Calfaria, Aberdare, in 1889, as successor to Dr. Thomas Price, "the John Clifford of the Welsh denomination", ministering there until he retired 41 years later at the age of 74. He died in 1933. A man of outstanding spiritual and pastoral gifts, he made a deep and lasting impression on the young man he baptised and sent into the ministry, and who was to become Principal of Regent's Park College.

This was more than a biographical lecture. Beginning with the first recorded act of believers' baptism in Aberdare in 1791, Dr. Henton Davies traced the unfolding story of Baptist witness there, particularly at Calfaria. We are grateful to him for a fascinating glimpse, not only of James Griffiths, but also of his predecessors, "three voiced" Will Lewis and the great Thomas Price, and of the inner life of the Welsh Baptist community.

E. F. C.