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## OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

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#### CONTENTS

George Wallace Briggs 1857-1959	...	...	...	...	245
Two Notes by C. E. Pocknee	...	...	...	...	249
The Case Against Charles Wesley, by Erik Routley	...				252
Correspondence	...	...	...	...	259

#### GEORGE WALLACE BRIGGS 1875—1959

At the season of Christmas, 1959, Canon G. W. Briggs was in Cambridge, making merry with his family and with the boys of the choir school of King's College, where his son, David Briggs, is Head Master. He worshipped in King's College Chapel, where as a student he had worshipped, in whose choir members of his family have sung in their turn, and where his friend David Willcocks now directs the music. On December 30th, peacefully and suddenly, he died. That he passed from this world with memories of so much that was central to his life's cheerfulness was appropriate, and must be a matter of high thanksgiving to those who loved him most.

Everybody in the Hymn Society knew who Canon Briggs was, and some of us were privileged to know him well personally. He was one of the founders of the Society, and was always the most cheerful, energetic and missionary-minded of its members. He was the most distinguished hymn writer of the first half of this century, and by far the most influential hymn book editor. He was essentially a practising hymnodist rather than a hymnologist: but he practised most forthrightly and faithfully what the rest of us, under his inspiration, preached.

The events of his earlier life can easily be gathered from the many biographies of him which have happily appeared in those hymn-book Companions of which all our members will know. There



is no need to rehearse them. We need recall only that he was at Cambridge a distinguished Classic (a double first), and that his ministry included a naval chaplaincy, several working class parishes, and a great deal of educational work. We remember his saying once reminiscently that when he was ordained he asked his bishop to find him the toughest parish in the diocese for his earliest curacy: the easy ministerial life was something with which he was never content.

Even when he had achieved the canonry at Worcester, and even when he was well into his eighth decade, he manifested an energy and drive that put to shame plenty of men a generation younger. And this when all the time his health was frail enough to have made of a lesser spirit a thoroughgoing hypochondriac. He was for many years in the frustrating and vexatious bondage of diabetes: but you only noticed that when the inevitable pair of miniature scales was surreptitiously produced at a meal.

How many places and communities are there now who are saying, 'It will never be the same now that Briggs has gone'. The Hymn Society, of course: that commanding and brotherly presence, that infectious humour, those memorable epigrams: 'Children's hymns ought to be childlike, but never *childish*'; "These things were done in type that day" — you can't ask the Oxford University Press to *print* that, now can you?'. The Oxford University Press itself: where will they be now that the guide and director of their school hymn books has gone? Will anybody be found to exchange Latin tags with the learned directors of the Press? The schools, the diocese of Worcester, the Church of England itself — it is hard for any of them not to feel that a great loss has befallen them.

From the point of view of this Society, the passing of Canon Briggs marks an epoch, because now the last of the great '*Songs of Praise*' generation has gone. Only last year we were giving thanks for the lives and work of Martin Shaw and Vaughan Williams. Now Briggs, their very dear friend, has gone to join them. But what is of great importance, and what the future historians of hymnody will have to take seriously into account is that it is to Briggs that the '*SP*' circle owed its continuing vitality. Without Briggs that the especially considered as a school of editors would have become before this something of an historical curiosity. What Dearmer did for his generation by way of finding hymns for it to sing, Briggs did, but in a very different way, for his own. There could hardly be two anglican priests of more widely dissimilar theological views than the Dearmer of 1900 and the Briggs of 1950. It is to be doubted whether Briggs would have cared to hear anybody describe him as a priest anyhow. Briggs shared a Manningesque contempt for the 'fusty translations' of the standard anglican hymn books, and an equally Manningesque passion for the hymns of Watts and Charles

Wesley. He made it his business to feed the younger generation, through the great multitude of regional hymn books he edited for the Oxford Press, some sound spiritual vitamins of the Watts-Wesley kind. But much more did he confess his hymnological faith in that remarkable hymn book, *Hymns of the Faith*, which they now use at Worcester Cathedral.

Now *Hymns of the Faith* (1957) is a book we have never reviewed, because it has never yet been put on general sale. It exists only in a words edition, published by Oxford, and is used only (up to the present) at Worcester. Your present writer would not himself say too much in its praise, since Briggs was kind enough to allow him to be associated with its editing in its earlier stages. All we would here say is that this book, in a fashion which is at present quite unique, combines the liturgical tradition of moderate anglicanism with the solid theological strength of the eighteenth century hymn writers. Never was a book produced for use by anglicans which contained a selection from Watts and Wesley at the same time so judicious and so generous. It may still be hoped that the book will come on the general market in a full music edition. But we would here add to this sentiment a recollection of the pure joy which Briggs himself took in collecting the book together. How he crowed with delight over some newly discovered treasures of Wesley! How he pounced on his scholarly friends to produce new and vital translations of the old hymns of the Ambrosian school!

And, of course, we must here say how fully he allowed his own writing to be influenced by the styles of Watts and Wesley. Their classic precision and feeling for resonant words naturally appealed to his mind, and their massive religious vision to his heart. Those who possess his little book of collected works, *Songs of Faith* (1945), will know how just it is to say that in a certain style (we believe, his best) he approached nearer than any living hymn-writer to the authentic simplicity of Doddridge and the deep tones of Watts.

In *Hymns of the Faith* he included a good deal of his own work. He insisted that this be scrutinized with a double measure of ruthlessness by his coadjutors; but we venture with some confidence the view that there you will find the best of Briggs. To quote as much as we would wish in his memory would expand this memorial to undue length. So much is already accessible. So much is good. He was incapable of banality because he had a fastidious and self-critical mind. But what the same gift produced in him was a marvellous simplicity, and a rare sense of lyric form.

O lowly Majesty,  
Lofty in lowliness,  
Blest Saviour, who am I  
To share thy blessedness?  
But thou hast called me, even me,  
Servant divine, to follow thee.



That is the kind of thing of which a man would say 'Nothing in it! I could have written that!': and that reaction is a sure sign that you are in the presence of the real lyric gift.

He always in his later years repudiated 'God, my Father, loving me': but editors have found it irresistible. It really was an exposition of his 'childlike, not childish' view of children's hymnody. And it is well to recall on this occasion his typically buoyant hymn for the saints, 'For the brave of every race' without which no hymn book can now regard itself as complete. But we believe that his best memorial, if we must choose one hymn to quote in full, is a hymn which, at any rate in its final version, may be the last that he wrote. It appears only in *Hymns of the Faith*, (no. 53), and he was touching it up as late as 1955. It struck us, when first we saw it, as a perfect example of the hymn-writer's art, and we still think of it so.

Jesus, whose all-redeeming love  
No penitent did scorn,  
Who didst the stain of guilt remove  
Till hope anew was born :  
To thee, Physician of the soul,  
The lost, the outcast came :  
Thou didst restore and make them whole,  
Disburdened of their shame.  
'Twas love, thy love, their bondage brake,  
Whose fetters sin had bound :  
For faith to love did answer make,  
And free forgiveness found.  
Thou didst rebuke the scornful pride  
That called thee 'sinner's friend',  
Thy mercy as thy Father's wide,  
Thy pity without end.  
Along life's desecrated way  
Where man despairing trod,  
Thy love all-pitying did display  
The pitying love of God.  
Jesus, that pardoning grace to find  
I too would come to thee :  
O merciful to all mankind,  
Be merciful to me.

Not only would we admire the style of that — its skilful blending of the very simple with the occasional great colourful word : we must also observe the pastoral care with which Briggs insisted on writing only hymns for those occasions and on those subjects which otherwise are ill served. Of so many of his hymns you are now bound to say, 'There is nothing else on that theme.'

Briggs was a musician as well as a hymn-writer. Not, perhaps, among the first flight of pianists, he loved music for music's sake, and composed tunes of singular innocence and effectiveness. Some of these will be found in *Songs of Praise*, and all are tunes which the ordinary worshipper can pick up in a couple of minutes, manifesting neither sentimentality nor undue austerity : tunes of the anonymous sort, which grew straight out of the classic tradition of psalmody.

A few years ago, nearing eighty, he resigned from Worcester and went to live in retirement at Hindhead. Only towards the end would he pay any heed to his doctor's advice to lessen his travelling and professional work. Not long before Christmas he passed his 84th birthday, and at Christmas he sent out many delightful notes of greeting, one of which came to your present editor. And now he is gone. May those whom he left be abundantly comforted ! Especially may Mrs. Briggs know of the gratitude of so many who have received of her gracious hospitality, and of so many more to whom her husband's personality brought good cheer, and his work, new insight into the Gospel of which he was a minister.

For a last look, *Hymns and the Faith* falls open at a place where there are three hymns printed. No. 180 — 'Captain of Israel's host' : no. 182 — 'Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard?' : Wesley, and Watts. Between them — lines of Canon Briggs which form a fitting comment on the sum of his life :

God is the King : he reigns alone  
High on his everlasting throne ;  
With judgments like his heavens profound,  
With love that knows nor end nor bound.  
Then why, my anxious soul, thy fears ?  
He changes not with changing years :  
His sovereign counsels stand secure,  
Sure as the sovereign Lord is sure.  
Though men in pride of power defy  
The righteous law decreed on high,  
Their doom is but a while delayed :  
God made : God holds the world he made.  
God reigns on high, and God is near,  
Fear him — no other shalt thou fear :  
Wait thou on him : he cannot fail :  
In God's own time shall God prevail.

#### TWO NOTES by C. E. POCKNEE

##### (1) JESU, GOOD ABOVE ALL OTHER

In *E.H.* 598 (1906 ed.) this hymn was given as an original composition of the late Dr. Percy Dearmer. In the 1933 edition of *E.H.* the first line of the words was altered to read, 'Jesus, Good above all other; and the last line of verse 3 was altered from 'Keep



us to thine altar near' and 'Keep us to thy Presence near'.

Recent research has, however, shown that the first two verses of this hymn are indebted to the last two stanzas of the Latin sequence, *Missus Gabriel de coelis*. This sequence appears in many of the late medieval service books including the Sarum, York and Hereford Missals. It comprises eleven stanzas, the last two of which read as follows:

Jesus noster Jesus bonus,  
piae matris pium onus,  
cuius est in coelo thronus,  
nascitur in stabulo.

qui sic est pro nobis natus,  
nostros diluat reatus,  
quia noster incolatus  
hic est in periculo.

In 1851 J. M. Neale published a complete translation of this sequence in his *Mediaeval Hymns and Sequences*. The last two verses of Neale's translation are as follows:

Jesus, kind above all other,  
Gentle Child of gentle Mother  
In the stable born our brother,  
Whom angelic hosts adore.

He, once cradled in a manger,  
Heal our sin and calm our danger;  
For our life, to this world stranger,  
Is in peril evermore.

It will be seen, therefore that the first two verses of Dearmer's version are indebted to J. M. Neale's translation (cf *AMR* 456).

## (2) PLAINSONG HYMN TUNES

Most hymnals published in England during the past half century contain some hymn melodies which are in free rhythm and are intended to be sung in unison. Such melodies are not infrequently termed 'plain-song'. Some of them, however, are not plainchant, while others are debased forms of authentic plainchant melodies. The essence of plain-song is to be found not only in its apparent lack of measured rhythm, but also in its modality.

Until recently all modern music was written in the major or minor mode. Both these modes have the fifth note of the scale as the dominant. This tonic—dominant relationship does not exist in authentic plain-song; and in the eight modes or scales recognised by plain-song theorists the position of the dominant in relation to the final of the scale varies. It is the unfamiliar modality that makes plain-song sound quaint to the modern ear which has become accustomed to the somewhat limited progressions and cadences of the major and minor modes alone.

The reintroduction of plain-song into the Church of England was largely the work of Thomas Helmore in the last century. He was the musical editor of the *Hymnal Noted* (1852-54). This work was the first book to give translations of Latin hymns set to plain-song melodies. At that time the study and performance of plainchant in the Roman Catholic Church was at a low ebb; and the service books containing the melodies had been produced by editors who knew nothing about the theory and execution of authentic plain-song. These editors altered the rhythms and note-groups in order to accommodate them to the measured rhythms of modern music; and the notation of the melodies was frequently altered in an attempt to make them conform to the major and minor scales which were unknown in the first millennium of the Christian era.

The Oxford Movement in the Church of England, with which Helmore was associated, seems to have been unaware of the decadence of much of the ceremonial and music in use at that time in the Roman Catholic Church. In the second phase of the Oxford Movement after 1845 there was an increasing tendency to assimilate uncritically anything that was 'Latin' in origin.

It was unfortunate that Helmore acquired a copy of the *Vesperale Romanum, ex antiphonale Romano, cum cantu emendato*, (Mechlin, 1848) since it was from this book, published at Malines, that he took forms of plain-song hymn melodies and reproduced them with English texts in the *Hymnal Noted*. He seems to have failed to note the significance of the phrase '*cum cantu emendato*' on the title-page of the *Vesperale*. It was in the *Hymnal Noted* that Bishop Cosin's English paraphrase to the *Veni Creator Spiritus*, 'Come Holy Ghost our souls inspire', was first set to the so-called Mechlin version of *VENI CREATOR*. From the *Hymnal Noted* this decadent melody, along with other debased tunes, passed into Anglican hymnals, including *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 1861.

The reader may conveniently compare the authentic form of this melody with the Mechlin debasement at *E.H.* 154, where both forms are given.

Most of the celebrated plainchant hymn melodies were composed before the ninth century; and the Vatican now forbids the use of the debased versions in the Roman liturgy. In the Church of England the researches of the late W. H. Frere and the late Dr. G. H. Palmer were incorporated in the 1904 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, where the authentic forms of many celebrated plain-song hymn tunes in their proper notation appeared for the first time.

It is here suggested that where the debased Mechlin versions are retained in certain hymnals the editors should give the correct ascription regarding the origins of these debasements. This should



read : *Vesperale Romanum, cum cantu emendato*, (Mechlin, 1848). In this manner it would be made clear that such versions are not authentic plainchant, but are adaptations made many centuries after the original compositions; and when the classical period of plainchant was over.

### THE CASE AGAINST CHARLES WESLEY

by ERIK ROUTLEY

One of the assumptions which the Hymn Society, writers about hymns, and religious people generally have taken for granted for long enough is that Charles Wesley is a hymn writer whose influence need never be impugned, and whose greatness need never be questioned.

Treating assumptions of this kind as settled is death to any company of men. In the hope of stimulating a little controversy, and of extracting from somebody better qualified than myself in piety and learning a rehabilitation of Charles Wesley for the modern age, I here propose briefly to examine again this treasured assumption.

The pre-eminence of Charles Wesley has, of course, been a settled article of belief among the people called Methodists, even as the pre-eminence of Watts has been a settled article of belief among those called Congregationalists. This belief about Wesley has spread far beyond Methodism, and it appears to be held faithfully by all who call themselves evangelical. Anglican hymn books have on the whole treated Wesley cautiously, although even they usually include more hymns by him than by any other writer (if we exclude the ubiquitous translations of the sainted Neale).

The more thoughtful among hymn-lovers have had their perceptions in regard to Wesley stimulated by the late Bernard Manning. Everybody who is interested in hymns has read Manning's essays in *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (1942). Classics they are, and blessed is the memory of Manning. But it is time, I believe, to draw attention to the historic fact that Manning's essays were written (a) in the 1930s, that is, twenty-five to thirty years ago, (b) largely as addresses to university students, (c) by a Congregationalist. The implications of these three facts are surely these: that, in the first place, the context of the essays was the period when popular theology in the churches was at its nadir, when enlightened humanism was the ordinary man's faith, and when a certain *a priori* suspicion of Wesley might well be expected in the writer's audience; that, in the second place, the essays are the work of a born fighter and controversialist speaking to that most lively, attentive and exacting of audiences, a university society; and that, thirdly, Manning was a man of magnificent and punctilious manners who took special delight in praising what had come from a tradition in which he himself did not stand.

I believe that what Manning wrote was written, at the time, with most excellent seasonableness. But it was written in a context; and certain special pleadings and unfair scores which were legitimate at the time are not, I think, to be regarded as carrying plenary and timeless authority.

For example: Manning's withering contempt for *Songs of Praise* served to add emphasis to his praise of the classics. But the more I re-read *Songs of Praise* (which comes from the same theological date and context) the less patience I believe we ought to have with Manning's dismissal of it. He never mentions the name of Vaughan Williams without a frown: but then, as he himself freely admitted, he had no music. He praises, for the same reason, certain hymn tunes which display a fatuous platitudinousness that had he encountered it in Neale or Charlotte Elliott he would have laughed out of the house: and one of these, STELLA, (not the worst) he would, I think, have praised less had he known of its real origin — folk song incorporated into hymnody by Roman Catholics.

*Songs of Praise* represented to Manning everything that he hated; everything that to him was eroding theology and piety. He hated it with a perfect hatred, and he derided it with a satirist's venom. His judgment has been uncritically accepted by too many for too long. *Songs of Praise* had its curious moments; it had its unsingable hymns and its editorial oddities. But too few realise at present, and too few value, the gesture made by that book in favour of uncompromising literary standards and a general dissent from the conventional hymn-form. Dearmer had a curious and tortured theological pilgrimage. But (like Manning), Dearmer could write, and he is, I am persuaded, not to be dismissed as a naughty old gentleman as airily as the neo-Calvinist mind of 1948 was prepared to dismiss him. For example: Dearmer replaced 'When God of old came down from heaven' in SP's Whitsuntide section by 'When Christ had shown God's dawning reign' (185). But was Keble really better than Dearmer? Now Keble — there is a purveyor of pious platitudes if ever there was one: the neat little epigram, the conventional religious double-talk, Keble was a master of them: but Dearmer's lines, which really do make Pentecost live, have been forgotten, and we all still print Keble. Have we been right to ignore so completely his Eucharistic hymn based on the *Didache*, 'As the disciples' (262), or the dark Advent hymn, 'Lo, in the wilderness a voice' (561: rather better here than in its original version at 292 in the old edition)?

Sometimes too much the pedagogue and the social preacher, rather too often impatient of the evangelical classics, Dearmer was none the less a hymn writer with red blood in his veins, and when one recognizes how much he gave us by printing for the first time, for example, Bishop Bell's 'Christ is the King' (242), Russell Bowie's 'Lord Christ, when first thou cam'st to men' (562), the Godolphin



cento, 'Lord, when the wise men came from far' (571), Housman's 'Father eternal, ruler of creation' (326), not to mention George Withers's 'To God with heart and cheerful voice' (176) and many admirable hymns of Canon Briggs; when one adds to that the unconventional and often brave music to which some of his hymns were set; and then one notes how many fine hymns up to then known only among Dissenters were introduced to a wider circle by his book — one can forgive much in the way of eccentricity.

But this is not a proleptic centenary celebration of Dearmer. My immediate point is this: that just as Bernard Manning on Dearmer is writing (he would undoubtedly have conceded this) as a child of his age, and writing topically—so as a defender of Wesley Manning is writing topically. Manning was really using Wesley as an instrument for promoting that revival of theological awareness and sensitiveness and responsibility for which, as he was convinced, the church was looking at that time. As a Congregationalist he was familiar with one of the worst examples of irresponsible editing in the book of praise which his churches used at the time, and he was constantly hearing from pulpits and observing in church-behaviour the results of a theological ineptitude which to describe as abysmal is hardly to use too strong language. But whether his almost unreserved praise of Wesley is the last word is the question I now ask.

At any rate there is no need here to add to the praise of Wesley, both assumed and articulate, that goes up daily from the four corners of the earth. Let it be assumed that no hymn-writer has been historically more influential than he, and that none has at his best reached greater heights. More 'universal' hymns, hymns sung by everybody who speaks English and translated into many foreign tongues, are by Wesley than by any other one author. The twenty or so hymns of Wesley that appear in every respectable hymn book are always among the greatest in that book. Take the nineteen (counting 23 and 24 as one) that the *English Hymnal* prints: indispensable and individually distinguished, every one of them.

But the real fact is that there are two Wesleys. There is the Wesley that the non-Wesleyans know, and the Wesley greatly venerated by his own people. There is the Wesley of *EH*'s nineteen, and the Wesley of the *Methodist Hymn Book*'s 240. The users of *EH* (Methodists would be the first to admit this) hardly know that other Wesley — he of 'Father, Son and Holy Ghost' (*M* 574), or of 'And can it be'. The former Wesley — 'everybody's Wesley' — is the life and soul of every decent hymn book. Agreed. The latter Wesley, the 'real Wesley', is pervasive influence on thinking about hymnody, and I ask, was this influence a good one?

I would — and I am not being merely perverse — set out the case against Charles Wesley under these heads which follow.

1. For all that his defenders claim about his catholicity, he set a fashion of introverted hymn-writing which proved to be disastrous to the health of public praise. He was capable of magnificent dogmatic writing — it is this, as a matter of fact, which is mostly attended to in the canon of 'everybody's Wesley'. You see it in 'Love's redeeming work is done' and 'Hail the day that sees him rise' and 'Victim divine' and 'Let earth and heaven combine'. He is capable of prodigious vision, as in 'Come on, my partners in distress', and of down-to-earth good sense, as in 'Forth in thy name'. But of such a hymn as 'Father, Son and Holy Ghost', or even 'And can it be', I ask whether the fashion of singing them in public is altogether a healthy fashion. Wesley's introversion is always theological; it goes right back to the solid ground of his doctrines of conversion and perfection. But was he careful enough, in his expression of these things, to guard against the facile imitation of his technique by people whose religious apprehensions were negligible compared with his? Whence have we got such dreadful things as 'Hail, sacred day of holy rest' but from that tradition of writing, apparently, about one's own apprehensions and religious feelings which Charles Wesley undoubtedly and of set purpose introduced to our custom? Is the church's public praise advanced if Wesley be used without very great care? Is the Wesley-cliché — an undoubted literary phenomenon — more of a danger to our habits of thinking than we are usually prepared to realise? I think so. Is the unbridled singing of Wesley liable to induce in the singer a habit of facile pseudo-penitence, of false assurance, of religious 'I'm all right, Jack', or is it not? I am afraid it is, and feel constrained to say so in the hope that a better scribe may refute and comfort me.

2. Wesley's emphasis, in a general way, is on the human soul and the church's ministry and offices. I noted recently in an 'evangelical' hymn book recently published the assumption, in its section on 'service' that 'service' always meant specifically religious work. You serve if you are a minister or missionary or evangelist: not if you are an accountant or a coal-heaver or a musician. That is a widespread assumption, and it is, I believe, a wicked assumption. More, I am afraid we owe it largely to Wesley and his school. If we sing 'Forth in thy name' as a hymn appropriate to decent worldly vocations — we have to, because we have hardly anything else except 'Teach me, my God and King' — I fancy that we are imposing on it thoughts that were not Wesley's. I do not think we are to blame for that: but I think Wesley is to blame, or our use of him is to blame, for fostering a very dangerous narrow 'evangelical' notion of what Christian service is. I write now in the knowledge that this sentiment is as much 'of the fifties' as Manning's judgement of Wesley was 'of the thirties' and Wesley's own thinking was 'of the eighteenth century'. None the less, it is, as Wesley said, the present age that we must serve (he said that because Matthew



Henry said it before him), and we must speak as we see. The point is decisively proved if we examine the 'service and influence' section of the *Methodist Hymn Book*. Consecration rather than compassion, personal sanctity rather than a readiness to get dirty in the world's service, is the keynote. Only 575, 'Servant of all' seems to strike a genuinely earthy note.

As a minister of a fairly mixed and responsible congregation, I despair of finding hymns that are suitable for stressing the thoughts of 'service and influence' in a modern setting. That is partly because I have to use a hymn book of unspeakable irrelevance and frivolity; but for this situation I fear we must blame Wesley and the habit of mind he induced.

3. It is time somebody said that the fact that Charles Wesley wrote 6,500 hymns, or 7,000, or whatever it was, is a scandal. I am astonished that nobody has said it (so far as I know) up to now. Has any man any right to be so prolific, so lacking in self-criticism and self-restraint, as to write all those hymns? Has any man the right to expect praise for doing so? What we see in 'everybody's Wesley' as a magnificent variety and sense of spaciousness. That is what happens when 6,500 are ruthlessly reduced to twenty by the erosion of public opinion. But what can have been the state of mind of a man who wrote on an average 130 hymns a year, or five every fortnight (taking a fifty-year span: actually it must have been much more intensive) staggers the imagination. Watts's 750 contain much downright rubbish; so do the large collections of anybody who wrote, and allowed to be printed, more than a hundred. The consequence inevitably was the coinage of the 'Wesleyan cliché', the return again and again to the same phrase, the same Scriptural quotation. It hardly shows now, but it is only too evident if one reads through a whole book of Wesley's hymns, such as the collection of 1782.

4. Finally, the question that has been raised before should be raised again here: has Charles Wesley, with his formidable prolixity and his great rhetorical power, stifled hymn-writing among Christians of his own communion, and been allowed to take too large a place in their manuals of praise? In a sense that is an impudent question: but the real danger runs beyond that particular communion. Hymnody should, surely, be a living force in the Church. Hymnody is not to be settled into a canon, but should always be adapting itself to the purpose of setting forth the Gospel to each generation. Anything that clogs the stream, or that seems to claim the status of unalterable revelation for any corpus of hymnody, is to be protested against by those who care for its health. There is, in particular, a chronic shortage of hymns on the social applications of the Gospel that are neither trivial nor dated. There is a shortage of good missionary hymns. But worse — there is a

tendency to ignore those hymns which are modern and relevant for the sake of perpetuating those which are now merely sentimental.

This larger point grows out of our previous discussion. Let us say more about the 'missionary' situation. Charles Wesley wrote very little that is of what we call the 'missionary' sort. He lived just too early to be conscious of the need which was met so excellently by James Montgomery two generations later. The limited time for reflection that the production of so many hymns left him did not allow him the foresight of Philip Doddridge in this matter. This was in itself no more than historically unfortunate. But is it not the fact that missionary occasions still draw from congregations patronizing mock-heroics like 'Hills of the North, rejoice' and all those others which encourage us to regard it as remarkable that 'backward peoples' can apprehend Christ?

Everybody with any sensitiveness realizes how difficult it is to make missionary occasions more than piously sentimental occasions. Why blame Charles Wesley? What has he to do with it? Why, he has this to do with it, that under his influence hymnody was given a violent thrust towards that 'evangelical' fashion which laid great stress on 'Come and see what the Lord has done for my soul', which encouraged (whatever his own intentions) spiritual pride and superiority, and which equated missionary work with making people, in a Western Protestant sense, religious.

Is he or is he not responsible for that? Is he or is he not, by placing his own people under so crippling an obligation to him, the author of the dreadful stagnation that overtook hymnody and brought it into disrepute? Is he or is he not the real origin of that 'habitual' hymn-choosing, that reliance on a 'canon', which makes so many of our services bare where they should be adorned? The 'canon' for most people is not now a 'canon' of Wesley or of Watts. It is, however, a limited canon. I heard not long ago of a service associated with a university mission at which it was suggested that the hymns should be 'All people that on earth do dwell', 'City of God', 'Come down, O love divine' and 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty'. Excellent hymns: nothing whatever to do with the point of such an enterprise. When it was suggested that 'A charge to keep I have' (yes, Wesley: but not with his dreadful last line) and 'Lord Christ, when first thou cam'st to men' be sung, the suggestions were welcomed and included. It was not that anybody objected to these livelier and more relevant hymns. It was rather that nobody had thought to go through a hymn book and find what would really meet the situation. By uncritical habit, excellent hymns that were well known but that did nothing more than give the congregation a 'breather' were at first suggested.

Singing for the sake of singing is an abuse of hymnody. Praise without understanding, without critical understanding, is not praise



but superstition. I conscientiously hold that the prodigality of Wesley was in the last resort responsible both for the narrowness and for the supineness of the modern religious person's apprehension of hymnody.

We must have new hymns. Of that we are all persuaded. Every new hymn book must make its considered contribution to the treasury, ruthlessly setting aside what has proved temporary, offering superstitious reverence to no great name or tradition, and seeking out what has been written by the real craftsmen of its own generation. But the new hymns must not be pious or stereotyped in their images. On the whole the 'evangelical' cult in hymnody has had a long enough run, and the greatest of the 'evangelical' hymns have found the place in our hymn books that they deserve. Nobody will ever want to discard 'Love divine, all loves excelling', but many must now feel doubtful about any version of 'Lo, he comes' but that which Percy Dearmer made current in *SP*. Nobody wants to get rid of 'Love's redeeming work is done', even though there is a good deal of 'O for a closer walk' that one can hardly sing in public. The modern hymn-writer should be encouraged, surely, to be critical of Wesley, not to reverence him over-much: to see what Wesley and Wesley's generation missed because they could not have known about it: to see where communication needs to be established in new directions. He should be encouraged to go where Wesley did not go: to write about the majesty and power of God the Father, about the relevance of the saving Gospel to things in life which Wesley regarded as beyond the Gospel's notice: art, business, love and science. And above all he should be encouraged to release himself from the hypnosis which Wesley still exercises on us all, so that what he writes shall avoid rhymes that were good in Wesley's day and are bad now, expressions that meant much to him but are now stale (like the use of the word 'heart' and too much archaism in word-formations), and expressions of theological fashion which bespeak intellectual dishonesty.

The man who writes about Sunday should not now call it the Sabbath. (Wesley didn't: but his pious imitators did). He should not talk about the 'Day of rest' but the 'Day of Resurrection'. He should not write missionary hymns that extol Western Protestantism. He should not disparage earth, nor denounce sins that no hymn-singer is likely to have the chance of committing. (Where in Wesley do we hear about the sins of hypocrisy and swindling and mean-mindedness?) He should not write of the Holy Spirit as a Dove or as a gentle breeze. He should not write of the demands of Christ as though they were the demands of Big Brother.

All this: but beyond it all, this other, which is of far greater importance. He should in no circumstances attempt to emulate Wesley's prodigality. Hymn writing should come to him with

difficulty. The finest piece of literature in modern hymnody, 'O God of earth and altar' came from a man who had no interest in hymns and no musical ear. C. S. Lewis ought to write a hymn — just because he openly declares that he hates hymns. If he did, it would be a better one than some of those that come from hymn-lovers. Charles Wesley, beloved and rightly honoured, has this to answer for, that he has made hymn-writing appear too easy to us.

I write this in the belief that the Church thrives on controversy and even on clashes of conscience. Come on, my partners in distress, or my adversaries in shocked eloquence, or my superiors in the lore of piety, and tell me what has gone wrong with my soul.

## CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Sir,

One has become so accustomed to informative articles in the *Bulletin* that the publication of Mr. Tull's article in the Summer number was something of a surprise. It is hard to believe that readers of the *Bulletin* need to be informed of the existence and character of such hymns as *Veni Creator Spiritus*, *O quanta qualia*, *Nun ruhen alle Wälder*, *Nun danket alle Gott*, and *Jerusalem the golden*. But if they do, then the facts should at least be stated correctly. It is not true that the "flat-footed Mechlin version" of the tune for *Veni Creator* "spoils the modality of the last line completely". It does not and only one who knows nothing of the subject could make such a statement. There is also room for a different opinion about the merits of this "flat-footed" version. It can be sung with moving effect, as I heard it sung in a parish church at a recent ordination; and, beautiful as the "untampered-with" plainsong version is, the adaptation is much more easily sung by a congregation, and it can be equally edifying. It would be a pity to let this denigration of a fine adaptation go unchallenged. Mr. Tull also holds the belief that words when sung should approximate in phrasing as nearly as possible to reading: e.g. (p. 198) the "dignified French melodies . . . should as far as possible follow a natural speech rhythm"; and the same belief is responsible for his objection to the last verse of Miss Winkworth's translation of *Nun danket*. It is a belief which has produced many misguided attempts to repoint the Psalter. The fact is that, when they are sung to music, the words of hymns must follow the melody, and they are none the worse for doing so. Moreover, Mr. Tull's re-writing of the 3rd and 4th lines of the verse already mentioned departs much further from the original than Miss Winkworth does, and by omitting the word "highest" loses the sonorous effect and the alliteration of the German:

Und dem, der beiden gleich,  
Im höchsten Himmelsthron.

I do not know what is meant by the statement that 'the long poem



*Hora Novissima* . . . has provided several hymns in different metres (p. 200). This may be a slip or a misprint for 'in a different metre': the statement would then be true. According to *Julian* — but it does not need *Julian* or an article in the *Bulletin* to tell us — no translation of any part of *Hora novissima* is in common use other than Neale's; and the whole of this is in a single metre. Nevertheless, if Mr. Tull's article has the effect of 'sending a few readers to explore the lesser-known treasures' of the English Hymnal, it will have served a good purpose. But why did he miss this excellent opportunity of telling us about some of them in his article?

Christ's College,  
Cambridge.

Yours faithfully,  
A. L. PECK.

October 24.

#### EPISCOPI VAGANTES AND HYMNODY

Dear Sir,

It is difficult to see the point of printing in *Bulletin* no. 86 F. Brittain's note so headed. Your correspondent is badly misinformed, but even *supposing* it to be true that Bishop Herford's ministry was only 'to the whole half-dozen or so of his adherents', what possible *relevance* could that have for the Hymn Society? How is it concerned with the quality of his hymns? Such a spiteful attack on the memory of a good Christian man is quite uncalled-for. Bishop Herford was *not* an *episcopus vagans*.

Although this is not the place to advertise his biography, he deserves vindication.

106 South Hill Park,  
London, N.W.3.

Yours truly,  
(Rev.) G. F. TULL.

October 17.

[The answer to Mr. Tull's question may well be that the relevance of Dr. Brittain's letter to the business of the Society was the raising of the matter at all in the pages of our journal by the designation of Bishop Herford as Bishop: to which title Dr. Brittain objects. The point that this has nothing to do with the quality of his hymns is well taken: but Dr. Brittain would be the first to agree. Ed.]

#### SUBSCRIPTION, 1960

*Members are asked to note that the subscription of ten shillings and sixpence for the year 1960 (or seven guineas for life-membership) is now due, and should be sent without delay to the Treasurer, The Rev. David Goodall, Mansfield College, Oxford. A subscription of one guinea will confer a year's membership of the Hymn Society of America in addition to membership of our own Society.*