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A Minister and His Hymns.

I FOUND Mr. Page's article "A Lay Preacher and his hymns," which appeared in the last issue of the *Baptist Quarterly*, of extreme interest; and was gratified, though not surprised, to find that at least one of our splendid body of "local preachers," as Ernest Brown insists they must be called, gives serious thought and attention to the conduct of Public Worship as distinct from the sermon, and has moved a long way from that once prevalent, but most lamentable, conception of a service as comprising sermon and "preliminaries". With most of Mr. Page's comments at the end of his article I find myself in complete agreement, and I hope they will receive the attention they deserve. I read his article in the train *en route* for the Assembly at the City Temple, where a mischievous fate directed my unwitting steps into the seat next to that occupied by the editor—who characteristically seized the opportunity, and imposed on me the task of following up the first article with a second.

I yielded to his blandishments the more readily since I have for years felt that very careful attention should be paid to the choice of hymns used in Public Worship, and have therefore throughout all my ministry preserved careful records of hymns used, etc. Lack of attention in this regard can go far to destroy the effectiveness of a service; and may, indeed, warrant the criticism sometimes levelled against Christian congregations that they are utterly insincere, and sing hymns quite unmeaningly, hymns that contain aspirations and sentiments quite remote from those actually present to the minds of the singers. I well remember the most unfortunate effect on my own mind, produced at a service I once attended (not in a Baptist church) at a seaside resort in Wales. Eighty per cent. of the congregation were obviously holidaymakers, and were welcomed as such by the church secretary, who told us that it was only the generous offerings of visitors in the season that enabled the church to pay its way through the winter. Then the minister announced the hymn:

The dawn of God's dear Sabbath
Breaks o'er the earth again;

and we who had spent a week in holiday delights were expected solemnly to sing,

Lord, we would bring for offering,
 Though marred with earthly soil,
 A week of earnest labour,
 Of steady, faithful toil!

If only a little imagination had been exercised!

But more than that. Fortunately, or unfortunately (it depends on your point of view!), the hymn represents the only part of worship in which the average Baptist worshipper is prepared to take articulate part. This surely makes it all the more imperative that in the preparation for the service careful attention be paid to their selection.

Now let me follow Mr. Page's example, and produce a schedule of hymns actually used. My list will differ from his in several respects; it is confined to one hymnal, it is confined to one congregation, and it covers a longer period. We use the *Revised Baptist Church Hymnal*, and the figures given represent the services for which I have been responsible since that book was introduced five and a half years ago. I have records of 2,332 occasions on which hymns have been announced: of the 787 available in the book 522 have been used, an approximate average of four and a half times each. Five have been sung more than twenty times, twenty-one from fifteen to nineteen times, ten from twelve to fourteen times: the remainder less than twelve times. The following analysis reproduces the subject arrangement of the *Baptist Church Hymnal*:

	Hymns avail- able in book.	Hymns used.	Times.	Approx. Average.
THE CALL TO WORSHIP	31	25	138	5½
THE HOLY TRINITY ...	6	6	10	1½
GOD THE FATHER				
His Attributes ...	13	7	22	3
Creation ...	4	3	13	4
Providence ...	17	11	63	6
Redemption ...	5	5	29	6
GOD THE SON				
Eternal Word ...	2	2	16	8
Incarnation ...	19	18	69	3½
Earthly Life ...	12	11	19	2
Death ...	12	9	45	5
Resurrection ...	9	8	43	5½
Ascension ...	4	2	2	1
Priesthood ...	3	2	3	1½
King ...	7	7	57	8
Name ...	6	5	33	6½
Titles ...	11	9	46	5
Ascriptions ...	5	4	17	4
Coming ...	6	3	13	3

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	Hymns avail- able in book.	Hymns used.	Times.	Approx. Average.
GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT ...	18	12	55	4½
THE SCRIPTURES ...	12	10	35	3½
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE				
Gospel Call ...	17	12	48	4
Call Accepted ...	20	12	39	3
Cry—for Grace ...	12	8	27	3½
Fellowship with God	21	14	51	4
Holiness	30	21	55	2½
Joy	5	2	6	3
Union with Christ	17	14	47	3
Patience & Submission	21	9	25	3
Peaceful Trust ...	18	11	59	5
Service	28	21	57	3
Zeal	21	16	71	4½
Guidance	15	11	48	4
Heaven	8	1	2	2
Victory over Death	8	1	16	16
Final Blessedness ...	9	4	25	6
THE CHURCH				
Unity	16	13	73	5½
Baptism	16	10	62	6
Lord's Supper ...	19	15	145	10
Ministers	5	—	—	—
The Kingdom ...	40	33	113	3½
WORSHIP				
The Lord's Day ...	18	12	62	5
House of Prayer ...	14	9	77	8½
Prayer Meeting ...	27	4	7	2
TIMES AND SEASONS				
Morning and Evening	36	14	69	5
New Year, etc. ...	18	6	15	2½
Seasons	13	8	39	5
Hospital	5	3	3	1
Marriage	4	1	1	1
At Sea	4	2	6	3
National and Inter- national	18	12	74	6
CHILDHOOD				
Intercession ...	4	4	38	9½
Aspirations	18	15	74	5
CHILDREN'S HYMNS ...	58	45	170	3½
FAREWELL	2	—	—	—
	<u>787</u>	<u>522</u>	<u>2332</u>	

These figures are very interesting—to the writer at least! Some may call for a little elucidation: e.g., the high average of sixteen in the section "Victory over death." Of the eight hymns in that section I have only used one, Charter Piggott's fine lines beginning, "For those we love within the veil," because I think it far outvalues any of the other seven. It did lack an adequate tune: both "Almsgiving" and "In Memoriam," suggested in the book, are wedded to other words, and neither quite fits these; but our talented organist at Sutton has risen to the occasion and produced a fine triumphant tune which perfectly meets the need. Of the five most frequently used hymns one is a Communion and another a Dedication hymn: of the twenty-one used from fifteen to nineteen times four are Communion and three are Baptismal hymns. The figures as a whole leave the impression that in the *Revised Baptist Church Hymnal* we have a hymnal which is adequate to the needs of a modern congregation; and I think the Committee responsible for its production have deserved very well of the denomination. I do not know any other book for which I should be prepared to exchange it. But, having said that, let me add that there is room, indeed need, for improvement. I should like to see a supplement issued in the not distant future, containing:

1. A selection of hymns for use at the Dedication of Infants (surely this section should be transferred to "The Church"). At present there are only four (nos. 706-709) of which one is harsh, one childish, a third sugary and the fourth plaintive. If it be retorted that no really adequate hymns on this subject exist—what a chance is offered to some denominational poet!
2. More hymns—many more—for use at the Communion Service.
3. More hymns on the social implications of the Gospel (the "Fellowship" book might help us here) and, if they can be found, more for the section "International."

Finally—would it not be well to reconsider some of the *versions*? Why on earth did the revisers mutilate one of the finest Christmas hymns ever written:

Earth was waiting, spent and restless,

omitting altogether from the Revised Edition the beautiful verse, which appears in the original Edition,

Still the Gods were in their temples.

And if, as I have often been told, Isaac Watts really wrote

When I survey the wondrous cross
Where the Young Prince of Glory died,

why do we not sing it?

But enough of such criticism. That our present book is a great denominational asset cannot be denied, and one minister gladly records here his profound gratitude for it.

H. V. LARCOMBE.

The Approach to Christ, by H. Elvet Lewis, M.A., D.D.

Thy Kingdom Come, by Bernard C. Plowright, B.A., B.D.
(Independent Press, 3s. 6d. net. each.)

We congratulate the Congregational Union on the enterprise of its Literature Committee. The war has not sent it into retirement. Its Press is issuing volumes which are a stimulus to faith in black days. Here are two. The first was intended for Lenten reading, but circumstances delayed publication. Its value does not, however, depend on a date: the message is timeless. The author, one of the most gifted sons of the Principality, writes of the wide variety of the ways by which men have come to Christ—conviction, meditation, prayer, friendship, glorious hope, and many others—and all are still open even in a world filled with violence and cruelty. A choice book for the quiet hour.

The second consists of a series of Bible Studies in Christ's teaching about the Kingdom of God, and questions for discussion are added at the end. Mr. Plowright says it is becoming clearer every day that some new orientation of both our Christian faith and our Christian ethics is more than overdue. His virile chapters challenge thought on every page. Just the book for a Bible Class or Study Circle: it will well repay careful study.