

the past and comments on current developments and personalities. It fell to me to be one of the two with him when he died in the Acland Nursing Home the Saturday morning after the war in Europe ended.

The high expectations and the complete trust which Wheeler Robinson showed drew out more than one's latent capacities. He needed help. One was eager to render it to the limit of one's powers—and beyond. The years from 1933 to 1942, when I was his colleague, extended in effect until his death in 1945. They were exacting, for much that I did whether in London or Oxford was in addition to a normal day's work. Looking back after a quarter of a century, I know that they were among the happiest and most satisfying of my life.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.

Church Member and Deacon

MANY FRIENDS, with varying degrees of sympathy, have remarked that it must have been a formidable experience to have Henry Wheeler Robinson numbered among the members of the church at New Road, Oxford. They had memories of his official appearances, of sermon classes, his intimidating definition of a sermon as "that which uttered the personal conviction of a great truth, intelligibly expressed and applied, and imparted with the dignity of a word of God". And who is sufficient for these things?

But that formidable figure with its scholarly distinction and strong individuality had a heart of love. He was utterly convinced that the church grows out of ordinary human friendship; it must always be in some sense a family, an attempt at the highest expression of human social life. He was prepared to make allowances for much of life's ordinariness, its intruding trivialities. Before I had accepted the call to the pastorate in 1934 he had written to me pledging "hearty and loyal support." There must have been many times later when he was conscious that the pastor had failed, the hungry sheep looked up and were not fed, but he never wavered in his loyalty, never grumbled, scowled or scolded. He was a great encourager.

He wrote a hymn, now No. 717 in our book. It breathes the spirit with which he came to worship in our simple traditional ways :

O Thou whose love has brought us here
Our Lord and King,
Within these walls so dear to us,
Thy praise shall ring,
To-day with joy and peace and hope
Thy people sing.

With joy we meet the friends we love,
Before Thy throne,
Our voices raised with one accord
Thy name to own;
While those we miss are still Thy care,
Nor are alone.

Thy peace which lifts us near to Thee
Is ours to-day;
The sacred calm of trustful faith
Drives care away;
That Thou wilt free from every fear,
Thy servants pray.

With hope we face the paths untrod
Which none can see;
For Thou wilt guide our stumbling feet
And near us be;
May each year's service find us still
Nearer to Thee.

Two other hymns he loved "Give me the wings of faith to rise" and "O love of God, how strong and true". He wrote a prayer for our church membership, full of sincere feeling. It was printed as a wall card found in many homes long after my time.

They were difficult years. The 1930's have been called "The Decade of Illusion." Oxford, as usual, was in a ferment. Widespread unemployment, the Jarrow Marchers, the darkening shadow of Stalin, Mussolini, the rise of Hitler, Communism, Fascism, the Spanish Civil War, the Abdication crisis, cries from concentration camps in Europe, the slow dying of the League of Nations. The Christian mind shuddered at the thought of another war so much that eleven and a half million people in the biggest private referendum ever held in this country voted for peace. But while we knocked our breasts and at the doors of Oxford homes on behalf of the Peace Ballot, the noise quite drowned the sounds from the German dockyards where the Bismarck, von Tirpitz and Scharnhorst were being laid down. At the time of Munich a meeting of Free Church ministers was held at 55 St. Giles' and though discussion was lengthy it all ended with support for the policy of appeasement, overwhelmingly.

When we gathered for worship on Sunday morning the 3rd September, 1939, and heard the Prime Minister say over the radio that the country was at war with Germany, with "bad faith and evil things" the news dropped upon the congregation with almost a sense of relief. When Wheeler Robinson led us in prayer the resolute spirit of Milton and Cromwell stirred again in the old church deeply sad, but unafraid.

All through these years the new Regent's was building in Oxford. Think not that this important work was done without blood, sweat and tears. Much travelling was involved. The principal had to argue with endless committees, to beg, persuade, contend, to defend his aims, his integrity, patiently clear away misunderstanding and all the time sturdily maintain high standards in scholarly work. Lectures and administration devoured his time. He toiled terribly.

It could not be expected that he should undertake detailed service at New Road but he was always ready to help where he could. He shared in the conduct of Communion services. He brought the words and cadences of some great collects into new life. He preached on special occasions. He once opened a Sale of Work. He became a pastoral consultant, ever ready to discuss and advise on the problems of a fairly busy church life. The best service he rendered New Road was his deepening of the sense of Church membership by emphasis on a catholicity that depends more on depth of conviction than on breadth of opinion; and his ideal of a Church meeting that takes in more of life, a democratising of sanctity.

When the church began to care for refugees from Germany we found homes and work for quite a number. 55 St. Giles' opened its doors to a venerable, white-bearded Jewish scholar. When we began evangelistic and pastoral work in the Cowley district he gave continuous help and encouragement. It was on his suggestion that the church came to be named after John Bunyan. "Why shouldn't we Baptists have our saints and martyrs?" he would say.

But even Wheeler had his limitations. He was only human. For one thing he was a Victorian. He dressed soberly making little concession to changing seasons. I could imagine him in a Tennysonian cloak walking with unhurried stride in Christ Church meadows, saying to himself almost any of the great verses, perhaps—

Let knowledge grow from more to more.
But more of reverence in us dwell,
That mind and soul according well
May make one music as before.

But VASTER . . . we are fools and slight . . .

He had the Victorian addiction to tobacco. With a crime story and a pipe he would escape from his troublesome problems to the fantasy world of Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson and Baker Street, more congenial than *some* of his theological circles. Perhaps he smoked too much. He had strong but uneven teeth and they were

stained noticeably. His study held the smell of stale smoke. Yet with all this he had a secret shrine, never untended, a candle always alight.

He was not naturally gracious. There were some who felt that any friendliness displayed was chiefly an act of will. He was certainly shy, happiest when in the seclusion of his study. A sunless childhood and lonely growing up doubtless contributed to the shaping of his temperament.

His home life in Oxford, helped enormously by a devoted wife, was strictly organized round the one dominant purpose of his life, that of his duty as principal of the College. He guarded and enhanced its reputation for evangelical integrity and sound scholarship. Punctuality even for meals was almost a fetish. He was fond of music, Beethoven naturally. His chief hobby was walking. He had no interest in games or sport of any kind. He never found any interest in gardening wherein he might have found refreshment of soul and body! Family life was a bit austere. One story has it that he tore himself away from a Christmas dinner table in order to wrestle with the deciphering of some obscure Syriac text.

A few weeks before he died Wheeler wrote me a letter about my R.A.F. chaplaincy service. Among other things he said "Tell the men that Grace reigns." I remembered that they were the last words of Mr. Honest. Wheeler must have been thinking about him in days and nights of weariness. I wondered how he would have shaped a sermon on that text. I recalled the five pointed star of Baptist Principles in Helwys Hall, its strange omission of charis and agape; and I came to feel and see that he knew with his own kind of special intensity, behind all the doctrines he so faithfully taught, there were the infinite distances, the background of light and love, yes, and of truth about which he cared so greatly, out of which they all came.

H. J. WHITE.

The Closing Years

MY FIRST MEETING with Wheeler Robinson was in the summer of 1938. He had invited me to lunch at 55 St. Giles' at one o'clock. I had arrived a few minutes before the hour and sat talking to Mrs. Robinson. Precisely as the clock chimed the hour, he entered the room. Punctuality was one of the rules of his life; not a moment was to be wasted.