

A NEW HYMN BOOK

By the REV. F. D. KIDNER, M.A.

Music Editor of 'Christian Praise'

HYMNS have a pleasant habit of flitting through the bars of our ecclesiastical cages to sing wherever they please. So free, at any rate, are those of the first flight. But there remain plenty of fine hymns in captivity, loved in their own Christian communions and barely known outside them. The good work of liberating them belongs chiefly to the interdenominational hymn books.

Christian Praise is the name chosen for the hymn book due to be published by the Tyndale Press in September. It is meant for general use in Christian fellowships; and the word 'general' may be stressed, since it is not a book only for students, or for any one special type of meeting: it contains just over 400 hymns, and is concerned with the whole field of the Faith. Those of us who compiled the book were convinced that we must aim high: that Evangelicals above all people should be known for the strength, not the weakness, of what they sing, and should be able to produce a book that would stand comparison with the best in any field. How far we have fallen short of this mark remains to be seen; but we have tried to choose hymns that have a good backbone of Scripture, that express themselves compactly, and that can be sung to well-made and beautiful tunes. Inevitably a few familiar hymns were found wanting by this test, revealing themselves to be 'soft-centred' (to borrow Mr. Cyril Taylor's epithet), but in nearly every case we were able to find others that expressed the same truths better. (The few exceptions we have retained!) All the evangelical warmth is here; what is missing, we hope, is the humidity.

The new book does certain things in its own way. One innovation is a metrical index which shows the first line of *music*, as well as the name, of every tune: creating in the process a concordance of hymn tunes which would be worth having for its own sake. Another is the inclusion of a large group of carols (in addition to the Christmas hymns) arranged for choirs; a provision for the Services of Lessons and Carols which are now almost universal. But the ordinary user of the book will get most joy — no doubt unawares — from a very down-to-earth reform: he will find he can reach the top notes of his hymns. We have broken from the fiction that hymns exist primarily for the convenience of the choir, whose trebles supposedly flourish at altitudes where few of us still breathe, and whose basses must on no account be submerged. Of course we have kept a balance: the hymns are harmonized for part-singing as usual, but we have reckoned E-flat to be normally the summit for a congregation, where others have prescribed F; and G-to-C a more habitable territory than, say, A-to-D.

We gain some temporary advantage from being the latest in the field. We can print some hymns and tunes which are entirely new; we have also brought together various others which have established themselves in the last few years and have a good expectation of life, but have been hitherto scattered. Altogether, with the help of the new and the neglected old, we find that we have gathered round the substantial core of universal hymns many dozens of others that have not before rubbed shoulders in any one collection.

But what will last when novelty has gone is quality; and we should like to achieve this above anything else. We believe that a growing number of Evangelicals have this same ambition for our hymnody, and are ready to be

adventurous and persevering in seeing that it is fulfilled. We pray that *Christian Praise* may be used to glorify God, to invigorate our worship, and to unlock many treasures, new and old, which wait to delight us.

'FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE CHURCH OF GOD'

By Gabriel Hebert, D.D.

A REVIEW BY THE REV. H. M. CARSON

THERE has been of late a steady flow of attacks on the I.V.F. and this book¹ makes a major development in this, for it is a clever attack on the main conservative evangelical position. Many of these attacks have been notable for their ignorance of the real issues at stake. The theological men of straw have been erected on all sides and then demolished, no doubt to the satisfaction of the writers but without very much effect. But this book is different, for there is an honest attempt to see what Evangelicals really believe. It is true that Dr. Hebert does not always succeed in avoiding the pitfall of attributing wrong views to his opponents, as for example when he deals with the doctrine of the Church. On the whole, however, he does try hard to be fair. Thus at the very outset he defines the term 'fundamentalism' precisely, and quotes from Dr. Johnson's article in *The Christian Graduate* in so doing.

There are, also, points where he sees weaknesses in current evangelical thought, and where many of us would agree with him in his criticism. Thus (p. 102) he queries the desire to 'recapture the glow' of an earlier experience and suggests, rightly I believe, that it is more important to think in terms of 'glorifying God'. Then again in a clever synopsis of a Swedish book we find the loosely used jargon of many Evangelicals about 'giving your heart' to the Lord being shewn up in its inadequacy.

The three big issues of the book, as stated in the Postscript, concern the positive value of the I.V.F. position; the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture; and the doctrine of the Church. Around these three main points the arguments of the book flow. We will consider each of these in turn.

THE I.V.F. POSITION

At first sight he seems to be very generous in his estimation of the contribution of the I.V.F. to the Church of God in terms of its evangelism, its adherence to the truth of the gospel, its spirit of prayer, etc. But a closer reading will show the background against which he writes. He moves in an ecumenical climate of opinion in which all our doctrinal statements are regarded as but partial insights into the truth which transcends all our partial conceptions (p. 15). Thus the evangelism of the I.V.F. is not seen to be the result of a hold on such a fundamental doctrine as the final authority of Scripture, but as the contribution of a group with a partial — but yet important — glimpse of the truth.

But while we admit that all our understanding of the truth is partial, we must also insist that not all 'insights' are necessarily true ones. Because a statement is alleged to be 'Christian' it does not necessarily follow that it accords with the Word of God. Thus his breadth of sympathy carries

¹ Published by the S.C.M. Press. 156pp. 15s. (Cheap edition 7s. 6d.)