

THE STORY OF ST. NINIAN'S

A term that comes glibly to the lips of politicians these days is Expansion, the panacea of all the economic and social ills. Another term associated with it is Planning. We hear airy-fairy stories of what will happen if these are co-ordinated; but how the objective is to be achieved is never really explained. If trade goes into recess, and welfare benefits of all kinds go beyond reasonable limits, finance is lacking and ambitions cannot be realised. Now if there is one institution where Expansion and Planning should be the slogan it is the Christian Church. If it becomes blind to the command of its founder to spread the 'good news,' it becomes dead or moribund and the truth is not in it. There was a period in the earlier years of the century, when it was fashionable to missionise wherever the opportunity seemed to exist. Some ventures were successful others were not. In these times opportunities were abundant but for financial reasons prospects of success are not so bright. The Episcopal Church in Scotland has always preached the missionary spirit and has had its successes. A unique opportunity presented itself in Prestwick, when in 1915 the Rector of Holy Trinity in Ayr was asked to provide facilities for worship in Prestwick for a company of soldiers. With the help of local people a temporary structure of utility value was erected, and a curate was put in charge to minister to the spiritual needs of the soldiers and the local people who were Episcopalians. The congregations were enhanced by the attendance of summer visitors and the little Church began to justify its existence. I well remember an impressive Easter Service, with small orchestra in attendance with an augmented choir, functioning to a congregation that made 'the Hut' burst at the seams; and I have a vague memory of a second offertory Hymn being sung during the protracted collection. This small church was dedicated to the name of St. Martin, the soldier Bishop of Tours, who was the legendary spiritual counsellor of St. Ninian,



It was in June 1915 that the Rev. J. C. Melville was appointed Curate in charge of St. Martin's. In July however the soldiers completed their training stint, and departed for the south: from that moment St. Martin's really began its career. In the course of time a good nucleus of local people

was formed who enthusiastically and generously gave their support. At last in January 1923 at a congregational meeting, the following resolution was proposed, by Mr Mearns Gow and seconded by Mr G. J. Ogg: 'Having regard to the fact that for the last three years the congregation of St. Martin's has entirely maintained the mission, this meeting unanimously resolves, with the full concurrence of the Rector, that the time is opportune to make application to the Bishop that St. Martin's be raised to the status of an Independent Mission.'

That was a bold step to take when one considers the history of the church in the light of facts as recorded in the minutes of preceding years. Notwithstanding, a deputation was appointed to meet the Lord Bishop of the diocese; the result was the appointment of a vestry of seven members in April 1923. At this point the Rev. John Knox of Dumfries was appointed Curate-in-Charge. All these developments were agreed to at a Congregational Meeting in the Co-operative Hall and the evening finished with a dance! Later in 1926 St. Ninian's was raised to an Incumbency, a status which it lost in 1940.

It was at this meeting that we first heard a definite reference to a building fund (January 1924). Now things moved quickly, for in June that year there were proposals for a new hut costing £750, and on top of that a suggestion 'to take the high jump' and plump for a stone church at a cost of £1600. It was agreed that St. Martin's should be known as St. Ninian's, and that the parish should be extended as far as Tam's Brig, at the suggestion of the Rector of Holy Trinity, which would give a wider field in which to work. Apparently the church was gaining strength. The number of those who had communicated that year was 1856, though the number of 'individuals' that stood for that return we do not know. It might be interesting to append the names of the vestry at that time: Messrs. G. J. Ogg, Mearns Gow, Dr Jones, J. Brown and T. Collins, with the Rev. John Knox who was indeed a man of vigour and lively imagination.

The building of the new church was begun on a site, one of the best and most prominent in Prestwick. It was consecrated by the Bishop in 1926 in the presence of a large congregation in circumstances that augured well for the future. We had at last got a home. The structure was of a special and expensive stone, not ambitious as regards size but pretentious in its architecture. There was criticism within and without as to the wisdom of the whole undertaking.



It would seem that the idea behind it all was to build a replica in miniature of St. Margaret's, Newlands, Glasgow, recently erected and the most complete church in the diocese. It was well situated on the main road, beautifully designed, furnished internally with all necessary appointments, in fact a perfect unity of Church, Hall and Rectory. What had we in Prestwick? An unfinished church which was likely to be a perpetual challenge to those who followed after. For the

moment circumstances looked stable and healthy. There was a good choir, organisations were busy and successful, with a well founded troop of Boy Scouts and a well attended Sunday School. But there was alas an unexpected change in the ministry, and Canon Aitchison of St. Mary's Cathedral did duty in the inter-regnum until a permanent Curate-in-Charge arrived in 1928 in the person of the Rev. Gordon B. Sylvester. His was a quiet and effective ministry, but a rather large debt has been incurred which was slowly being liquidated. He remained in office till 1937 when his place was taken by the Rev. James Galt, whose tenure of office was short lived. He left when the second war was in its early stages to become an army chaplain. In his time, I notice, there was a balance of over £100 better than the previous year. My word - that was unique! It was at this time, 1939, that St. Ninian's suffered a tragic loss by the death of Mr George J. Ogg, who had been its 'strength and stay' from its inception: and It had been his ambition to see it reach its full development as an incumbency. He had been an enthusiastic chorister, a sympathetic accompanist in services and had served in the principal offices of the church in Prestwick and in the diocese at large. The trying thing about good men like him - and I mean good in every sense of the word - is that their place is seldom adequately filled.



With the departure of the Rev. Mr Gait to the army, it was some time before a successor could be found and in order to ensure continuity the vestry determined to surrender their independence and take refuge under the covering wings of our mother church, Holy Trinity; a rather bitter pill, perhaps, for the old adherents to swallow. It was no use grousing that we should never have forced independence in the first instance. It was on a par with policy of some African States today, clamouring for an independence too soon, which they could not understand nor sustain economically. But all honour to the broad-mindedness of Holy Trinity who took us back to the fold

and helped to nurse us back to health again. A new curate was appointed who was a power in the land, robust in physique and in mental and spiritual strength. He had a commanding style in the pulpit, his singing was a powerful lead to choir and congregation. He savoured in general manner of the Presbyterian - and indeed he was actually a son of the manse. He had little



time for the snob; what he wanted was service, for with service would come all that was needful. His conduct of affairs was reflected in the Bank Balance, he laid in train the resuscitation of former organisations which had given valuable help to the maintenance of the church, besides benefiting themselves in the enjoyment of their activities. He also furnished plans for the completion of the church. But again a change is due and another comes to take up the task. It reminds us of the character in Greek antiquity called Sisyphus whom the Gods punished perpetually by condemning him to roll a huge boulder up an inclined plane. When he got it near the top he lost control, it rolled down to the bottom and all his work went for nothing.

But an important development now took place whereby vacancies in the vestry could now be filled by women. Three were nominated and accepted.

It was now in 1946 that the well remembered Dr Jauncey was appointed Curate-in-Charge. He came to us in his latter years, but showed such virility and earnestness in his work as many a



younger man might envy. To hear him sustain the tenor part in the services was to know him as one who loved to praise the Lord with all his heart. It was to his efforts we owe the acquisition of a valuable organ fit to grace the chancel of a pro-cathedral. Some of us could with difficulty reconcile the housing of an instrument of delicacy in unfinished surroundings that were, from one angle, suggestive of a ruin that might have been found in a derelict mining district. However, the fact remains that these plans were agreed upon and every kind of legacy and fund was commandeered - in fact the barrel was thoroughly scraped to meet the vast expense.

The officials of Holy Trinity who took a close interest in the affairs of St. Ninian's were watching these happenings and could hardly be said to be pleased. No doubt their Rector, The Rev. Rowland Hill, who had just come among them, must have been intrigued. Here was a church that seemed to be living from hand to mouth on overdrafts and loans and was still drawing the breath of life! Now a real crisis had been reached, and in the midst of all the argument at a vestry meeting, Dr Jauncey was called to the phone. On return he announced that a member of the congregation had donated £100 - manna from heaven! This brings us to the year 1948. The organ was completed - and paid for in the stipulated time.

So Dr Jauncey had achieved his ambition and incidentally had added his quota of financial responsibility: for had not an organ to be maintained and tuned from time to time, and an executant of no mean ability to be engaged and paid for? But where there is an exuberance of spirit which cannot be quenched all burdens are light. Laden with years the good Doctor retired but insatiate in respect of work he carried on a small mission in Maybole, and with joy we saw him from time to time occupy the pulpit at St. Ninian's among his many friends.

Now we come to perhaps the most colourful of all our Curates-in-Charge, the Rev. R. L. Armitage. He had had a wonderfully varied career as artist, etcher, and engraver, joined the navy in the second war when he had manifold experiences in various parts of the world, then trained for the Church after demobilisation. He was like a fresh wind blowing away the dust and cobwebs of humdrum existence. He went among the people: visitation was a strong point: he knew everybody and many most intimately. Say what you like people like to see the parson: they feel that they count. His past connexion with the navy was most apparent: his gait, erect with somewhat of a roll, was reminiscent of a Chief Petty Officer though he was never heard to claim that distinction. His was a successful tenure of office. Debt was reduced, budgets were balanced. Buses brought children and parents from Adamton. As he said in one of his annual reports: "There have been constant appeals for money, and our needs are not likely to diminish. This is a healthy sign of life, for only the dead require no money." The Church roll went up to 400, there had been 83 public celebrations of Holy Communion, and 23 private: the number of individual Communion was 1076 public and 65 private, in all a good average year. Ultimately he left for Vancouver to rejoin his family.

The Treasurership having become vacant through the death of that 'valiant pilgrim' Mr Nelson, who was never known to say an optimistic word on finance, it was agreed at a vestry meeting in 1956 that Miss Butler be asked to fill the vacancy. This was a bold and imaginative proceeding as it was the first time in our history that one of 'the weaker sex' had been suggested for such a taxing post. The vestry was consistently passing through troubled waters, so who better than one 'versed in the law' was competent to act as pilot? She was a keen churchwoman just as her father was a staunch churchman, possessing qualities of courage, imagination and pungent criticism tethered to uncommon business acumen. We were filled with buoyant hope for the future when Miss Butler accepted the post.

Mid all the strain of keeping up with changing circumstance, we introduced oil heating to the church which proved its worth in the diminution of labour, although it had its teething troubles. Then the matter of the hall was always under consideration: for it was felt that it was impossible to make headway in general and social activities without one. And now another Godsend! By the sale of property Holy Trinity was able to donate for our use a very substantial sum so that the construction of a hall that would fulfil all purposes at lowest possible cost could now be entertained. This was a time of progress under the encouraging guidance of the Rev. Mr Pozzi. We had a capable organist and choirmaster, a competent and balanced choir, who rendered the services well: in Mr Pozzi, again, we had a successful producer of, and capable performer in plays

of the Miracle type, which were presented in church with due solemnity and dignity; a well attended Sunday school providing sound instruction; while our finances were in a healthy condition under the management of Miss Butler our treasurer. But as so often happens in our story, unforeseen tragedy overwhelmed us and we were driven back on our heels. Mr Pozzi's mother died and he felt he could not carry on in the altered circumstances and he migrated to a charge in the south.

The Rev. E. W. Buswell, from Dalry, Ayrshire was nominated and he was introduced at a vestry meeting in July 1957. Like the Rev. Rowland Hill he must have wondered what he had let himself in for as the business of the meeting unfolded itself. The agenda was as follows: arrangements for the foundation of the new hall; plumbing and electric lighting installation, Rectory garden requirements, guards for protection of church windows coal chute door in a state of disrepair; in short, a list of necessary and petty requirements which in total amounted to a considerable sum. However, we had a self-appointed master of works in Mr Butler, who undertook to look after all these details and nothing seemed to upset his equanimity. Again the saviour of the situation had arrived at the right time. In February 1958, a surprising piece of news was released by the Rev. Mr Buswell. With the purpose of enlisting support on behalf of St. Ninian's he had been in correspondence with Bishop Sherrill of New York (who was the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in America, which is the equivalent of an Archbishop). In some quarters this move when it came to be known in its fruition, aroused some doubts. However it was rather an effective proceeding resulting in a donation of 2,000 dollars (about £750), a very substantial windfall which cleared the expense of the hall. One might look upon this as a kind of 'Marshall Aid.' But in these days the possession of a hall was no mixed blessing, for it entails certain extras: There was the Burgh assessment, the necessity for certain modifications in construction in accordance with bye laws if it were to be used for entertainment purposes, and Insurance premium. But this accessory has been of tremendous advantage. Arrangements were now made for a numbering of the people. The roll of members was brought up to date as far as possible, and the parish was divided into districts which could be combed by members of the vestry and other helpers. This seems the first real effort at such a survey, and it was hoped that it would culminate in a more intimate contact with individual members.

One thing from time to time has not met with approval- The Magazine. This periodical was issued by Holy Trinity each month and many felt we did not get value for money as the space allotted to our use seemed inappropriate to our needs. But a like publication of our own was beyond our means and it would have been difficult to sustain a flow of articles that would ensure continued interest and support. Alternatives were sought among anglican publications with

interpolation of a Scottish page, but that proved unsatisfactory. The position has been met by the production of a 'News Letter,' in type, twice a year as a stop gap and we wait the outcome of this experiment.

Another feature of perpetual consideration is the Free Will Offering Scheme, which would seem to be in need of constant PEP treatment. In earlier times the usual way of raising funds for the maintenance of a church was by the imposition of Seat Rents. There was in time a general consensus of opinion that that method was 'unmoral' and that an appeal should be on a more dignified and responsible basis. But the working of this highly attractive method has 'throughout the years proved more or less impracticable. The system of Tithes in Judaic times was laid down by the law and the orthodox conformed to the letter of the law. When the system of F.W.O. was first applied the results in some of our own churches were phenomenal in times of industrial prosperity. But in the hard times contributions fell away badly. It used to be said that the tailor and the doctor were the last people to be paid and the same could be said in the case of the churches. Experience teaches that, unless there is a constant drive, offerings fall away rapidly. People get lax, especially when attendance gets irregular and promises are not fulfilled. Finance is a very difficult problem. Such success as there is, is too often due to the generosity of the few to the benefit of the many. It is an aspect of -Church management which many of our clergy refuse to comment on from the pulpit, but surely it is not outwith their -duty to point out the responsibilities of the people under their spiritual guidance.

The departure of Canon Rowland Hill, Rector of Holy Trinity was a disappointment to all for he was in large measure responsible for the development of St. Ninians. He took an active part as chairman of the vestry, has been of inestimable value in an advisory capacity, and instrumental in arranging finance when things were difficult. We sincerely hope that he will be long spared to continue his good work in the charge to which he has gone near Gloucester. Another has taken his place and no doubt will be activated by a zealous interest in our affairs. Long may the intimate connection between St. Ninian's and Holy Trinity continue.