

In Memoriam

The Reverend John Wilson Baird, D.D. (1891-1962)

FOLLOWING the lamented passing on 5th August last of the Reverend Doctor Wilson Baird, our President, 1946-48, the Church Service Society claims the particular right and privilege of a grateful tribute to his faith and spirit, his example and service which form an imperishable contribution to the Church's life. For many long years he strengthened the Society with a unique leadership and catholic vision, tempered by a sound practical wisdom which was vitally sensitive to what the Church of Scotland was ready to accept from time to time of development and improvement in worship. In the early years of the Annual his capable pen made some most distinguished contributions, and his article in the first Annual (May, 1929) on *The Service of Holy Communion* indicated his own high sacramental and scriptural faith.

Ordained to the Holy Ministry on 8th June, 1923, when he was inducted to the Parish of Kirkgunzeon, Doctor Wilson Baird served on the General Assembly's Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion throughout almost his entire ministry, being Convener of the Committee from 1945 to 1950. It was in the liturgical field that the Minister of Kirkgunzeon, Holy Trinity, St Andrews, and St Machar's, Old Aberdeen, wielded so impressive an influence and left an abiding mark. Carrying over the best Scottish traditions in worship from *Prayers for Divine Service*, Doctor Wilson Baird was closely associated with and contributed largely to *The Book of Common Order*, 1940 ; to both the 1935 and the 1952 *Prayers for the Christian Year* ; and to the 1931 and the 1962 revision of *The Ordinal and Service Book*. His expert hand and sensitive touch can be discerned in all the other Committee publications of the last thirty years, and special acknowledgement must be made of his share in *A Year's Praise*, indicative of a choice spirit with a profoundly devotional understanding of the Church's Calendar. Thus, better standards of decorum, order and reverence throughout the Scottish Church are part of his nameless memorial.

As churchman and preacher, Doctor Wilson Baird gave positive content and spiritual depth to the epithet catholic,

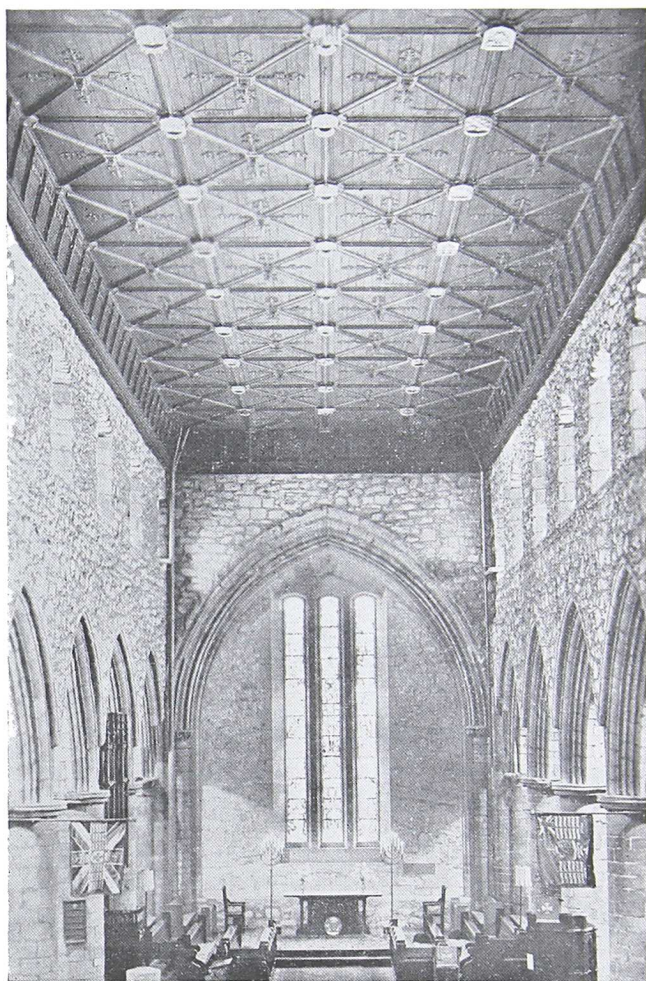
not least because he believed in the true catholicity of the Church of our Fathers, one token of this being his affection for the historic sanctuaries where he was privileged to minister. His pulpit gifts showed rare distinction and appeal, and many of us cherish memories of fascinating sermons which shed unique light upon the Word of God and made the Church's tradition vital and relevant. This churchly preaching also showed him a master of English, in which he was a notable scholar and authority, and his sermons made such a season as Holy Week a spiritual oasis in our wilderness of materialism. Devoted as he was to sacramental worship, and catholic as he was in his doctrine, this Scottish churchman never erected a tension or conflict between Holy Table and Pulpit, for he broke the Bread and ministered the Word under the one divine commission. He always brought into a church service a moving sense of the Presence of God, and he inculcated human reverence as the true response to the Divine Majesty. His quiet self-effacing walk within the Lord's sanctuary, his careful and reverent movements at the Holy Table, and his whole bearing in church had much to teach our generation, as they also expressed his own sure conviction that he ministered in holy things.

With what gladness and appreciation one now recalls Doctor Wilson Baird's shy charm and rippling humour which brought him so humanly near to the few privileged to enjoy his close friendship and trust. In his Manse he was as intimate and pawky, as in his parish church he could appear aloof and remote.

Part of this fine Scottish churchman's memorial, also modestly nameless, is the beautifully designed and handsomely rebuilt new east end of Bishop Gavin Dunbar's Cathedral of Old Aberdeen. It was the fitting background to his funeral service on that poignant Thursday morning last August. For some of us, leaving the grey dignity of St Machar's, the words have continued to echo in our hearts as our affectionate song of gratitude for this man of God :

“ Wait but a little while
In uncomplaining love,
His own most gracious smile
Shall welcome you above.”

R. STUART LOUDEN



ST MACHAR'S CATHEDRAL, OLD ABERDEEN: THE EAST END

By courtesy of the Kirk Session