

Feb 55

Bywell Vicarage,  
Stocksfield-on-Tyne,  
Northumberland.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

As we look back to the Christmas of 1954 there is much to occupy our thoughts. There was an increase in the number of Christmas communicants which, though it may not mean very much, is at least a step in the right direction. A large congregation came to the mid-night service at Bywell when the old church with its candle-lit chancel looked its loveliest. We are grateful to all those people who decorated all three of our churches for the festival. The slight alterations in the arranging of the crib at St. John's made it perhaps more attractive than ever.

But this Christmas is likely to be remembered chiefly for the production of the Christmas play "Light over Bywell" in the parish church on January 2nd. May we at this point all offer our congratulations to Mr. David Bell who wrote the play that combined so skilfully and dramatically the story of Bywell's past with the events of Christmas, and to Mr. Grist for the play's most adequate production. We must also thank them both for the considerable amount of very hard work needed to produce the play at all. It was, indeed, no mean feat of organisation. The extent to which we are indebted to many other parishioners is well expressed in Mr. Grist's letter in this issue of the magazine. But while it is impossible to mention everyone by name, we would like to record the work of Miss Margaret Allan who trained the choir whose singing meant so much to actors and congregation alike, and of Mr. W. Reay-Smith who in the temporary absence of our regular organist returned to the St. Peter's organ for the performance and for many of the rehearsals.

It is good to know that all this effort did not go unrewarded. The effect on the congregation may best be summarised in a quotation from each of two letters I received a few days later. "I was tremendously moved by the sincerity and happiness of your play and I felt uplifted and somehow 'encouraged' by the very simplicity of its message," is the first. The second reads: "I came a rather tired woman and came home refreshed in body and mind and with a feeling of repose I have not felt for some time. Truly the spirit of the Nativity was in Bywell last night." I am sure the two persons who wrote those words will not mind them reaching a larger public than myself. There can be little that any of us would wish to add to them.

The play had been well publicised by the press and B.B.C. which probably helped to account for the size of the congregation! Some time before 6-30 p.m. it became apparent that it was quite impossible to get everyone in. A second performance was the only thing to do. Fortunately the Vicarage, where the cast and choir, some seventy strong, had already had tea and got ready for the play, was well warmed, and here those who, like the one whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, could find no room, took refuge and sang carols until it was time to come to church for the second showing. It must be a very long time since there were so many people in Bywell, all at one time on a winter evening.

It is often hard for a parson to resist pointing out morals, and there do seem to be two obvious ones here. The first is how great a parochial asset is Bywell Vicarage. Even one performance of a play with so many people involved would have presented very great problems had there been no premises available in Bywell apart from the St. Peter's vestry. The second is the extent of our privilege in being able to come to church any Sunday and find it lit and warmed and with room for us all. It takes the rare occasion when this is not the case to make one realize how great a privilege this is. Possibly if it was not always so easy we should appreciate it more.

Your friend and Vicar,

L. D. BLATHWAYT

#### Calendar for February 1955.

- Tuesday, Feb. 1—Women's Offering Service  
Newcastle Cathedral 3 p.m.  
Wed., Feb. 2—Purification of the Blessed Virgin  
Mary.  
Holy Communion 10 a.m. St. John's.  
February 6—Septuagesima.  
February 13—Sexagesima.  
February 20—Quinquagesima.  
Wed., February 23—Ash Wednesday.  
Holy Communion 9 a.m. at Bywell.  
Holy Communion 7-30 and 10 a.m. at  
St. John's.  
Mothers' Union 2-30 p.m. at St. John's.  
Evening Service and Address 7-30 p.m.  
at St. John's.  
Thursday, Feb. 24—St. Matthias, A.M.  
Holy Communion 10 a.m. at St. John's.  
February 27—1st Sunday in Lent.