

OBITUARY

FRANCIS CAROLUS EELES

Francis Carolus Eeles, O.B.E., D.LITT., LL.D., F.S.A.SCOT., F.R.HIST.S., President of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society 1953-4 and for many years Secretary of the Central Council for the Care of Churches, died on 17th August, 1954, after a long life devoted to the service of the Church and the preservation of its ancient buildings.

Eeles was born near Porlock, of Scottish descent. Though much of his early life was spent north of the border, he knew West Somerset well, spending many of his holidays in that district. Trained as a Librarian his principal interests lay in the fields of ecclesiology and the study of liturgies. Among his earliest publications was an account of the Church Bells of Kincardineshire (1897), a county in which he then resided. This was followed by books on the Reservation of the Holy Eucharist in the Scottish Church (1899) and on the English Coronation Service (1902). In 1914 he was appointed Rhind Lecturer by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and chose as his subject: "The Liturgy and Ceremonial of the Medieval Church in Scotland." The lectures, which were never published, attracted considerable interest in Edinburgh at the time they were delivered. Perhaps his most important contribution to these studies was his publication of the Holyrood Ordinale, which appeared in 1916.

During the first World War he came south to join the Library staff of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Museum was then under the direction of Sir Cecil Harcourt-Smith, who was much concerned with the movement for safeguarding the ancient buildings of the Church of England. Eeles' interest in the question had been roused as a young man when he once saw the workmen hacking plaster with the remains of ancient paintings off the wall surface round the rood stairs of Selworthy church. His new post brought him into close touch with all those who were seeking to set up an adequate organization to watch over the ancient churches of the country. He was closely associated with the formation of the earliest Diocesan Advisory Committees at the end of the first World War and in the years immediately following. When, some years later, the Central Council for the Care of Churches was set up to co-ordinate the work of these Committees, Eeles was a natural choice as the first Secretary, an office which he held for

nearly 30 years. His wide knowledge of churches in many parts of the country, his remarkable memory, his scholarship in matters of archæology and liturgy and his extensive experience of both ancient and modern church furnishings made him an admirable counsellor for the movement. The present sound position of the Central Council and of the Diocesan Committees owes much to the firm foundations which he laid. Inevitably his duties cut into the time available for other studies and prevented additions to the works published at an earlier period. He continued to produce scholarly articles published in the Journals of the learned societies, of which he was a member and also prepared accounts of a number of ancient churches.

Eeles joined our Society in 1921. Some years later he acquired a house near Minehead, in that West Somerset country which he had known and loved as a boy. His many duties prevented a frequent attendance at our meetings. When in Somerset he was always ready to act as a guide to the churches visited by the Society; his lucid and scholarly descriptions on those occasions were much appreciated by all who heard them. Among his more recent publications were accounts of churches in West Somerset, including Dunster, Minehead and Selworthy, the last a beautiful rural church, which always held a special place in his affections and where he desired to be buried. With the outbreak of war in 1939 Church House at Westminster was requisitioned and the Central Council deprived of its office. With characteristic generosity he offered his own house as a substitute and there the office and records remained during the war years.

The degree of D.Litt. was conferred on him at Lambeth by Archbishop Lang in 1937. He received the O.B.E. in the same year. The Scottish University of St. Andrews made him LL.D. He was elected President of our Society at the Annual Meeting in 1953 and gave as his address:

His health, which had been poor for some years, was then deteriorating, and in 1954 he tendered his resignation as Secretary of the Central Council for the Care of Churches. His death will be greatly regretted and he will be much missed, both in Somerset and in those wider circles with which his work brought him into touch.¹

C. A. R. R.

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