

The Baptists in South Africa.

AN English Baptist, familiar with the recent glowing reports of Baptist progress in Eastern Europe and in the United States of America, will probably be disappointed when confronted with the figures pertaining to the growth of his church in South Africa. In the four provinces of the Union (Cape Colony, Natal, Orange Free State, and the Transvaal) there are thirty-nine European churches with thirty-six European ministers in charge. These churches, according to the 1923 Handbook, have a membership of 5,105. In addition there are ten European missionaries and fourteen native and Indian helpers ministering to a membership of 5,391. This gives a total membership (European, coloured, and native) of nearly 10,500. But before he begins to express his disappointment, the English Baptist should consider the conditions which obtain in the country, and the difficulties which have to be overcome in the progress of the work. There are conditions peculiar to colonial life which do not affect the growth of religious work in older and more settled countries; also, over and above the conditions and difficulties which affect the work of the Christian churches in general, there are those which affect the Baptist church in particular. These will be pointed out in the course of this article, and unless they are kept in mind, the position of the Baptists in South Africa will be misunderstood.

A leading Wesleyan, who had spent many years in the Transvaal, once remarked that people in the Homeland are not sufficiently aware of the "pioneer" nature of the religious work done in South Africa. And even after a hundred years the work is still "pioneer" work. It will probably continue to be such for a long time to come. However, the conditions which make growth possible on any large scale have not yet emerged into view; and those who have the interests of the Kingdom of Heaven at heart will have to be content with few returns, and live and work in the certainty that they are laying the foundations of an edifice whose more imposing aspects will be seen by the men and women of the future.

We shall first give a brief account of the beginnings and growth of the work in the various Provinces. Then the difficulties which have been encountered, and have retarded its growth,

will be pointed out. Finally a few words must be said about the problems and tasks which confront the South African Baptist Church to-day.

It was in the year 1820 that the first Baptist Church was founded in South Africa, its members consisting of some seven or eight persons who had arrived in that year at Algoa Bay, in the ship *Brilliant*. The movement of settlers to South Africa had been brought about by the condition of economic depression which existed in England after the Napoleonic wars; conditions which in some important respects resemble those obtaining to-day. To relieve the congestion, emigration schemes were instituted by the government of the day, and suitable emigrants were selected and granted facilities to settle, and farm lands in various parts of the Eastern Province of the Cape Colony. Naturally a halo of romance surrounds the beginnings of the Baptist Church in South Africa, as in other parts of the world, and there is a sufficiency of material not only for the historian who describes "hard facts," but also for the novelist who appeals more directly to the imagination. There is the story of the early settlers meeting for their first religious service under a tree in the Lower Albany District. There are tales of Kaffir raids, and of resulting "treks" by the settlers to pastures new. There were Kaffir wars; and the settlers, many of whom were old soldiers who had fought against Napoleon, were often called upon to shoulder the rifle once more, and go out "on commando" in defence of hearth and home. Such occurrences were frequent enough in those days in South Africa; but here we are not concerned with the romantic aspects of church history, and we must restrict ourselves to a bare statement of the progress of events.

The honour of being the founder of the Baptist Church in South Africa goes to a man named William Millar, one of the settlers, who gathered his first congregation in a place called Salem. Soon he began a Grahamstown as well, and formed a church there; the mother church of the Baptist denomination in the sub-continent. For many years, and for reasons obvious to all who are acquainted with work in the colonies, progress was very slow; but we are supplied with illustrations of the splendid resourcefulness and initiative of some of the Baptist leaders in the way in which opportunities were seized for starting new causes and forming new churches in different parts of the colony. Thus the Port Elizabeth Church was founded in 1855; the Alice Church in 1874; the Cape Town Church in 1877; the King Williamstown Church in 1882, and that at East London in 1884.

Two important and determining factors which call for notice in this connection are the coming of the German Legion in 1857, and the formation of the South African Baptist Union in 1877.

The German Legion had fought in the Crimean War with the British Forces, and on being disbanded they were granted facilities to settle in South Africa, lands being allotted them in the district surrounding East London, known then as British Kaffraria. Among them were some Baptists, and one of their number, Carsten Langheim, was set apart and ordained as minister. Later, however, in 1867, there came to South Africa the Rev. Hugo Gutsche, a man who had come under the influence of the famous Pastor Oncken of Hamburg. He soon became a leader, not only among his German brethren, but among British colonists as well. It was he who was the first among South African Baptists to attempt missionary work among the natives. This led subsequently to the formation of the South African Baptist Missionary Society. Other important aspects of Baptist work are due to his vision and initiative; and it is to his qualities of leadership that we must ascribe the fact that more than a fifth of the membership of the Baptist Church in South Africa are Germans. The presence of the German element has led to some important consequences in the past. It has introduced a cosmopolitanism into the Baptist outlook, and has established a contact between the Baptist Churches and the Dutch community which would probably never be realized if the British Baptists in the sub-continent were left to themselves. As far as we know there is only one Dutch Baptist Church in the country (with a membership of 160). But here and there in all the provinces are found little groups of people with their attention turned toward the Baptist Church, while Baptist principles are being considered by them with an eagerness and sincerity surpassing anything inspired by their own church.

The other important event was the formation of the South African Baptist Union in 1877, in Grahamstown. This was brought about mainly through the instrumentality of the Rev. G. W. Cross, who had arrived that year to take charge of the Grahamstown church. Prior to this there had been no attempt to organize Baptist work in South Africa. The progress that had taken place was of a haphazard kind, and churches had sprung into existence in different parts without aid or guidance from any central body. The Wesleyan Church had made great strides, and had kept pace with the growth of population by starting new causes in the main centres. The Dutch Reformed Church was also well organized, and had a firm grip over the Dutch people. It was now felt that the Baptist forces also should be marshalled into order, and that an attempt should be made to join the various churches together with a view to more aggressive work among the Europeans and natives. The leading spirit was Cross. But there were others, some of them laymen, who came afterwards to take

a foremost place in South African commerce and politics. The foundations were firmly and truly laid, and a new chapter in the history of the South African Baptist Church was begun on that occasion. Meanwhile, churches were being founded in the other provinces, far away from the base in the Eastern Province, where Baptist operations had begun. In 1864 a few Baptists began to meet in a private house in Durban, among them being Mr. Isaac Cowley, who was soon chosen to be the minister, and a church was formed. Later came the formation of the church in Pietermaritzburg, with the various missionary ramifications of the work among Indians and Zulus. Then, in 1891, Revs. Cross and Batts started the work in Bloemfontein. But most important and interesting of all—since the formation of the Grahamstown church in 1820—was the movement northward which took place in 1889, when Revs. Cross and Batts started work in Kimberley; while about the same time the Rev. W. Kelly began work in Johannesburg, and Revs. R. H. Brotherton and H. T. Cousins in Pretoria. The lure of the South African gold-fields was by this time felt all over the world, and the leading brethren in the churches had heard the call to go north and provide for the spiritual needs of Baptists and others in the great centres that were growing so rapidly in those parts. Travelling to Johannesburg and Pretoria in those days was by no means an easy matter, since the railway did not penetrate farther north than Kimberley. The distances that had to be covered were great, and travelling by ox-wagon was difficult and slow. But already the Baptist Union had made a beginning of grappling with the problems of South African life, and here were fresh problems constituted by the crowding together in mining camps and quickly-growing cities, of men from all kindreds and tribes and countries under the sun. The resources at the disposal of the Baptist brethren were few, and the difficulties confronting them immense; but they had heard the call of God, and they went forth on a venture of faith which has been abundantly vindicated by the events that have transpired during the intervening years.

But those who are not acquainted with the conditions of life in the colonies are wont to ask questions about the numerical weakness of the Baptist Union in South Africa. The Wesleyans and Baptists began their work together in 1820. The growth of the Wesleyan churches has been phenomenal, while the Baptist churches, after a hundred years of work, have a membership of only 10,500! What is the explanation of this?

It is impossible in an article such as this to give a fair idea of the conditions in colonial life which work against Christian progress. These conditions have to be seen and lived under before they can be felt and realized. The tardy growth of the

Baptists in South Africa, however, must be seen in the light of the possibilities which the country offers. The total European population of the four provinces is only a million and a half. About one half of these belong to the Dutch Reformed Church; with the result that the sphere of work for the Baptist and other churches is relatively a small one. We must not expect too much! True that Wesleyans, Presbyterians, and Anglicans have made rapid strides, while the Baptists seem to have been standing still. But this, as we shall presently show, is due to conditions affecting the Baptists which do not affect the other churches. Then there are all the difficulties to be encountered which are suggested by the word "colonial." The ancient "colonist" leaving Greece for his new home took with him the sacred fire from the temple, together with the laws, traditions, and customs of his native land. The modern colonial goes forth with a similar equipment; but the new environment quickly tells a tale, and much of what is deemed precious in the life of the mother-country soon begins, in many cases, to lose its appeal. Old restraints are cast aside, and what colonialists call "freedom" is found to be congenial. There is a looseness of living and thinking; and so many of our young people, from the best homes and churches, and often with fine records of Christian service behind them, find their ideals and purposes swamped by the surrounding materialism, and suffer themselves to be carried away by the stream. Also one must remember that South Africa has been the home of the adventurer and the rendezvous of people whose standard of judgment is materialistic, while undoubtedly the fact of being surrounded by an inferior civilization has to be considered in any analysis of the atmosphere of the country. But these considerations—and many others might be added—refer to other churches as well, and what we are seeking is an explanation of the slow growth of the Baptist church.

This explanation may be summed up in the word "independence," together with the lack of organization mainly due to the isolation of the churches from one another. It is, of course, admitted that the principle of independency has been a retarding force in other places than South Africa, and our generation is witnessing its failure to meet the needs of our modern church life. It has completely failed in South Africa, and the more thoughtful people in the churches are asking for some organization of the Baptist denomination in the sub-continent similar to what has come to pass in the Homeland during the past few years.

The Church with the finest record of progress in South Africa is the Wesleyan. But this is explained by the fact that in the Transvaal it is worked as a mission from England, and until a few years ago similar conditions obtained in the other

provinces. The lesson for the Baptists is obvious: organized effort is necessary, for the problems of South Africa are such that only concerted action can grapple with them. But beyond this is the fact that our South African churches are not only isolated from one another, but also from churches of the Homeland; and the feeling has grown in force during the past few years that stronger links should be forged between them. For instance, some system of interchange in the ministry would be an inestimable boon to men who are at present facing great loneliness, and enduring mental isolation, with little prospect of relief, and without such stimulus as is felt by our missionaries who are connected with a strong home organization. Recently one or two Baptist leaders have visited South Africa, and hopes have been raised that this may lead to a deeper and more sympathetic interest on the part of the home churches. Can the South African Baptist Union be worked as a southern association of the Baptist Union of Great Britain? This is being seriously discussed by those who realize the present inadequacy of the Baptist *status quo* in South Africa. At any rate we are sure that the Baptist Church in the sub-continent needs to be fortified by a closer union with the Baptist Churches of England, whatever the nature of the link may be.

We have more than once in this article referred to the problems of South Africa, and to the fact that the Baptist Churches are developing a sense of responsibility regarding their solution. In the main these problems gather around the conflict that is going on between British and Dutch ideals; the attitude of South Africans towards the native races and their future development; the vast changes that are coming over South African life industrially and socially; and the new national conditions that are quickly coming to view and constituting a challenge to Christian internationalism. These problems offer a great opportunity to the Baptist Church.

The conflict that is going on between the various racial element makes it impossible to forecast even approximately the future religious developments of South Africa. Which element will predominate in the end? Will it be British or Dutch? Or some other element that is neither? Much is heard about the emergence of a new South African nation which will be neither Dutch nor British, but which will conserve the best ideals and traditions of both races, as well as of other peoples who may influence future developments in the country. This is the view held by General Smuts, and it is the meeting-ground of the finer spirits among both Dutch and British. But whatever the future may hold in store, and whichever racial element may predominate in the national consciousness that is emerging, we need have no

fear lest Baptist principles and ideals should fail to prove their adaptability to the conditions and needs that will arise. A church that is distinctively English will fail; and so will a church that is distinctively Dutch. But the Baptist Church is possessed of a witness that is universal in its appeal; and the cosmopolitanism that has shown itself in the history of our denomination in other parts of the world will be seen again in South Africa, and with a richness of life not surpassed in our previous history.

D. DAVIES.

Pantygog, Pontycymmer, Glam.

Andrew Fuller, 1754—1815.

Real development is not leaving things behind, as on a road, but drawing life from them, as from a root.

G. K. CHESTERTON.

AS a raw student there came into my hands the volume of Andrew Fuller's works which Mr. Henry G. Bohn, that firm friend of good literature, had included in his famous *Standard Library*. Ever since reading the short memoir of the author, by his son Andrew Gunton Fuller, which the old green-bound book contains, I have felt an admiration for Fuller's character and work which all further knowledge of that remarkable man has increased. I have no claim to speak of Fuller on any ground of having special sources of knowledge not open to all; my right to speak is based only on the repeated perusal of all his published works and on some knowledge of the biographies of Fuller and his contemporaries.

Two things combine to make Andrew Fuller a person of unusual interest to all who respect human achievement. First, here is a man, with no education worth speaking of in youth, and without a spark of genius, who yet manages by dint of unremitting use of ordinary gifts, to write works in strong, serviceable English, which are immediately received with applause wherever theology is read at all, and which are reprinted fifty years afterwards, both on their merits as literature and as still effective pieces of Christian apologetic. If this should seem unimpressive to any of us, let us ask ourselves, fellow dribblers, how many