

C. O. P. E. C.

A Woman's Point of View.

FOR many months that cryptic word, "Copec" had been enough to cause a thrill of joyous anticipation. Probably two main ideas contributed to that feeling, (1) that the church really was going to get on with the job which is so imperative if it is to meet the needs of this age—that of relating its teaching on religion to the practical problems of living in a highly civilized and highly organized state of society; (2) that it contemplated focussing its work in a conference, that, in its character, would be more like an assembly of the Universal Church than some had ever hoped to see realized in this generation. As the questionnaires were issued, and one heard something of the work of the Commissions, the fact came home that the preparations were being undertaken in a very thorough manner. There was gratifying evidence that while it was to be a Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship, with the emphasis on Christian, yet the organizers had not assumed that a committee of parsons, or even of bishops, would find the way through the diverse problems, but had called in men and women of specialized training and practical experience of the problems under consideration. As the time drew near, and as the batches of commission reports followed one another at intervals of a few days, the scope and depth of treatment became more evident. Were the leaders attempting the impossible? Had their consciousness of the great arrears of thought on the part of the church led them to the idea of making a supreme effort to atone by a week of concentrated thinking? With such a range of matter could anything definite be done? Much would depend on the leadership.

And what of the reality? It was good to join in prayer and thought with the representatives of all the great Christian communions; good, too, to have so many overseas delegates. It seemed fitting that greetings should be read from the leaders of all political parties, as well as from the King and Archbishop of Canterbury. The Conference was out to discover the extent of its unity in Christ, and as the days passed,

the Conference became a great religious experience. In small groups that guidance of the Spirit had been experienced, and men and women had been led through frank statement of differing aspects to a common expression of truth. Now the experience was repeated with hundreds instead of tens. Probably some of those present will never forget the discussion of "Christianity and War," not for the resolutions passed, but for the Guidance through a session, when disruption seemed possible, to almost unanimity.

The Conference gathered in the belief that "the Christian faith rightly interpreted and consistently followed gives the vision and the power essential for solving the problems of to-day." It was deeply conscious of the gulf between the social ethics of Christianity and English life of the last two centuries. To quote "Artifex," of the *Manchester Guardian*, "The period of the industrial revolution . . . corresponded with the era of the church's greatest deadness and inactivity. Modern democracy sprang into being while the church slept, and she has never caught up her work of evangelizing it." Realizing that much of modern life was a denial of Christianity, it accepted responsibility for the present conditions, because it had failed to give them a Christian basis. Realizing, too, that repentance involves action, it accepted its penance of unmaking and re-making—a particularly difficult job, as women, who use the needle, know. The chief concern was how to make life more Christian—and not rhetoric, but clear fundamental thinking in the sight of God, was what the Conference demanded and usually got. Any speaker who could "think clear, feel deep," and put the result into terse phrases was welcome, whether bishop, philosopher, or political leader, and the balance of contribution was pretty evenly maintained between parson and layman, man and woman. The Conference took itself and its decisions seriously—even if it took its jokes uproariously—and the organizers made great demands on both speakers and listeners. Never surely did any religious organization succeed so well in eliminating waste of moments; and never before did one so resolutely refuse to degrade praise by using it as a means of relieving the physical tension of sitting two and a half hours in one position! One very small point—the convention that women must wear hats was broken, and headaches were fewer, and brains worked better in consequence.

As regards pronouncements, only lines of thought can be indicated. (Facts can be obtained from *The Proceedings of Copec*, 1s.). Someone was overheard saying that Copec meant the death of Puritanism. If by Puritanism is meant a religion of mere negation, then probably it is true. Copec sought to

fill up all life with a Christian content, and not even a small preserve was left to which one had the right to bar the entrance of Christ. Starting with the belief in the Fatherhood of God, the value of human personality, and the prayer, "Thy will be done on earth," the Conference proceeded to claim the whole of Education as a religious process, and therefore to stress the importance of the personality of the teacher. Housing was viewed from the standpoint of the Fatherhood of God; sex was regarded as a God-given instinct, and marriage a divine ordinance. Those engaged in dealing with criminals were seen as having a chance to join with Christ in the redemptive work of the world. International relationships afforded scope for being corporately Christian; the affairs of industry were seen to be the means of helping God in the distribution of His provision for mankind, while the paying of rates and taxes—provided you paid enough—became the means whereby God's will could be done. In dealing with problems relating to imperialism, war, industry, &c., an attempt was made to get at the causes of wrong action. Here the Church found itself in the province it had felt to be peculiarly its own, confronting self interest, greed, jealousy and kindred evils, and emphasis had again to be put on the necessity for a new spirit. One good feature of Copec was, that where insufficient data existed, as over the subject of birth control, the Conference, instead of recording a decision, asked that research work might be carried on. It followed, as a matter of course, in a gathering where men and women were acting together so naturally and helpfully, that there should be complete repudiation of the double moral standard. Among other things Copec demonstrated, in a remarkable way, the value of the principle of the co-operation of the sexes.

At times one almost gasped at the eagerness of the Conference to assume responsibility for Christian pronouncements involving radical changes in the attitude of the churches to many problems, and considering the diverse elements represented it was amazing how many resolutions were carried *nem. con.* As one speaker pointed out, the Conference led up to Palm Sunday, and we might be ready to acclaim Christ as King as we caught a glimpse of another Jerusalem, but the testing time would follow. Christ won through sacrifice, and many present felt that He was leading His church, and wondered whether this body of His would be as subservient to His will as the body of Jesus of Nazareth.

For the churches Copec is not a goal, but the starting-point of a fresh venture. A plea is being made that the following-up of Copec shall be done interdenominationally,

in order that that wonderful sense of the unity of the church shall be preserved. Much needs to be done, however, in the way of education in our own denomination, if our churches are to be ready to take their part in whatever united action may be evolved. The writer is haunted by a question asked by a leading Baptist woman as she left the Conference Hall after the last session, "What are we going to do about it?"

VERA BARSON.

The Value of Denominational History.

(As illustrated from an unpublished church book of the 17th and 18th centuries).

(An address given to the Congregational Historical Society on May 15th, 1924).

ANTIQUARIANISM is regarded as the hobby of the few, and sectarian antiquarianism—the study of denominational origins—is at a double disadvantage of limitation, for why should we trouble about sects when the reason for their existence seems largely to have passed away? The result is that a Society for the study of denominational history is apt to become a Cinderella without Cinderella's good fortune—for she may count herself lucky to get an invitation even to an obscure corner of the annual denominational ball, and it is not often that a denominational prince picks up her slipper. I wonder whether the relative neglect from which all such societies suffer is not partly their own fault, and whether it is not largely due to our failure to present more clearly the practical values and present interests of the study of our past. That, at least, is the aim of this paper. Instead of an abstract argument that a denomination ought to support its own Historical Society much more widely and generously than it does, let us take a definite field of study, and see what it may yield along these lines of practical values and present interests.

The example here taken is a church-book of the Baptist Church gathered by the well-known Hanserd Knollys about 1642, but its continuous record does not begin till a year or two before his death in 1691. The manuscript, in many different hands, which belongs to the Angus Library of Regent's Park College, is found in a vellum-covered volume, with clasps, its size being 16in. by 6in. The book is not the