

The Baptist World Alliance and the approaching World Congress.

The Significance of Toronto.

THE Baptist World Alliance has come of age. It was formed on July 17th, 1905, at the First World Congress in London, England. In the early years it aroused comparatively little interest, and the interest was not always sympathetic. Some people, especially in America, imagined that it might invade the rights of existing organisations or interfere with the autonomy of national groups. The fears have proved unfounded. The Alliance is in fact dependent from first to last upon the national unions and conventions. They are its constituents, from which its funds are derived. It has no personal members or endowments, and it is to be hoped that it may never have either. Precisely as a fraternal organisation, sustained by the interest of the national groups, and embodying the common mind of the living community throughout the world, the Alliance has a true and useful place in Baptist life. It is able to express the essential spirit of Baptist churchmanship, its democratic and voluntary character, and withal its genuine and far-reaching unity of faith and outlook.

Only since the Great War have the potentialities of the Alliance begun to be realised. First of all, it enabled our people to think together over the problems of reconstruction in Europe, by convening the London Conference of 1920; and the result of that conference was the relief programme and the co-ordinated plan for the assistance of European Baptists—financed and carried through, not by the Alliance (which has no administrative authority), but by the mission boards and committees of America, Canada, Britain and other lands.

The inspirational value of the Alliance during the post-war period has been appreciated in a remarkable degree throughout the world, and I am convinced that it has now secured a permanent place in the affection and confidence of Baptists as a whole. The Stockholm Congress of 1923 was a great occasion, but of perhaps larger importance has been the work of the Executive Committee during the years following. It was on the initiative of the Executive, led by President Mullins,

that "regional conferences" were called throughout Europe, and these have aroused a denominational world-consciousness in lands in which hitherto only a local and even a "parochial" outlook had prevailed. The wide vision, statesmanlike exposition, and evangelical intensity of Dr. Mullins contributed in no small measure to the effect of these conferences. Their influence will not pass; it is registered in the feeling of our people, who now "belong together" more intimately than ever before. Within the Alliance, too, minor groupings are emerging, and these are significant of unified evangelical endeavour. The Copenhagen Conference (for example) provided the occasion for a series of resolutions in which Danish, Norwegian and Swedish Baptists set forth their sense of a peculiarly close relationship and their determination henceforth to act continuously with one another in furthering the interests of the Kingdom of God. The Baptists of the Baltic Republics are similarly drawn into intimate fellowship.

It had been hoped that President Mullins would be able to visit South Africa, where Baptists have long felt their isolation; but when it unhappily appeared that his health would not permit the journey, the Executive was fortunate in securing Dr. W. Y. Fullerton as its spokesman at the Jubilee celebrations of the South African Baptist Union. Dr. Fullerton not only addressed united gatherings, but has the unique distinction of having visited every Baptist church in the Dominion of South Africa. To-day the sense of isolation has vanished; the brethren in this part of the Southern Hemisphere know themselves part of a great whole, and they will be strongly represented at Toronto. (I hope that the Executive will during the next quinquennium fix a regional conference in Africa, and that the Alliance may also link up with the Latin-American Baptist Congress fixed for 1930). Similarly, though Australasia is far distant, contacts are multiplying. Australia is co-operating in assisting mission work in Holland; and almost the first action of the Baptist Union of Australia was to express its sense of world-fellowship by affiliating with the World Alliance. The Dominion is sending a powerful delegation to Toronto, and New Zealand will also be represented. Moreover, connection has been established by the Alliance with some of the indigenous churches of India and the Far East, and as these develop the intercourse will become more continuous and intimate.

There is indeed no assignable limit to the services which can be rendered by a body having the cultivation of Christian fellowship as its supreme end and holding aloof from special administrative tasks. It can survey the world as a whole, gather

facts, study needs, pass on suggestions to executive bodies, and perform a multitude of other functions as a "clearing-house."

Of outstanding importance is the service of the Alliance in the exposition and defence of the Baptist principle of religious freedom. I can speak here with exceptional and detailed knowledge. As Commissioner for Europe it has been my duty, on behalf of the mission boards, to which I am responsible, to maintain before Governments the rights of our brethren; and it has been an immense advantage to be able to do so not only as spokesman of the mission boards, but of the Alliance. Governments listen more readily to the opinions of a body whose membership is world-wide; moreover, this is not in their eyes a merely foreign body, since it actually includes those on whose behalf it interposes. At Geneva, too, the League of Nations can listen to representations from the Alliance, precisely because its membership covers those directly affected, so that it has their implicit and explicit authority to speak. In the long, difficult, and delicate task of contending for religious liberty in Rumania, the existence of the Alliance, and its promotion of a world-protest on behalf of the persecuted, have been factors of primary and decisive importance.

In the light of such considerations, the Congress of this year will appeal to all who care for the maintenance and effectiveness of our Baptist witness. At Toronto we shall pool our experiences; points of view, characteristic of all lands, will find expression. The World Congresses are occasions for renewing old friendships and forming new; no gatherings of Baptists are of equal value for widening our horizons and enabling us to appreciate the significance of New Testament Christianity throughout all the earth. The approaching Assembly will have peculiar worth in bringing home the significant changes of perspective within the denomination. Europe has rightly received a large share of attention during the after-war period, and must necessarily take a foremost place in our interest for many years to come. The development of preachers' schools, the struggle for freedom in religion against mediæval ideas that are still influential in certain lands, the immense possibilities bound up with the opening of Russia—such subjects will receive attention from the delegates of the Baptist brotherhood. Nevertheless, in our world-survey the outstanding facts will probably be those connected with the growing strength and independence of churches in Eastern lands, where nationalist feeling plays a new part and the indigenous groups are asserting their claims to a larger autonomy. The Toronto platform provides for Indian and Burmese and Chinese to

speak for themselves; and their Western fellow-disciples will give sympathetic hearing to these brethren and will endeavour to gain a full understanding of their outlook. A period of tutelage is natural at the outset of missionary enterprise in new lands, but Baptists never desire that it should be prolonged. A time arrives when the missionary becomes the adviser, "*primus inter pares*" at most, and this is a stage in the normal advance towards full self-government, self-support, and self-propagation. How far the indigenous churches have moved on this road, Toronto will in some measure reveal. Not only so; it will bring us face to face with responsibilities which a denomination such as ours, now in the forefront of the evangelical peoples of the world, must assume in christianising lands that are opening to new settlers. "Frontier tasks" are to be considered; and our obligations to Western Canada, South America, and Australia, as great populations arise in hitherto unoccupied or sparsely peopled regions, will take definite form for the thought and conscience of the Baptist world. It is also to be hoped that suggestions will emerge at Toronto for a careful survey of lands still to be possessed.

Nor will the Congress be destitute of significance for the older and larger communities there represented. "Non-Christians in the home-lands" is the title of an address by one who is exceptionally qualified to speak; and the immense subject of religious and Christian education, whose problems burden the heart and mind of all serious people, comes up for careful survey by experts. These problems will also be dealt with through the "exhibit of methods," which is no "side-show," but an essential and important feature of the Toronto assembly. What duties have we in relation to peace, the conquest of the military spirit, and the reconciliation of classes and of races? Not merely formal addresses, but sectional meetings permitting full and free discussion, will be devoted to these great issues.

It goes without saying that throughout all our proceedings the Lordship of Jesus Christ, His all-sufficiency for all things, dominates our thought. We shall consider afresh the call to carry on the Great Commission; and our governing idea from beginning to end is set forth in the text that has been chosen as the Congress motto: "To sum up all things in Christ."

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