

the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth: the power because the Love, illimitable and boundless—something within the attainment of all who seek it through Christ.

F. TOWNLEY LORD.

An Experiment in Christian Education.

DURING the past eighteen months an Association Commission has been busily at work in Yorkshire on Christian Education. The plan of campaign has been as follows: After the subject had been introduced to the seven District Councils, entry was sought to the Deacons' Meeting of each particular church. The aim was not to hold large general meetings but to interest the responsible leaders of the church and to win their support. The Commission is in hearty agreement with the dictum that "No church can rise above the level of its diaconate." Already it can be reported that over seventy churches have been visited, and in every case, the visitor was received with conspicuous goodwill, and his words heard with evident interest.

The point of view the Commission has tried to communicate is that Christian Education is a matter for the whole church and not simply for any one of its societies. "The Church a School" might very well have been the slogan, provided only that the school closely approaches the New Testament picture of our Lord with His disciples. A scheme was drawn up entitled *A Five-Point Programme of Christian Education* (Kingsgate Press 1d.), in which an attempt was made to state the function of the church in educational terms, and to set forth the vital aims of every Christian society. The five-fold scheme was presented to the deacons (and the minister) at their meeting and it was suggested that they recommend to their church the holding of an *Enquiry* into the whole of their life and work in every society. (In no case would a post mortem have been a better suggestion.) The old tag about an unexamined life comes to mind of course, and it is unfortunately true that all churches would do well to review their activities in the light of those aims which alone entitle a society to be called a church. It is astonishing how the passage of time blurs aims which once were clear-cut, and it is disquieting to know how

many churches are chiefly concerned with their own fabric, finance and future. The Five-Point Programme sets five questions for each church to answer for herself, and it goes on also to outline ways in which the questions might be answered.

Nothing can be attempted here beyond a brief outline of this five-fold programme.

(1) What is the source and nature of our own individual constituency"? or "Who are our people and how do we get them?"

Investigation has already revealed to many churches that most of their scholars (about seventy-five per cent.) are not the children of their own people but have in some way or other become attached to the place. From this it is evident that the future membership will not come from the present one, and that unless adequate contact is made with the church's immediate locality, the church is doomed to a dwindling membership. Unfortunately there are churches with new Housing Estates at their very doors who have utterly failed to take advantage of the fact. They are waiting for people to drift in and no house-to-house visitation has been arranged for. It is high time that a policy of attraction was worked out, and localities were shown that churches are alive to their Christian duty. Such a policy would include an attempt to show that the church members have indeed "been with Jesus" and caught His spirit. There would be Good Samaritan work, open-air meetings, visitation, and a definite attempt to provide young people with forms of social life healthier and more constructive than they might find elsewhere.

The first question then has reference mainly to the building of the constituency.

(2) The second question is "What is our church doing for Evangelism?" The endeavour here is to open the eyes of the church to the opportunity which God is already giving her within her own borders. There is no church anywhere without young people who might be won for the Kingdom.

When one church was asked if it would call itself evangelistic, the reply came emphatically, "Certainly we should, our minister is a devoted evangelist." When it was replied, "Yes, but is anybody else?" it was evident that a new idea had been propounded. Evangelism is too often delegated to a few. If evangelism be limited to public witness by word, then no doubt many would seek to disclaim fitness. But if the word be broadly defined to mean passion for conversions, then withdrawal would not be easy, nor defensible. Evangelism should be co-operative, shared by members, teachers, parents, and ministers. Witness by word is necessary, and in these days there are far more opportunities than many realise. Religion is given room in the press

and conversation often turns in the same direction. There may be times to be silent, but there are certainly times to speak. Then there is witness by life. Tolstoy was not converted by splendid sermons or private appeals but by the lives of Christian peasants. Young people turn from moving descriptions of the power of Christ given in the pulpit to the actual evidence of this same power in the life and character of the minister and church member, and what they see there is often decisive. There follows also evangelism by prayer, a duty which no church member may legitimately avoid. If only in that hurried prayer at the beginning of a service, the names of those in whose lives a work of grace is desired were privately and lovingly repeated, services would be more powerfully used by the Holy Spirit.

The Commission has aimed therefore at the production of evangelists, and has sought to lay an inescapable duty on every church member.

(3) The third question is "What teaching is our church attempting to give?" Immediately, the response has come, we are trying to give instruction in the Bible, Missions, Theology, Church History, Ethics, and various other subjects also. When however, it has been asked, "Are you satisfied with your progress?" no great assurance has been evident.

Let it suffice to take one illustration of our failure. Is it not true to say that all that most of our people know about the book of Jonah is that it contains the story of a marvellous fish? There is little or no appreciation of the real reason for the book's existence. This little book is the most graphic and vivid description of God's merciful purpose for the heathen ever penned. The Commission, in pressing for more and better Bible teaching, does not desire the mere impartation of miscellaneous Biblical information, such as the measurements of the Temple, but seeks to secure the setting forth of the central religious message of each and every book in the Old and New Testaments. If the whole duty of the teaching function of the church is to be at all adequately discharged, much will depend on the minister and the Sunday School teacher. To this end, the Commission has sought to encourage a teaching ministry and also to establish training classes for teachers. It firmly believes on recent evidence that congregations will welcome sermons in which the mind as well as the heart is stimulated, and also it is convinced, again from experience, that teachers who are awake to the value and difficulties of their task will readily attend training classes. Emphasis has also been laid on the need for particular attention to the instruction of candidates for baptism and church membership, and to the further training of those who have already joined the church. The Commission regards conversion, not as the harvest,

but as the rooting of the seed and the springing up of the first fresh green shoots. Study circles have been pressed for also as an ideal means for the education of the middle-aged. These are some of the ways in which the Commission has supplied answers to its own question. Others have suggested themselves to different churches, but the church itself can only become a school as ministers and teachers play their parts and as the educational policy is framed to cover the whole constituency.

(4) "What service is our church asking of its members?" This fourth question naturally arises in educational thinking, for education should influence life and produce activity. It has been necessary here to stress the scope and sphere of Christian service and to point out that the church should not be regarded as an exhaustive field. For many years now a favourite topic of Young Men's Classes has been "Can a man be a Christian in business?" and the suggestion has been "No." Imagine it! God and His Kingdom may only have the odds and ends of time and energy. Does not this mean a divided life, with two codes, two sets of moral principles, two loyalties? Yet we have called ourselves monotheists! It is high time that "every thought were brought into subjection to Christ," that we cried with the Psalmist "unite my heart," and that all departments of life were regarded as opportunities for the service of our Master. If this were the case, the church would be a power-house to which workers might regularly return for reinforcement, and a base from which a supply of creative personalities would proceed into the world to battle for the Kingdom. While, however, Christian service should be as wide as life itself, within the church helpers are needed. Here the Commission has almost invariably been met with the cry "The labourers are few and volunteers infrequent." Investigation shows, however, that the joke against the Army authorities might equally well be directed against the church. We also are adepts in putting round pegs in square holes and vice versa. The result is that the church has a wealth of unused capacity. Instead of facing everybody with a choice of one of a few stereotyped jobs, instead of counting people altogether impossible because they have failed in one particular task, let us give initiative more play and let us give everyone repeated chances. Because a youth has not been a success as a Sunday School teacher, it does not mean that he would not do excellently as a canvasser of advertisements for the church magazine. The Commission is seriously of the opinion that modern young people, if only they are rightly handled, will give a good account of themselves as servants of Christ and His Church.

(5) Question five also is of the greatest importance, "What fellowship is our church creating and enjoying?"

The church ought surely immediately to reveal itself as a united society, yet its host of over-lapping and isolated societies proves the contrary. The least that could be done is that every society should define its own aim in relation both to the church and to all other societies. The greatest weakness here, however, is the lack of fellowship between church and school. The Commission has sought to remedy this by advocating a close relationship between the minister and the school, suggesting with emphasis that the minister should count himself called equally to the school as to the church. Also it has recommended that the scholars be not placed in remote galleries on Sunday mornings but be given space in the front of the area (a region avoided as the plague by adult worshippers). Again the relation between school and church may be deepened if church members only are allowed to teach in the upper parts of the school and if annually, at a Communion Service, teachers are dedicated to their high vocation.

An adequate answer can only be given to this question concerning fellowship as the prayer-life of the church is also considered. Here the Commission has sought to enquire into the widespread complaint that prayer meetings are scantily attended and often insufficiently inspiring. Suffice it to say here that the trouble often begins in the Sunday School, though the home also must share the responsibility. Apart from the question of the suitability or reality of many of the prayers offered in school, it is apparent that many teachers find it much more easy to speak on morality than on religion and also to treat the Bible as a collection of moral stories rather than as the greatest religious book the world has ever seen. The teacher's true task is not to omit or minimize moral teaching, but to show that the roots of morality are in religion and that power for the accomplishment of moral ideals comes from worship. Conversion should be the aim, and it is conversion that produces character. These and other matters have been raised by the Commission respecting fellowship, for education should include training and practice in the art of corporate service, thought and worship.

To return now to the method of the Commission. It has been suggested to every church that an enquiry be held into the whole of its life and work. The precise recommendation was that five conferences be held in each church, one on each of the five points mentioned above. Conferences may easily be criticised, but not so conferences on our own work, by our own people, and in our own place. In order that these meetings might yield their full value, it was also suggested that each church should set up a small committee of its own to make preliminary investigations and so provide the conferences with detailed infor-

mation of the true state of affairs. Further it was recommended that church members should be presented with a copy of the pamphlet "A Five-Point Programme of Christian Education," in order that they also might come to the conferences having done a little preliminary thinking.

It is impossible as yet to tabulate results, but on all hands churches are speaking of the value of the enquiry and conferences. One large church has even gone so far as to say that the enquiry is the biggest single event in its life for over forty years.

Since, however, the whole campaign may rightly be described as a mission to ministers, deacons, teachers and all church members, time alone will show how far it has been rightly planned and properly undertaken.

J. B. MIDDLEBROOK.

Mr. Seymour J. Price's "Popular History of the Baptist Building Fund."

The Centenary Volume: 1824-1924.

READERS of *The Baptist Quarterly* remember with gratitude the series of articles which were not long since contributed to its pages by Mr. Seymour J. Price, commemorating the centenary of the Baptist Building Fund. They revealed to a larger public than before that the Denomination possesses a writer of real historic ability—one who can explore regions but little known, quite romantic in their interest, and deeply significant in their value and influence. And now these articles may be had in permanent and attractive form, which deserves to be in the hands of a far larger circle of readers than the membership of the Baptist Historical Society. It is "popular,"—and it is fine!

Like many other religious societies of various denominations, fruit of the Evangelical Revival, the Baptist Building Fund had its birthplace in "The King's Head Poultry"; the date was the 10th November, 1824; and the name at the first was "The London Baptist Building Fund." Very clearly does Mr. Price trace the various stages through which the Society passed in the course of its evolution. In particular he dwells on the important change that was introduced in 1846 when the system of *Grants*

trams from the Centre and from Old Market Street: allow *twenty* minutes). The party will be under the guidance of Rev. S. J. Ford, of Hanham, who will conduct them to various places of interest to Baptists, giving brief historical sketches of each, e.g., Terrill's "Terraces" and Conham House, at both of which Baptists held meetings in time of persecution, and Conham Ferry, where two Baptist ministers lost their lives in 1683, in trying to avoid capture by swimming. The tour will conclude at Hanham Old Meeting House (originally built in 1714 by Andrew Gifford) with tea at 4.30 (tickets 9d. each) and an hour's meeting at 5.15, after which those present can return by tram to Old Market Street.

MR. FORD'S keen interest in Baptist History and comprehensive knowledge of it is abundantly proved by the *World View of Baptist History*, which he has prepared in view of the Bunyan Tercentenary, and of which he has favoured us with a copy. It consists of a handsome chart, accompanied by brief explanatory chapters, in which are made apparent to the eye the course of Baptist principles in Church history from the primitive age onwards, and the various ramifications of the Baptists in the modern world. It testifies to considerable ingenuity and industry on the part of the author, and we think that ministers or other leaders of Young People's classes might find it of real service. The diagram with its incidental pictures is calculated to awaken interest in the subject beforehand, and the pleasant effort involved in tracing out the various currents of Baptist history would be likely to assist in fixing the facts of that history in the learners' minds. We hope that Mr. Ford may be rewarded for his labour by seeing it become widely useful.

THOUGH 'printed for private circulation,' we should like to draw our readers' attention to *Coming of Age: the Story of twenty-one years of the London Baptist Property Board*, by its Hon. Secretary (Kingsgate Press, 1928). The progress of the Board, and the amount of valuable work achieved by it for churches of our Denomination in that period, are really astonishing, and they have found an excellent historian in Mr. Price. His style is ideal for the purpose: at once simple and clear, crisp and easy, direct and vigorous. And he has the not too common quality of being able to evince the inherent interest of his subject, and of relying on this interest to make its own way with his readers. His is surely a rare combination of literary gift with business ability.