

## The Hubmaier Celebration and the Baptists of To-day.<sup>1</sup>

SWEDISH Baptists consider it a great privilege to take part on this important memorial occasion. The picture of the great hero and martyr for whose sake we have gathered here to-day, has stirred our hearts, and enthusiasm for our high ideals burns more brightly because of him. The Baptists of Sweden are also able to show martyrs and heroes of their eighty years of history, and this fact gives us occasion to participate in this festival with the greater reverence and eagerness. The Baptist movement in Sweden gained its first impulses through connection with Germany, although our path-finding pioneer F. O. Nilsson turned to Methodism on the occasion of a visit to America, and the connections with America had a definite influence upon our further development.

We Swedish Baptists are happy and proud to manifest our solidarity with the entire brotherhood of Baptists by our delegation to this celebration.

Only during recent decenniums has the Baptist movement of the sixteenth century found the recognition and attention from church historians which its importance deserves. In modern investigation it has come more and more into the foreground, and to-day every one who has a competent knowledge of the great ecclesiastical revolution of the sixteenth century knows that the Reformation was not limited to the Lutheran and Reformed churches, but amid the ecclesiastical confusion of that time it expressed itself also in a powerful and far-reaching movement of a more radical and more Biblical kind. Through its strong emphasis upon the authority of the Bible, the religious value of faith, individualism and the priesthood of all believers, this movement separated not only from the Roman Catholic church, but also from the State-established Protestantism, and on this account won a pioneering significance for the Free Church movements of recent times.

More recent investigations in church history have shown that the Baptist movement has often been unjustly neglected, or too lightly disposed of by casual reference to the radicalism of the Zwickau prophets, or the fanatics of Münster. Often too, as was

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered at the celebration in Vienna (March 1928) of the 400th anniversary of Hubmaier's martyrdom.

the case for example in connection with Hubmaier, the Anabaptists were looked upon as agitators and social revolutionaries, the study of whom really concerned profane history.

It is now understood that religious ideals and religious conviction were the driving force in these men, and that their plans of social reform were shaped by these. From this knowledge the task has arisen for church history to judge and value the achievement of the Baptist movement as an important branch of the Continental Reformation. It is also now clear that the Baptist movement already by about 1520 represented a movement which in extent and spiritual influence rivalled the Lutheran. Among the investigators who have shed light upon this question, the foremost are J. Loserth and Troeltsch, and with these a number of other German church historians may be named.

That this spiritual movement was so soon suppressed is chiefly due to the severity of the methods of repression that were applied. The heaviest blow was struck against this immature and disunited Baptist movement by the fact that its best and most capable leaders were so early snatched away. When on the 10th March, 1528, the blazing faggots here in this city reduced to silence the tongue of Hubmaier and his body to ashes, the Baptist movement lost its greatest prophet and with him buried one of its most valuable human sources. How the Baptist movement endured its martyr period, how, in spite of bloody sacrifices, in spite of fire, water and prison, it trod its pilgrim way, and held aloft its banners and ideals from decennium to decennium, until at last it found new defenders in the British Isles—all this represents a thrilling history into which we cannot now enter.

Baptists of to-day are for this reason gathered in this city to celebrate the memory of a martyr death—that we discover again our ideas in Hubmaier, and indeed are able to maintain that he was the great pathfinder of the post-Reformation Baptist movement. Strangely enough, the connection of the Continental Baptist movement and the Anglo-American Baptists has been repeatedly contested on the part even of writers of Baptist history. Emphasis has been laid upon certain features of the "Anabaptists" which are not characteristic of Baptists. It is my conviction that the view can in no way be maintained that the English Baptist movement of the seventeenth century arose without strong influence from the side of the Continental Baptist movement. There are clear facts which speak against this, and show that the connection is really undeniable. Among others who have taken part in the discussion are Dexter, Dale, Burrage, and Troeltsch. The attempt to deny to the Continental Baptist movement its decisive influence in this matter is seen to be completely ineffective when one reflects that already in 1530 numerous

emigrants from Holland came to England and there entered into relations with the remnants of the Lollards, whilst English exiles under "Bloody Mary" and Elizabeth lived for long periods on the Continent. About 1570, Flemish "Anabaptists" died a martyr death in England; and about the same time Dutch Mennonites played a great part in the independent movements of Browne and Barrow. A still stronger indication of the connection appears in the fact that it was on the Continent that the first English Baptist church was formed.

We must recall all this to mind, since it indicates to us that there is a historical line from the words and deeds of the man in whose memory we are gathered here, via Holland, England, the United States of America, and again back to the present-day Baptists of the Continent, continuing to the Baptists of the whole world. This fact lends our celebration its special significance. That on the other side Hubmaier and the other leaders of the Anabaptists, for example in respect of civic duties, represent views which we modern Baptists in general do not accept, merely proves that the opinions held by Baptists on certain subordinate questions are subject to change in the course of time. To take an example, it is easy to understand that Baptists in Cromwell's England appear other in their standpoint regarding civic questions than Hubmaier's Anabaptists, but this in no way indicates that there are essential differences in their conception of fundamental religious questions. Troeltsch summarises the character of the Baptist movement: "It turned itself against the new theological dogmatism, against compulsory State-Christianity, and against secularisation. It lived by opposition, and emphasised against the actual development of the Reformation elements which belong to the Reformation itself, but which the Reformation had very speedily left to fuse with the tasks of an established church standing in reciprocal relations to a secular culture."

With such an idea regarding the meaning and the task of "Anabaptism," one cannot avoid recognising the connection of the modern Baptist movement that has appeared via England and the United States both in its essential nature as well as its historic descent, with the Continental Baptist movement of the sixteenth century.

A description of these historical lines appeared to me necessary for the reason that it is important that the Baptists of to-day should understand clearly and consciously their intimate relationship and inner connection with the "Anabaptism" of the sixteenth century, and their dependence upon the words and deeds of the hero of faith in whose memory we gather here. At the same time I desire also to give expression to my conviction that Hubmaier is in our history what Luther is for Lutherans and Calvin

for Calvinists. In this fact I see the great significance of this celebration, and I hope that hereafter the Baptists of the whole world will concern themselves closely with the study of our great hero, to whom it was granted by God's grace to remain even unto death a witness of his confession.

May I then be permitted to emphasise that in my judgment a special content should be given to this celebration? I have already, in a letter to Dr. Lewis, given expression to the hope that what is missing in the present arrangements may not be passed over without attention.

First, there should, either by means of a special historical society or the Baptist World Alliance, be arranged as soon as possible, preferably in the course of this present year, the issue of a critical and scientifically trustworthy edition of all writings and letters of Hubmaier which are recognised as genuine. Hubmaier's teachings are, even among Baptist investigators, still practically unknown, and we should realise that it is an important undertaking to spread the knowledge of the thoughts of this man. "These writings are the one true source of Hubmaier's theology, and therefore their content is of the greatest significance," says Carl Sachsse in his treatise, "Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier as theologian." Moreover, these writings are spread about in various archives, and some are obtainable only with difficulty. Sachsse draws attention to the fact that most of the writings of Hubmaier are preserved, "but all are extraordinarily rare and difficult to obtain." Only a few of them are found scattered in German libraries; the majority are available only in the Moravian provincial archives of Brünn and in the Imperial and Royal Court Library of Vienna." Extracts from these writings are found in Loserth's work and in Sachsse. The significance and need of such an edition of the collected works of Hubmaier is manifest. Sachsse names twenty-five writings, of which most are, however, small tractates. Then there are letters of Hubmaier and similar material. The language is mostly the German of the sixteenth century, and occasionally Latin.

The task here suggested should, of course, include a strict reproduction of the original, furnished with the necessary notes and comments. I leave aside the question of whether there should be an issue in modern German and perhaps also an English translation.

My second proposal is: the Baptists of the whole world should set up a statue or memorial stone for Hubmaier. We Baptists are always disinclined to celebrate our great pioneers; we shrink from building "the sepulchres of the prophets." We believe that we honour their memory most effectively by following in their footsteps and enlarging upon their work. Nevertheless,

It seems to me in this case justifiable to give to all the Baptists of the world, and perhaps also the Mennonites, an opportunity to take part in the erection of such a statue of Balthasar Hubmaier. It might be erected here in Vienna, where he died his martyr's death, or in Waldshut where he passed the most active period of his life, or perhaps in Zürich, where he had also to tread the path of a martyr. And in golden letters on this statue the words should be immortalised, which Hubmaier so often repeated as his *Praeterea censeo*; so that all the world may hear and read them :

Veritas est immortalis.  
Die Wahrheit ist unsterblich.  
Truth is immortal.  
La vérité est immortelle.

These words Hubmaier's God, the Lord of all the events of history, has to-day in mighty fashion made to live before all our eyes. Above all, we Baptists of the present should study the Baptist movement of the sixteenth century in quite another way than hitherto, and seek by all means to ensure an earnest consideration of the known and unknown sources for the history of Anabaptism. Much has been done for this in recent years, but already a superficial investigation has shown us that in the archives and libraries of Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian provinces there must be available a mass of unused material. To what extent such a plan can be realised, it is difficult to say, but I desire that this solemn hour should not pass without this matter at least being mentioned.

In all retrospect of the past there is a summons to new action. The great deeds of our fathers lay upon us the obligation to advance. And in this moment in which the greatness of those who laboured before us is impressed upon us, we are mastered by the responsibility of a great task to represent before our fellow-men the high business with which the Baptist movement is concerned. Let us each in his own place and work live in the conviction, strengthened by this solemn hour, that truth is immortal.

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