

Baptists on the Continent :

A Plea for more Interest and Concern.

NO previous generation has had such opportunities of hearing about and meeting its saints, and of learning of the working of the Spirit of God in its midst. The drawing together of different parts of the world by modern science, quicker travel, the popular press, broadcasting, all these things enable men to know far more of contemporary efforts for the Kingdom of God than was possible to our ancestors. A very great faith was demanded of those who sent out missionaries in the Middle Ages, or even of those who agreed to support Carey when he sailed for India in 1793. It was often years before any detailed news of what was going on or what had been achieved reached home. Many of the great Christian ventures were carried out by those who remained quite unheard of until after their death. Nowadays, however, a Sadhu Sundar Singh or an Aggrey or a Kagawa visits England; a Wilfred Grenfell travels backwards and forwards across the Atlantic in the interests of his work; an Albert Schweitzer is known and acclaimed by half Europe. If there is an obvious movement of the Spirit in Africa or India or China, in a month or so the whole of Christendom is informed. Those who work in England, where conditions are at the moment difficult, may be thankful to modern science, which makes it possible for us to be cheered by knowledge of the triumphs of the Gospel elsewhere, and gives us such constant evidences of its continued power.

We do not yet make the most of our opportunities in this respect. We debate whether religion is "played out," when we might be observing its victories and studying for our own guidance its achievements, not in any past age, but to-day, and almost at our doors. It is strange how little attention most of us Baptists give to the astonishing growth of Churches of our own faith and order throughout central and south-eastern Europe. We ignore what might be a source of great inspiration to our own faith, a movement which might teach us very much. It has developed so quietly and so near to us that many have overlooked it, some perhaps because they have been too pessi-

mistically fascinated by their own problems, and others because their attention has been fixed in the distant corners of the earth. Ministers who want illustrations of the present activity of the Spirit of God, Young People's Societies who want "up-to-date" subjects, and individuals who want evidence that truth is still stranger than fiction and mightier than the sword should study what is happening among the new Baptist communities on the Continent of Europe. There are stories of adventure and heroism worthy to be set beside any in the history of the Christian Church.

This is not exaggeration. The spread of the modern Baptist movement on the Continent during the last hundred years is one of the most amazing chapters of swift expansion anywhere to be found. A century ago there were no organised Baptist groups (excluding of course the Mennonites) in any country on the mainland of Europe; to-day they are to be found in every land except Albania and Turkey. There are over 5,000 separate Baptist Churches, and some 230,000 members, without reckoning those in Russia. During the same period, it may be observed, the number of Baptists throughout the world has increased by 2,216 per cent. The remarkable increase in Europe has come not from any large missionary movement from outside, nor from any big propaganda effort, but has been in the main a spontaneous spreading in simple ways with few external aids.

Here is a movement not only to be heard about and pondered, but to be helped. That such astonishing growth has been accompanied in some places by narrowness of theological outlook, by a negative attitude towards culture, by some dangerous tendencies towards fanaticism, and by occasional antinomianism will surprise no one who knows anything of religious history, and of our own story in particular. The growing Baptist movement has been met in most European lands by persecution, and has suffered much at the hands of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. "Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble" have been called, though there are exceptions, especially in Sweden and Denmark. These things make all the more necessary study of what has taken place and sympathetic contact with these brothers of ours. Whether this extraordinarily rapid expansion, fraught with such rich possibilities for the future of religion in Europe, fulfils its early promise, or whether its flame now so bright dies rapidly and is extinguished, depends largely on ourselves, on whether we can make friends with Continental Baptists so that we can aid them with our longer and wider experience, and whether we are willing to help them financially that their own evangelists and pastors may be adequately trained. If Baptists on the Continent sink to the

position of what the Germans call a "Winkelsekte," an insignificant and eccentric group out of touch with the main stream of religious life, and with little or no influence in their own lands, a heavy responsibility will rest on their brethren in England and America.

Travel is now becoming so easy that it is possible for many to cross to the Continent and see for themselves these new communities. Personal friendly contacts can be made on holiday and are of far greater value than is often recognised. This last summer a party of young men visited Germany and met with a most eager and warm welcome from Baptists in Berlin, Kassel, and Marburg. Trips that establish contacts like this can be easily and fairly cheaply arranged, and need not be confined to Germany. It seems likely that the Baptist World Alliance will meet in Berlin in 1933, and in the years before then it is important that we should become as well-informed as possible regarding the situation on the Continent. Those who plan visits abroad should be careful to orientate themselves first by a little reading. Any willing to correspond or exchange periodicals with European Baptists can learn much as well as give encouragement and help. Upon all lies the responsibility of gaining information and showing sympathy.

Mr. Byford, before the War, issued several editions of a book entitled *Peasants and Prophets*, which gave intimate sketches of Baptist pioneers in Russia and in south-east Europe. This is still well worth consulting, but it is to Dr. Rushbrooke that we are indebted for the only general survey of the subject. His book, *The Baptist Movement on the Continent of Europe*, is a fascinating story of the spread of Churches in Germany and the neighbouring lands, following the efforts of J. G. Oncken, and also of the small beginnings in strange ways in other parts. Every year, however, important changes take place, and it is difficult to keep the story up-to-date. Those who read the supplement on European affairs which is issued with *The Baptist Times* every quarter, know of some of the most recent developments. Before long a new and much enlarged edition of Dr. Rushbrooke's book will be necessary. Meantime he has published a smaller volume, *Some Chapters of European Baptist History*. After describing summarily the commencement of work in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Poland and South-east Europe, he tells in greater detail the story of what has been occurring in Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and Czecho-Slovakia. There are brief biographical notes of some of the more outstanding and picturesque figures, such as Adam Podin, L. H. Luther (Esthonia), J. A. Frey (Latvia), Th. Gerikas (Lithuania), and the Novotnys (Czecho-Slovakia). At

the end come some useful statistics, a short list of books, some questions for study circles, and adequate indexes. A map, and a chapter placing the whole movement against a rather wider background might well have been added, but as it is the book is very handy for practical use, and costs only half-a-crown, at the Kingsgate Press.

We are promised later the story of Baptists in Rumania, a story "of men and of deeds that stir the blood and prove that the sacrificial passion for truth and for souls is not dead." The accounts of the beginnings in Baltic lands are full of romance and bravery. The stories of the first baptism of Latvians, of the journeys across the old Russo-German frontier in a farmer's cart, and of the trip to Memel in a smuggler's boat are little epics of faith and courage. Comparatively little is known in this country of these lands, and incidentally in both his books, but particularly in the more recent one, Dr. Rushbrooke is very informing regarding general conditions. Although a Baptist minister is now Deputy-Chairman of the House of Commons, most English Baptists will be surprised to learn that Libau has had a Baptist minister as its mayor for nine years and that he is also a member of the Latvian Parliament.

Reliable information about Russia is not easy to come by. It will be long before any detailed account of Baptist developments there can be written. In the later of his books, however, Dr. Rushbrooke, who has had the advantage of visits to Russia, relates the beginnings both among German settlers and among Slavs. The early history of the Russian Baptist Union, and of the Union of Evangelical Christians is clearly traced, and there are valuable pages on post-war happenings. Unfortunately the Preachers' Seminary, opened with such high hopes in Moscow at the end of 1927, has been closed by the Soviet authorities, and it appears that a renewed attack upon religious bodies is being made. Statements as to "millions" of baptised believers in Russia are to be viewed with suspicion, but clearly there has been remarkable progress by Baptists and kindred religious groups, which under Czardom were ruthlessly repressed.

Dr. Rushbrooke refers incidentally to Marzinkowski's important book on *The Experience of God in Soviet Russia* (reviewed in *The Baptist Quarterly*, January, 1929, and in *The British Weekly*, May 9th, 1929). There has now been translated into German by Hans Harder and issued under the title *Christus unter den russischen Jugend* (Hans Harder Verlag, Karlsruhe, 1928, 143 pp. 3RM) a series of addresses, articles and Bible studies by Marzinkowski, who was for many years secretary of the Russian Student Christian Movement, and who, although brought up a member of the Orthodox Church, has since the

Revolution adopted Baptist ideas. This new book forms an interesting postscript to the earlier one, further revealing the simplicity and strength of the faith of the still-exiled author. There is the story of his conversion in 1903, entitled "My Experience of Christ," several addresses on work among and by Russian students, and two later papers on "The Revolution of the Spirit" (1917) and "Christ and Youth" (1923), which give valuable insights into the spiritual conflict which has accompanied the political upheavals. Those who read German will find in the *Theologische Blätter*, June, 1929, an important article by Bernard Harder on *Die Glaubensfreiheit in Russland*, which concludes with a useful annotated bibliography on the religious situation in Russia.

There is material enough, therefore, for study. Those who make themselves familiar with the story are almost certain to be moved to action and to be themselves recalled to the essentials of our faith. This remarkable movement is not unworthy of comparison with the sixteenth-century Reformation. Indeed they may well be right who urge that it cannot properly be understood unless the part played by the old Anabaptists in preparing the soil be recognised. It is not without significance that the Czecho-Slovakian Baptists go even further back for their inspiration and call themselves "The Brotherly Union of Chelcicky," after a fifteenth-century reformer. Those who would take right views of current religious tendencies on the Continent or elsewhere must take long views. The fate which overtook those sects who have been called "the stepchildren of the Reformation" should be a challenge to all of us to a keener effort to understand and to aid these simple, eager, brave communities which the Spirit of God is forming before our eyes not many miles away.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.

The Holborn Review, alas, will no longer be edited by Professor Peake, of whom a brief notice is given in October. Mr. Flowers, of Chorleywood, has an article on the modern value of the New Testament—giving the portrait of Jesus, His teaching, unanimous faith in His sovereignty and saving power, the influence of a new society, the religion of the Spirit. Other good articles discuss the profitable reading of fiction, and Conrad as a novelist.