

## Australia : Its Vital Importance and its Problems.

THE knowledge of Australia among a large number of English people is woefully scrappy. In many cases it seems to begin and end with associations connected with such words—great words admittedly—as Bradman, Crawford, and The Ashes. The blissful ignorance of the real Australia prompts me to say that it is an island continent of about 3,000,000 square miles situated in the far distance of the southern hemisphere, a land of amazing natural resources, one of the few countries of the world that can be entirely self-supporting; a land, moreover, of grave problems and enormous possibilities, and one among several countries which contain a serious menace to world-peace.

It is from the point of view of its problems that I would speak of the religious life and especially of the Baptist life of Australia.

The first problem is distance. Distance from what has been and still is the centre of things in England, Europe, America. There is the “unplumb’d, salt, estranging sea,” and out of sight is too often out of mind. This difficulty, it is hoped, will be somewhat overcome by the inclusion of Australia as a member of the Council of the League of Nations. Also, the recent remarkable developments in communication by air prove that Melbourne can be brought as near to London as Edinburgh was to London in stage-coach days.

Distance within its own borders. Each of the six Australian States, including Tasmania, has its own Baptist Union, and all are banded together in a Federal Union. The difficulty of Federalisation in a huge and sparsely populated continent where the city of Brisbane, in which I have been working, is 3,500 miles from Perth in Western Australia, and the difficulty of Home Mission work in such a country where the State of Queensland alone would contain quite comfortably the combined areas of France, Germany, Italy and the British Isles—these difficulties are being tackled with splendid devotion and generous enthusiasm, but it is a struggle of an undermanned boat against the tide.

One form of that adverse tide which constitutes another religious problem is the weather. Australia is one of the two healthiest countries in the world. The average sunshine is seven hours a day. The people get so much of heaven on earth that they are apt to grow careless about the heaven beyond. Beauty spots and coastal paradises abound. In Sydney Harbour alone there is a beach for every day of the year. As a result, paganism and Sunday picnics are the order of the day; they constitute a strong challenge to the organised Church, and a problem to be considered wisely and sympathetically by Christian people generally.

Another vital denominational problem is that of ministerial training. In these great, youthful, truth-demanding days when the severest pains of the world are growing-pains, Christian ministers need more than evangelical fervour. That is an essential factor in every minister's equipment, but he needs, too, the adequate resources of an education gained in the atmosphere of our best seats of learning. In Australia we are doing what we can in the almost complete absence of first-rate scholarship and properly equipped university colleges. In Queensland, for example, we have a most scholarly and highly-cultured Principal; we have really good material in the young men who offer for training, but we have no college building; the students meet for classes for one week only in each month; every student is also a Home Missionary in charge of a church and several out-stations, and some of them have to travel from two to four hundred miles to their training centre. Ten Commandments, or no ten Commandments, we covet the training institutions of America and Great Britain, and the people's appreciation of essentials which has made them possible.

Hinging partly on this pivotal matter of ministerial education is the further problem of the gap—the growing gap—between church and people. There are notable exceptions, but in the main what we call the working classes, and the university students, *i.e.*, those who come to real grips with the complicated experiences of life, are leaving the Protestant churches alone. Time has made ancient good uncouth, and numbers of people, bewildered by modern problems, and unsatisfied and vexed by crudely dogmatic and superficial preaching, are bending to the authority of Roman Catholicism or drifting into the nebulous region of Agnosticism.

Another problem is due to the curse of gambling, common to the world, but especially virulent in Australia. It is indulged in as a matter of course by the bulk of the population and even by some church members. In Queensland, and also in some of the other States, the cloak of respectability is thrown

over it by reason of the fact that the State Government controls a lottery in aid of the hospitals. This lottery is comprised of 100,000 tickets; it takes about a fortnight to fill; it goes on all the year round and the first prize in each drawing is £6,000. A periodical lottery, perhaps twice or three times a year, is also run with tickets at £1 each and a first prize of £25,000. Many of the shops in the main streets of Brisbane are Government agents for these lotteries. (I know of only one hair-dressing and tobacconist's shop in the whole of the centre of the city that is not a duly authorised lottery-ticket seller, and the proprietor recently told me that he was on his last legs and would soon either have to give up business or become a Government agent.) The windows of these shops are plastered with black cats and notices asking passers-by why they should work when they can win £6,000 for 5s. 6d. The Government has recently issued one-sixth share tickets at 1s. each, and it is no uncommon thing for four school children to put in three-pence each and form a syndicate. One feels that a country whose Government so undermines morality cannot run very far. Such a state of things is a first-rate hindrance to the Kingdom of God, a subtle incitement to dishonesty in business, and a terribly evil influence in the community generally.

Another problem which, while it is peculiarly Australian, may yet disturb the world, is that of population. The Australian Government, and indeed every political party in the Commonwealth, has declared emphatically for a White Australia. It is a worthy ideal, and no fault could be found with it if that great Continent were fully occupied by white people, and its teeming resources worked and utilised. But here is the fact. Australia, on a low computation, is capable of carrying and maintaining fifty million people, and the actual population for some time has been almost stationary at about six million. As things are in the world to-day, is this playing the game? "The earth is the Lord's," and not far from Australia is another part of God's family, a nation capable, ambitious, enterprising, whose great problem is elbow-room, with a teeming and rapidly increasing population, and only one sixth of its land is arable. One feels that in Divine justice some amicable arrangement ought to be made, for if it be unwise to have other than a *white* Australia, it is surely dangerous to have an unoccupied Australia.

A further problem is that of Leisure. In almost every country in the world the problem of production has been solved. In Australia, with its suicidal and war-breeding policy of high tariffs, export of manufactured goods is practically impossible; the home market can be supplied, with boots for example, by

the available workmen working less than half the year at present hours. With the increasing invention and use of labour-saving machinery it is not fantastic to talk of a four-hour working day in the near future. And that is not only not to be deplored but to be welcomed by those who look and strive for the Kingdom of God. Work is a divinely beneficent ordinance, but men and women are getting too much of monotonous, grinding, personality-crushing, adventure-killing labour. Every privilege has its risk and real progress is never advance into an easier kind of life. The *danger* of shorter working hours is the wilderness of moral flabbiness, tawdry amusement, and spiritual blindness, but the *opportunity* is that of a promised land, a land whose citizens shall be equal in length of real selfhood, breadth of brotherhood, and height of godliness. It is an opportunity for much-needed education in music and the arts, and for the all-round development of humanity with means to achieve it such as has never before presented itself. And the responsibility of the church as the channel of spiritual power which alone can supply the essential vision, steadiness and courage, is as great as her opportunity.

The last problem I will mention is that of the church itself. The reason why with all our elaborate machinery we are not producing more results and making a greater impact upon the world is that the fire at the centre burns but feebly. It has not always been violence from outside but rottenness within that has disrupted Empires. The thing to be feared among us is not so much the badness of the bad man, as the indifference of the good man. Our churches are largely composed of people who do not take Jesus seriously—people, often, who search the Scriptures for texts to back up this or that fad, but who will not come to Jesus that they may catch His spirit of love, sincerity, and sacrifice. Christianity is a "Way," an open road for activity and for pushing on to somewhere. We often hear the great word quoted from the New Testament about "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the Saints," and far too frequently it is made to sound as though the faith were something valuable but lifeless like a diamond, to be merely preserved in a formal creed or an ecclesiastical deposit vault. And Christian faith is not like a diamond; it is living like a tree, and the only way we ever can keep a living thing is to let it grow.

One of my friends at the recent Berlin Congress of the Baptist World Alliance, unacquainted with German lettering, read Oncken's classic phrase "Every Baptist a Missionary" in this way: "Every Baptist a Millionaire." There is infinite truth in his mistake. Let us put our wealth into circulation;

let every Baptist be a missionary, not only with his lips but with his life. Let us believe our beliefs, let us realise that Jesus is greater than any book that ever was written about Him, even though the book be the letters of Paul; and let us realise that the salvation of this needy, stricken world, and the hope for the Kingdom of God lie, not in the insistence upon denominational differences, some of which are now non-existent and others only of secondary importance, but that they lie in the faithful following of Jesus the Son of God, whose greatest words were: "Love God—Love one another."

W. E. HURST.

THE EARLIEST known publication in which full liberty of conscience is openly advocated, according to Professor Masson, is Leonard Busher's *Religions Peace*, which was reprinted in 1646 and again in 1846. But two years earlier, Thomas Helwys from Nottingham and Amsterdam had published "A short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity," whose title showed a study of the epistle to the Thessalonians, and adopted the interpretation of Henry Barrow that the Church of England, compound of Church and State, was that very mystery. Helwys, like Barrowe and Francis Bacon, was a gentleman, trained at Gray's Inn. In studying law he had special occasion to consider religious liberty, and this book displays his thought on it. His experience was many-sided. He was in London when parliament passed the first Conventicle Act, 1593; and was in the thick of that society which could eagerly discuss precedents and consequences. He was in Basford when the act was enforced against his wife, who was taken to York Castle. He was in Amsterdam where he found the State permitting the free exercise of religion to all Protestants, without enquiry or interference. He therefore wrote this book, handicapping it by a distracting and irritating title, came to London where his uncles were prominent in city and at court, and sent a copy of his book to the king.