

Anders Wiberg :

A Baptist Pioneer in Sweden.

ONE of the most important reasons for the significant success of Baptist work in Sweden is unquestionably the fact that during its earliest and most trying time it was led by men of considerable education and of noble Christian character. One of these men who more than any other contributed to the sound and successful development of the Swedish Baptist work was the Rev. Anders Wiberg.

Wiberg was born near the city of Hudiksvall in the province of Hälsingland, Sweden, on the 17th July, 1816. He was of peasant lineage, but showed an early desire and aptitude for study, and therefore his mother, who had early been left a widow, decided that he should receive a training which would prepare him to become a clergyman in the State Church. After preparatory courses in the schools of his native district, he proceeded in the year 1833 to the High School (Gymnasium) at Gävle, whence he graduated two years later and matriculated as a student of the University of Uppsala. But being poor, and unable to obtain the necessary financial assistance from home, he was compelled to suspend his studies for longer or shorter periods, during which he acted as a private tutor in order to secure the means for continuing his University course.

It was during this time that Wiberg came under the influence of the religious revival which was then spreading over Sweden. This revival was largely influenced by an English Methodist missionary, George Scott, who had been sent to Sweden by the Wesleyan Missionary Society. Wiberg came into contact with Scott and was awakened to a concern for his soul's salvation, although he did not immediately reach a definite decision for Christ.

After working with Scott for some time, and after the latter had been compelled to leave Sweden in 1842 on account of the prevalent religious intolerance, Wiberg returned to Uppsala to complete his preparation for the Church. A short time after resuming his studies at the University he came to a full assurance of sins forgiven, mainly through reading Johann Ardt's *True Christianity*. He experienced the peace of God, and a new period of his life began. He received his diploma in the following years and was ordained in the Cathedral of Uppsala on the 11th June, 1843. After his ordination, Wiberg

held several charges in his home province. His work was crowned with large success, and those who had experienced a religious awakening gathered about him and looked upon him as their leader.

But it was not long before the ecclesiastical powers found reasons to interfere with his work. He refused to admit to the Holy Communion such persons as he knew had no experience of God's saving grace and were living in open sin. But according to the policy of the Swedish State Church and the opinion of its authorities, he had no right to impose such restrictions. The conflict brought him great distress of conscience. He discontinued his ministerial duties for a time, and returned to Uppsala in order to obtain the additional degree necessary to qualify for holding the higher offices in the Church. He passed his examination in March, 1847, and went back to his work in his home province, but soon again found himself in difficulties on account of his persistent refusal to admit ungodly persons to Holy Communion. He then decided to apply for leave of absence from his duties. In the meantime, however, he continued his work among the believers until he finally arrived at the conviction that it was impossible for him to remain a clergyman in the State Church. He therefore sent in his resignation, and was discharged from his office in the spring of 1851.

At this time Baptist thoughts and ideas had begun to gain ground in Sweden. The earliest church of the denomination, organised in 1848, had been subjected to such severe persecution that it had been rendered incapable of doing any work whatsoever. Its founder was the Baptist pioneer, F. O. Nilsson, who, because of his Baptist convictions, was exiled from Sweden in 1851. The Baptist thoughts had nevertheless found acceptance, and the seed which had been sown was soon to produce a rich harvest. When at this time Wiberg first heard of the Baptist faith, he considered it a dangerous heresy, and contemplated writing a book for its refutation.

It then came about that he, in company with a friend, made a journey to Hamburg. Whilst there he came into association with the Rev. J. G. Oncken and Rev. Julius Köbner. He argued with them regarding the Baptist doctrines, which he naturally considered contrary to the teaching of the Scripture, and he considered himself victorious in the discussion. On his departure from Hamburg, however, he received from Mr. Oncken some tracts and pamphlets dealing with the question of baptism. Through the reading of these his faith in infant baptism was disturbed, and he came back to Sweden with another view than that which he had formerly held. He now began to study Baptist literature in earnest, and after some months published a

noteworthy book on the doctrine of baptism. This treatise, which he had originally intended to prepare in defence of infant baptism, is now one of the standard works in Baptist literature.

After having completed his great work on baptism and before publishing it, he decided to visit America and to receive believers' baptism there or on the journey. In the summer of 1852 he started on his journey. The ship stopped for a few days at Copenhagen, Denmark, where the exiled Baptist preacher, F. O. Nilsson, was pastor, and Wiberg visited him and asked to be baptised. His request was granted by the Baptist Church at Copenhagen, and on the 23rd July, 1852, he was baptised by Nilsson in the waters of the Baltic Sea. This marked the beginning of another new period in his life.

Having been baptised and accepted into membership with the Baptist denomination, Wiberg continued his journey to America. Nilsson supplied him with a letter of recommendation to the pastor of the Baptist Mariners' Church in New York, the Rev. I. R. Steward, and thus began his connection with this Church, which later came to mean so much to the Swedish Baptists. Since Wiberg had become a member of this Church, Mr. Steward secured employment for him as a colporteur and missionary among the immigrants in New York, under the auspices of the American Baptist Publication Society. After three years of service in this capacity, during which time he also busied himself with literary work, the Society appointed him a missionary to work in Sweden, preaching the gospel and distributing Christian literature. In the autumn of 1855 he returned to his native country to enter upon the evangelical work which has meant so much to the Baptist cause in Sweden.

While Wiberg was living in America, Baptist views had made some advance in Sweden and a few small churches had been formed. These lacked real leadership, and their need was met by Wiberg's return. He at once took charge of the Baptist church in Stockholm, and became the true leader of the work throughout the whole country. He was untiring in his zeal as a preacher and in his care of the churches; he wrote books in defence of the Baptist faith, and was active in every enterprise for the advancement of the cause of Christ. Shortly after his return to Sweden he started a paper which became an effective instrument in the furtherance of the interests to which he was devoted. The work continued to grow from year to year; new churches were organised; and the Baptist movement soon became so important a factor in the religious life of the nation that the authorities had to take it into account and put a stop to the persecution which had heretofore been carried on in the land.

In the year 1857 Wiberg called together a general conference of delegates from the different churches in the country, and a Union of Baptist Churches was constituted. In the following year he issued invitations on behalf of the denomination to the English and German Baptists to send representatives to the second annual conference of the Swedish Baptist denomination. In response to this invitation the Baptist Union of England sent Dr. Edward Steane and the Rev. Howard Hinton to the conference, and the German Baptists sent the Rev. J. G. Oncken and the Rev. Julius Köbner. These visits came to mean much for the further development of Baptist work in the land and for the cause of religious liberty.

In 1860 Wiberg made a journey to England in order to gather funds for a church building in Stockholm. Through his persevering efforts, assisted by recommendations from Dr. Steane and others, he was successful in this enterprise. The money which he collected made possible the erection of the first Baptist church building in Stockholm.

Wiberg had scarcely returned from his journey to England when he began to make plans for a voyage to the United States. On his initiative, the Baptist Conference of 1861 had accepted a proposal to establish a training school for ministers, but in order to achieve this purpose money and teachers were necessary, and neither could be found in the land. But Wiberg rested his hope on the American Baptists. He started for the States in 1863 in order to raise funds and find teachers for the proposed training school and in other respects to promote the Baptist cause in Sweden. Though times were then very hard in America owing to the Civil War, he succeeded in his endeavours. The American Baptist Missionary Union (now the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society) decided to accept financial responsibility for the Swedish Baptist Mission, which the American Baptist Publication Society had hitherto carried. The funds for the new training school and for sustaining a number of evangelists were guaranteed by the Union. Wiberg found also in the States a Swedish man, who was destined by God to be the leader of the new Seminary and a "chosen vessel" to promote the cause of God in his native land. His name was K. O. Broady. Having served as an officer in the Swedish Navy, he had emigrated to America, and had studied at Madison University whence he graduated in 1861. Thereafter he served with great distinction as an officer in the Union Army during the Civil War and attained the rank of colonel. After the War he became the pastor of a small Baptist Church. Wiberg recognised in Broady a man with the qualities needed in the leader of the new Seminary, and Broady accepted the call to be its principal. In

1866 the two men returned to Sweden, and the Baptists' Conference of that year decided to establish the "Bethel Seminary," with Broady at its head. This decision was one of the most momentous which the Swedish Baptists ever reached.

With unflagging zeal and energy Wiberg now gave himself to missionary work in his native land. The churches grew in number, and the Baptist faith gained respect in an increasing degree from year to year. The Bethel Seminary produced trained Church leaders and missionary workers, and Wiberg continued to exercise wide influence both within and without the denomination, not least through his literary activities. In 1874 he made another journey to England and remained there about two years, during which time he collected a considerable sum of money for another church building in Stockholm. His success was chiefly due to the wholehearted support and recommendation of C. H. Spurgeon.

The later years of his life were passed by Wiberg in the southern part of Stockholm, where a second Baptist church had been organised, whose pastor he became and remained until his death. In 1887 his earthly life came to an end. It had been a career of inestimable blessing. He had laboured beyond most men, and had lived to see far-reaching results of his work. When he came to Sweden in 1855 as a missionary worker for the American Publication Society there were but a few hundred Baptists in the land. When he died Sweden had 473 Baptist churches with 31,849 members. In the Sunday Schools were enrolled 31,273 scholars, and the ministers numbered 506. In this development no one had played a more important part than Anders Wiberg. He was "God's chosen vessel" for his time.

Wiberg was a well-balanced Christian, a man of sterling qualities, a trained theologian, and a fervent and gifted missionary worker. He will always be remembered as one of apostolic stature by those who have learned to know the great work which under God he was permitted to perform.

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