

The Making of a Capital.

The Story of Canberra: Australia's Capital City.

IT is not given to every generation to witness the building of a Capital City or take part in its creation, and, perhaps, no City was ever built quite like the Capital of the Australian Commonwealth. Most Cities grow spontaneously, or as the result of certain conditions that compel them into being. Canberra did not grow like that; Canberra was deliberately created, and its population lifted out of the nurseries of other cities and just transplanted into the new soil, where, at present, it is in process of taking root. This article is an attempt to introduce this latest civic infant to the older members of the British family.

THE PAST.

It sounds strange to talk of an infant's past, but to get a true idea of Canberra as an achievement of modern town building it is necessary to know out of what this beautiful city has been created in something like a decade. Dim ages ago, before the advent of the white man, Canberra lay sleeping. Until the Ngarua tribe settled there, no human disturbed the dreaming stillness. Then some hundreds of aborigines roamed the countryside, made bark canoes, sailed the Cotter and Murrumbidgee Rivers; speared fish, hunted and practised their quaint tribal customs, and Corroboree Park to-day is a reminder of the corroborees of the past. Then the white man came. All that remains of the old tribe are occasional stone axes and other primitive weapons found on the hillsides, and the smoke stains from their fires in sheltered caves. Charles Throsby, an English surgeon, and a bushman named Joseph Wild, were probably the first whites to discover Canberra. In 1820 they camped at Duntroon, where, to-day, the Royal Military College stands. Then more settlers came, those heroic pioneers who, enduring many hardships, made life a big and wonderful adventure. And so the years passed, while flocks of sheep roamed on the grass-covered plains, and comfortable homesteads were built, one of them—"Yarralumla"—to become the official residence of the Governor-general of the Commonwealth.

THE PRESENT.

By the present, I mean those years which cover the story of Canberra during the past thirty-seven years, for it was on the 17th September, 1900, that Queen Victoria signed the Proclamation declaring that from January 1st, 1901, the people

of Australia should be united under the name of The Commonwealth of Australia. The first Federal Parliament was opened in Melbourne by the late King George V., the same year. Seven years after, in the year 1908, Canberra was chosen as the site of the future Capital, and at a little gathering of distinguished citizens from various States of the Commonwealth, standing on the virgin soil, Lady Denman announced the name on March 12th, 1913. Ten years passed, and in 1923 the first sod was turned for the House of Parliament. The first Parliament in the new Capital was opened by our present King, then Duke of York, on the 9th May, 1927, and that same year, on the 17th October, the first meeting of Baptists took place to consider the question of establishing a Baptist Church. The chair was taken by the writer, as Chairman of the Australian Home Mission Board, and there were fourteen Baptists present. Thus the history of our Church in Canberra begins with the history of the city itself.

At the inaugural meetings of the Australian Baptist Union, which came into being in September 1926, it was resolved to initiate a movement to raise funds, select a site, prepare plans for a church and manse, and make arrangements for the formation of a Baptist Church in Canberra. The task of carrying out these proposals was committed to the Home Mission Board, and no time was lost in embarking on the great venture.

In the meantime, the city itself was beginning to assume definite shape. A world-wide competition for a design for the lay-out of the Capital was conducted, and won by Mr. Walter Burley Griffin, a Chicago architect, and his ideas to-day find expression in Canberra's magnificent planning. Certain sites were set apart for the various Churches and they were invited to make a selection. The Baptists were early in the field and chose a site comprising four acres, in a very central position, and this was granted to them on a perpetual lease of a peppercorn rental. All States joined enthusiastically in the campaign to raise funds for building purposes, over £10,000 being subscribed. The foundation stones of the church and manse were laid by the President of the Baptist Union of Australia (Rev. J. H. Goble) and the Vice-President (myself) on the 21st March 1928, in the presence of a large company of people gathered from the four quarters of the Commonwealth. While the buildings were in course of erection, the question of the first Minister for the new church was considered, every State Union being invited to make a nomination. The church was opened on Saturday, 23rd February, 1929, and on the following day the induction of myself, the first Minister, was held, and the Church formed with thirteen members.

Baptists thus had the honour of erecting the first church

in the new city. Since then both city and Church have grown. Canberra is the seat of government for the Commonwealth of Australia. The official residence of the Governor-General is there, and the administrative offices of the Public Service. It is becoming the centre of national life and culture. The University College has been established. The Institute of Anatomy, the Forestry School, and the Royal Military College are among its national institutions. Important businesses have been established and modern homes, and the building is still going forward. More than three million trees and shrubs have been planted, and already Canberra has developed into a garden city that promises to be one of the most beautiful cities of the world. We feel some pride in the knowledge that the Baptists are taking no mean part in the development of the city's life. Already some of the highest officials of the Commonwealth are officers of the Church. The young life of the city has been captured. Many of them have been converted and baptised and joined to the Church, and as the majority of them enter the public service it promises well for the future of the Commonwealth that its high affairs will be in the hands of Christian men.

THE FUTURE.

It is always a risky thing to speak of the future, and one can only express hopes that have been encouraged by the past. The growth of the capital cities of Australia is in the nature of a romance. Sydney is just about to celebrate its 150th anniversary, not a long period as we count time, yet in this century-and-a-half Sydney has grown from nothing into a city that ranks second among the cities of the Empire, with a population of over a million and a quarter. Melbourne has recently celebrated its centenary, and its population numbers over one million. Canberra is the Capital of the Commonwealth, and its importance will increase with the years. Australia itself is young, but is destined to occupy an important place in this Eastern world, upholding the traditions and ideals of the British race. Canberra will grow as Australia grows, and it is our aim and fervent prayer that the Baptist Church will grow as Canberra grows.

A. J. WALDOCK.