

Atlanta and Rumania.

BAPTIST WORLD INFLUENCE.

[Dr. J. H. Rushbrooke was announced to give a report on the Atlanta Congress at the afternoon session of the Baptist Assembly, on Monday, 29th April. Unfortunately, owing to the lateness of the hour and the time occupied by earlier business, his report was curtailed and heard by an attenuated audience. The *Baptist Quarterly* does not usually print speeches, but this report by the President of the Baptist World Alliance was of importance, and we gladly give it permanent record.]

FIVE years ago it was my privilege to tell in this Assembly the thrilling story of our meeting in Berlin, how in Hitler's capital city the world assembly of the Baptist communion adopted resolutions condemning not by implication but directly and unequivocally the racial theories of Nazism. What we said on war and peace and on other matters was equally to the point, and has given a lead to Christian thinking within and beyond our denomination.

It seemed to me at that time that no future world gathering could rival in dramatic intensity "Berlin 1934," but I was wrong. "Atlanta 1939" was in some respects very different, but its influence immediately flooded a whole continent, and the electric currents of its inspiration radiated in every direction to the ends of the earth. Berlin saw the greatest Baptist world assembly yet held in the Eastern Hemisphere, but Atlanta set up a new record. It was the scene of the greatest world assembly any Evangelical communion has ever held. I confess that the numbers almost frightened me. Think of masses of people occupying all the seats around an American baseball ground, and filling the playing space itself, so that often 50,000, and on one occasion some 70,000 were present. I was unable to imagine such multitudes unified into a congregation quiet, reverent and intelligently participant in the proceedings. Until the Atlanta Congress I had not appreciated the marvellous developments of American technical skill in the use of amplifiers, so that throughout the vast area everyone followed every word without disturbing reverberations. Never have I known a more intense spiritual experience than during the stirring sermon of Professor Ohrn, preached to 45,000 people as easily and naturally, and heard as clearly, as if he had been in a small village church. Only on one occasion was there an embarrassing interruption, and

Mrs. Ernest Brown was its victim. Her husband is credited with a mighty voice, but I am told he has declared that he never "smashed the mike" as his wife did. I really must publicly vindicate Mrs. Brown. The prosaic truth is that a nearby thunderstorm put out of action a section of the amplifiers; but within a few minutes the technicians had righted everything, and her remarkable speech was perfectly heard.

It is impossible to attempt to describe in a few minutes even the external features of the Atlanta Congress. It was a historic event in its setting. Never have coloured people and white co-operated more closely and fraternally than in that city of the *South*. The speaker on behalf of all the Baptists of Georgia, chosen by themselves to offer their welcome, was an honoured negro minister. It was historic, as I said, in its vast numbers. It was unique in the public attention it evoked. Press and radio were constantly at our service. Again and again nation-wide broadcasts were secured. One of my own addresses was wireless not only to the States and Canada, but to Europe and South America. It was unique in the variety and range of the questions it faced. Nothing was shirked. War and peace: if there is anything within its compass more searching than the Report presented by Dr. Nordström's Commission, I don't know it. Political, economic, racial issues are all treated with profound insight, and its last word is a moving, simple slogan that has reverberated everywhere: *None but changed people can change the world*. We faced the question of the Church, both as it concerns Baptists themselves and as it concerns their relations to others, and we faced it in the only light in which it can for us be solved—that of the New Testament. No one could accuse us of lack of open-mindedness or of stand-offishness over against fellow-Christians who peruses the Report prepared by Dr. Wheeler Robinson and presented by Dr. Holms Coats, or that of Professor Carver on the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences. Our responsibility for evangelisation was enforced both in connection with foreign missions and at home; British visitors have told me that their supreme gain in Atlanta was the vision of an evangelising church. Youth received attention, and young people participated in a degree beyond precedent. The pageant of Baptist history prepared by Mr. Payne, and presented by members of the white and coloured churches of Atlanta, stood out as a "high light" of the Congress. And it must always be remembered that the abiding worth of such a Congress is not measured by oratory in the vast public assemblies—even when it includes a tremendous presidential address of Dr. Truett—but by the friendships formed and the fellowships deepened, and by the sectional meetings in which smaller representative groups

hammer out decisions and recommendations on practical issues. *Inspiration and witness* were the dominant notes of the mass meetings: plans for practical action were shaped in group gatherings. Two only of these will I mention: a Women's Committee of the Alliance has taken shape under the chairmanship of Mrs. Brown, and an Evangelisation Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Pitt Beers. You will hear much of these.

The British-American Fraternal, an outgrowth of the Alliance, is an instrument of fellowship in specific directions, and from our point of view it could not have chosen a better president than the Rev. Henry Cook.

You sent a splendidly representative group of British Baptists to Atlanta, and except for distance, expense and the gathering clouds of war, far more would have gone. There were a hundred of us on the other side of the Atlantic. You were one, Mr. President, and your service was great indeed. You, Mr. Vice-President, left your mark and earned a new title: "The head of the leading bone-dry organisation in Britain." You, Mr. Secretary, certainly expressed our mind about the totalitarian State, and after your speech no one in the States should be surprised at the British Baptist attitude towards the present war. Beyond those I have named I find in the list of speakers Mr. Taylor Bowie, Mr. Child, Mr. Middlebrook, Mr. Payne, and Dr. Dunning, and other such honoured leaders as Dr. Gilbert Laws, Mr. H. L. Taylor, the Rev. B. Grey Griffith, Dr. S. W. Hughes and the Rev. Henry Cook. Our end was kept up. Certainly I am deeply moved at the fact that the nominating committee, representing all parts of the world, unanimously decided that a British Baptist should be named as President. I have only one word to say regarding the choice which the great assembly ratified: the man they elected has put his life into the service of the fellowship and freedom of Baptists. He believes in the Baptist World Alliance, and he believes in inter-denominational co-operation. About ecclesiastical fusion, which is a different thing, he perhaps has an opinion which need not now be obtruded!

As President of the Baptist World Alliance, I wish in a few closing sentences to plead for a wider horizon in the outlook of some—not all—British Baptists. It shocks me to discover now and again how little thousands of our people know of what their brethren represent in the world. Over a large section of Europe since the Great War it is the pressure of Baptists exerted with the support and guidance of their World Alliance that has kept alive the claim to *religious* freedom and compelled statesmen really to understand and face it. Other minority claims have been mixed up with politics and race. The suspicion that our

claim was of that sort, industriously fed by slanderous tongues, has been one of the major difficulties, especially in Rumania. After twenty years' work, with heart-breaking disappointments, I have lived to read of the approval by the Government of that land of a Baptist Statute with the title: "The Statute of the Baptist Christian Cult of Rumania"—*cult*, mark you! The term is the Rumanian legal description of a Christian communion; that status has never been admitted before; and the first clause of the approved statute reads:

"The Baptists of Rumania, of any nationality, constitute a Christian cult."

Troubles are not over. One clause had been inserted into the statute that would have wrecked everything by suppressing liberty of preaching. My personal intervention secured its removal. While I was on the way to Bukarest, on the 8th of this very month, sixteen Baptists were imprisoned or fined for taking part in a prayer meeting. These cases and others are, in response to our appeal, to be revised by the Ministry of Justice, and action is promised to remove other grievances. There is a changed spirit, and I recall with grateful appreciation the attitude of the present Minister of Cults, who received me as a guest to lunch in his home, and of the Prime Minister who, if I had not been forced to leave early, would have had me to dinner with him. New and significant facts! I believe there is now a firm resolve on the part of the Royal Government of Rumania, expressing the will of the King himself, to make an end of the long story of strain. I was profoundly pleased to learn this: that a document which I submitted last December in the name of the Baptist World Alliance gave the Minister the suggestion and starting-point of his new policy. Our people in Rumania are loyal citizens, and we who all wish well to their country will thank God if they are able henceforth to live their lives in happy freedom, none daring to make them afraid.

Brethren, Baptists stand for something vital, whose disappearance would leave the world impoverished. Grasp that, and all our problems are seen in a clearer light. We are not a spent force, but by the grace of God mighty yet for the Gospel and freedom.

J. H. RUSHBROOKE.