

Fifty Fruitful Years.¹

THIS title covers the story of the founding of the Sunday School Board by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1891, and of developments during the following half-century. The book deserves all praise as a careful and well-written presentation of facts. It is also excellently printed and illustrated.

Visitors to Nashville and to the present headquarters of the Sunday School Board have been impressed with the amazing growth of an enterprise that began from nothing, but has been so skilfully guided that it now counts among the most successful of commercial undertakings and religious publishing houses. It is closely linked with every section of Southern Baptist work. Indeed, nothing has contributed more powerfully to the popularity and success of the Board than the generosity with which it has allocated from its profits huge amounts for the promotion of Baptist causes outside its own control. Between 1892 and 1940 some six and a quarter million dollars were thus given (over £1,500,000 at present rates of exchange), in addition to enormous sums applied to its own rapidly developing departments.

Dr. Burroughs tells of the steady and notable expansion of the Board's activities; but the reader is impressed still more deeply by the courage, devotion, and evangelical spirit of its leaders, and by the ever-widening and deepening unity of Southern Baptists in its support. When we recall that no organisation within our communion has increased so rapidly as the Southern Baptist Convention, which now includes about five million church members, we understand that the Board had a vast potential *clientele*; and a large part of its story reveals the skill with which it used its great opportunities, adapting its machinery and output to the constantly enlarging needs of its natural constituency.

It would do British Baptists good to read this book, if only for the glimpses of leaders among the Southern Baptists from the Civil War onwards. Dr. Burroughs has prefaced the narrative of the Board with an account of earlier publishing efforts; and through his pages move such figures as James P. Boyce, John A. Broadus, and Basil Manly, whose names are heroic in Baptist history. (The last two are commemorated in the "concertina" title "Broadman Press," which appears on the title page of the Board's publications.) Here, too, are many

¹ *Fifty Fruitful Years: The Story of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.* By P. E. Burroughs (Nashville: The Broadman Press, \$1.00 net).

who in later years became well known in Britain—among them J. B. Gambrell, E. Y. Mullins, R. H. Pitt, and J. R. Sampey, the last-named still in active service. Dr. Truett has a place of his own; as far back as 1898 he already appears as chairman of a committee dealing with the affairs of the Board at a critical time. The crowded pages stir me as, sometimes in almost every line, I encounter the names of men whom I know and esteem. The records of the Sunday School Board not only involve contacts with every phase of Southern Baptist life, but with interests far beyond the U.S.A. I find its funds supporting the Baptist World Alliance, and I come upon the name of Dr. Frank H. Leavell, the leader of its "Student Union" department, who has done so much in conjunction with the Young People's Committee of the Alliance to further the international fraternity of students.

Amid a multitude of competent and devoted workers a few men stand conspicuous. The first is Dr. John Marion Frost, the true father of the Board and its first secretary, who served—with but a short interval—from 1891 until his death in 1916. His term of office covered the most critical period in the history of the enterprise—in 1896 its actual existence was in question—but before his death it was firmly established. Nineteen-seventeen saw the election as secretary of I. J. Van Ness, who had already served the Board for seventeen years as Editor, and under his leadership it attained new levels of prosperity and usefulness. Dr. Van Ness retired in 1935, and was immediately succeeded by the energetic and magnetic Dr. T. L. Holcomb, who is still in office. In selecting these names I have indicated those whom the Convention has itself honoured by calling them to accept the supreme responsibility. But when I think of the Sunday School Board, it is of so many gifted workers and personal friends that no passing reference can compass more than a few. Hight C. Moore stands out, not only chairman of the editorial division, but a secretary of the Convention—the most genial of men. Dr. Burroughs, who writes the book lying before me, heads a division known as "education and promotion," and it covers not only Sunday School and young people's work in a bewildering variety of forms, but branches out into such sub-divisions as "church architecture" (originally set up to ensure that in church planning adequate provision should be made for the young) and "survey and statistics." This last sounds strangely, but has been of extraordinary value; I have for years regarded Dr. E. P. Alldredge, who looks after it, as one of the greatest of living statisticians. The business division under Dr. J. O. Williams is a vast affair, in spite of the fact that the Board confines itself to publishing and distributing and does not print. (Its printing bills run to over \$600,000 annually.)

Let me emphasise that the story of the Sunday School Board is not merely that of a prosperous business concern. All through its existence it has been definitely a missionary enterprise, concerned for propaganda in the true sense (see John xx. 31). This dominant purpose is the secret of its prosperity; and so far as *Fifty Fruitful Years* finds its way into the hands of British Baptists it will be found crowded with suggestion.

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HISTORY is a series of happenings, not a logical process; and those who try to explain it by the popular slogans such as are inspired by the words "evolution" and "progress" are not to be trusted—least of all when they, consciously or unconsciously, slip in philosophical or moral deductions from their observation of world-annals.

There are many who will try to reconstruct what they must needs call a "Philosophy of History." I can only see a series of occurrences—and fail to draw any constructive moral from them.

Against vague theories of "Progress" and "Evolution," in which I disbelieve—holding that history is a series of happenings, with no inevitability about it—we have to set the hard fact of the appearance of occasional individuals, of the few men who have turned the stream of events into unexpected courses.

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