

Editorial Notes.

THE Archbishop of Canterbury has now supplemented the questions he addressed to the Assembly of the Free Church Federal Council in March, 1946 and to the Methodist Conference in July, by a sermon preached before the University of Cambridge on November 3rd, and published under the title *A Step Forward in Church Relations*. It makes even clearer than before Dr. Fisher's earnest desire to break the present deadlock in the discussions regarding Christian union in this country. It also indicates for the first time the lines along which his own mind has been working. The sermon therefore deserves and must receive the most careful and sympathetic study.

Dr. Fisher is of opinion that "we are not yet ready for organic or constitutional union," but he specifically rejects an alternative often put forward by Free Churchmen by his remark "We do not desire a federation." Instead, he proclaims his belief that intercommunion could and should be the next step. This is something for which many Free Churchmen have long pleaded and there should be swift and generous recognition of the sincerity and courage which lie behind the Archbishop's words, for they will sound strangely in the ears of not a few of his fellow-Anglicans.

We are bound, however, to look carefully at the terms on which Dr. Fisher thinks intercommunion might take place. It involves a mutual recognition of ministries passing beyond anything so far agreed in the general statements adopted by the Anglican Church. Dr. Fisher suggests that full mutual recognition, and then intercommunion, would be possible if the Free Churches would take episcopacy in some form "into their own system" and "try it out on their own ground." "The Church of England has not yet found the finally satisfying use of episcopacy in practice: nor certainly has the Church of Rome." But at the Lausanne Conference of 1927 the various churches present agreed that a reunited Church would have to find place within its order for episcopacy, as well as for synods and presbyteries and the rights of local congregations. Why then should not the non-episcopal churches begin to develop from within their own traditions, the type of episcopacy they would desire in a reunited Church?

This, as we understand it, is Dr. Fisher's line of thought. It is unexpected and it seems to us, we confess, a little too ingenious. There is no indication as to when or at what stage the Anglican Church would declare itself as satisfied with the "episcopacy" of the Free Churches. Nor, on the other hand, is there any parallel assurance that the Anglican Church will take immediate steps to develop within its system those forms of government on which Free Churchmen have relied, and those safe-guards to episcopacy on which they have insisted. Baptists were not officially represented at Lausanne, but bearing in mind the practice of many of their forefathers and remembering the circumstances which have led to the creation of the office of General Superintendent, they have no reason for rejecting episcopacy as such. We hope that they will join in discussions, both official and unofficial, with other Free Churchmen and with Dr. Fisher himself, for we are convinced that the world situation, the position of organised religion in this country, the approaching Lambeth Conference, and the teaching of Christ Himself alike, demand closer visible fellowship among Christians.

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Baptists all over the world begin to turn their eyes towards Copenhagen where, if all goes well, from July 29th to August 3rd the seventh congress of the Baptist World Alliance will assemble. It is bound to be a very important gathering from the denominational point of view, but it will be far more than that. There is every hope that there will be considerable delegations from Russia and Germany as well as from Scandinavia, Britain, and America. Not for a decade at least will so widely representative a Christian gathering have taken place, for the oecumenical conferences of 1937 and 1939 had no effective delegations from Russia and Germany. And how much has happened since? Those responsible for the shaping of the programme and the leadership day by day will have a most onerous and delicate task, but also a great opportunity of demonstrating what Christian fellowship means. We hope that in view of the sorrows of the Continent and the anxieties hanging over mankind as a whole, the denominational drum, even though it necessarily and rightly be sounded, will be muffled, or at least beaten in time with other Christian instruments. That Baptists should be able to assemble such a gathering so soon after the end of the war is a striking reminder of their strategic position in Christendom and their consequent responsibilities.

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The discussion in the Church of England of the rite of baptism and its relation to confirmation continues unabated. There seems

to be a growing feeling that what the New Testament joins should not have been put asunder. In the course of the debate many statements and proposals are being made which are of interest and importance to Baptists. Dom Gregory Dix, of Nashdom Abbey, has now published the text of a lecture delivered at Oxford some months ago on *The Theology of Confirmation in relation to Baptism* (Dacre Press, 2/-). In it he frankly confesses that "Christian Initiation in the New Testament is described and conceived of solely in terms of a *conscious* adherence and response to the Gospel of God, that is, solely in terms of an *adult* Initiation." This statement has recently been quoted with approval by the Bishop of Oxford (Dr. Kenneth Kirk), who uses it to support the rather startling proposal that in order to escape from what he calls "the desecration of the sacrament of baptism" which is now so frequent, the Church of England should bring baptism and confirmation together and administer both when years of discretion have been reached. Dr. Kirk would replace infant baptism with a service of admission to the catechumenate, marking the reception of children into "the congregation of Christian people" as distinct from "the congregation of Christ's flock." Years of discretion he would interpret as "the age of eight or thereabouts," and the new joint service of baptism and confirmation would be followed by admission to communion. The Bishop's suggestions will be found in the *Oxford Diocesan Magazine* for September and October, 1946. We await the reactions of his fellow Anglicans with considerable interest.

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We are glad to learn that the S.C.M. Press is prepared to publish an English version of Karl Barth's pamphlet *Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe*, to which allusion was made in a previous issue, and hope that its appearance will not be long delayed. In the meantime, we offer our readers a quotation from Schleiermacher against whom Barth so often tilts but with whom, on the issue of baptism, he would seem now to be in agreement. In his *Glaubenslehre* (1821) Schleiermacher wrote:

"Every trace of infant baptism which people have professed to find in the New Testament must first be inserted there. . . . It would have been quite intelligible if, to recover touch with Christ's institution, infant baptism had been abolished at the Reformation. . . . We ought to make it known that in regard to this point we cancel the sentence of condemnation passed on the Anabaptists, and that on our side we are prepared to enter into Church fellowship with the Baptists of today, if only they will not pronounce our infant baptism absolutely invalid, even when supplemented by confirmation." (E.T., pp. 634-638.)

Mr. F. Beckwith, Librarian of the Leeds (Old) Library, Commercial Street, Leeds, 1, is collecting information for a bibliography of Yorkshire Baptists, and would be glad to have particulars (and if possible, copies) of local histories, biographies, and the like, of churches, ministers and laymen.

History of the Bedfordshire Union of Baptist and Congregational Churches, by John Brown and David Prothero (Independent Press, 5s.).

In 1896 Dr. John Brown, of Bedford, the well-known biographer of Bunyan, issued an admirable centenary essay on the Bedfordshire Union of Christians. This Union was formed in 1797 by Samuel Greatheed, of Woburn, under impulses similar to those which had caused the starting of the broad-based London Missionary Society two years earlier. But the tradition of close fellowship between Baptists and Congregationalists runs back as far as Bunyan and is one to be cherished and studied. It was a happy thought to reprint Dr. Brown's work and to add a survey of the last fifty years by the present minister of Roxton. Mr. Prothero gives a careful and useful summary of the happenings of the past half-century, though he has neither the wide historical knowledge nor the literary skill of Dr. Brown. It is strange that no place is found in the just eulogy of Dr. Brown for a word about his family. Mrs. Brown was a daughter of David Everard Ford, of Lymington. One of their children was the late Professor Sir Walter Langdon Brown; the other married Dr. Neville Keynes of Cambridge, and became the mother of J. M. Keynes and Dr. Geoffrey Keynes. Few families have contributed more or in more varied ways to the making of modern England and its Nonconformist roots deserve record.