

A Hundred Years of Work for Youth.

NO one can say with certainty when the young people and children of our homes, churches, and Sunday Schools first became interested in the B.M.S. They were probably enlisted as missionary enthusiasts and supporters from the earliest days of the Society. They would be thrilled by the tales of the strange and remote lands to which missionaries went, and by their descriptions of the savage peoples among whom they worked. We can be certain that a lover of children like William Knibb, of Jamaica, would have an enthusiastic following among boys and girls, and young men and women, in the churches he visited. It is known that the *Juvenile Missionary Herald*, a pocket-size magazine with its sometimes pious and melancholy articles and homilies, illustrated by somewhat crude wood cuts and printed on poor paper, was first issued in 1819, to begin an existence unbroken to this day as the ever popular *Wonderlands*. Juvenile Missionary Auxiliaries were formed in many Sunday Schools, and children were among those whom missionary deputations were set to reach. Thus, early in its history, the B.M.S. turned to young people as a fruitful field of support.

The Society was, however, fifty-six years old before the first recorded organised effort was made to harness children and young people to its service. The tardiness of this move was due perhaps to the fact that in the early years the Sunday School Movement was in its infancy, and also that young people then stood in a subordinate position in relation to their elders. It was not until August 16th, 1848, that a group of young men associated with London churches formed themselves into *The Young Men's Missionary Association in Aid of the Baptist Missionary Society*. The *Missionary Herald* of the following October included a statement about this new organisation. This emphasised: "the importance of systematic and intelligent effort on behalf of missions, the cheering exertions of the young in the work, the need of a more vivid impression of the wants of the world, and a clearer conviction of the pecuniary resources and duties of the churches". A special appeal was issued to Sunday School teachers to support the new body. Membership was to be personal, and from among the practical proposals these may be cited:

1. The more general formation of Juvenile and Sunday School Auxiliaries and the increased efficiency of those already formed.

2. The preparation and delivery of lectures to the children connected with Auxiliaries, "to which the children of the parents may be specially invited".

3. The delivery of lectures to the young generally on topics connected with missions which cannot be introduced at length in ordinary missionary addresses.

4. The formation of a missionary museum which was to become the property of the Baptist Missionary Society. (The germ of the present Visual Education Department!)

The use of a room in the Mission House (then in Moorgate Street) was granted once a week for meetings and for the consultation of the Society's library and various missionary periodicals.

Special support, at once a benefit and a problem to missionary administrators, was early agreed upon in these terms:

"That the subscriptions received be devoted to some special field of labour, such as the schools connected with a particular mission station."

Another resolution of far-reaching significance reads:

"That a monthly address on Christian missions be delivered in the Schools on a Sunday afternoon."

The first committee, which shaped and adopted these and other resolutions, included such names as John Edward Tresidder, James Benham, William Olney, Henry Potter and Fred Potter.

The London of 1848 differed in many ways from the metropolis of today which extends at least thirty miles from east to west and from south to north. On the west it was practically bounded by the Edgware Road. On the east it reached to Stepney Green. On the north it included the district within a line drawn east and west from the north side of Regent's Park. South of the Thames, gardens lay between Lambeth and Southwark. Newington, Kennington and Stockwell were hamlets. Battersea was market gardens, as were Fulham, Hammersmith and Brompton to the west. Camberwell and Peckham New Town were villages. Deptford, Greenwich and Woolwich were places apart. The main thoroughfares leading from London, Clapham Road, Brixton Road, New Kent Road, Bow Road, Kingsland Road, Hampstead Road, Edgware Road and Bayswater Road—were lined with substantial villas occupied chiefly by retired people and city merchants, with open fields behind. Suburbs which today are regarded as being within the inner belt of the metropolis, were detached and somewhat remote villages in Kent, Surrey, Middlesex, or Essex. There were no tramways or motor buses,

underground railways or tubes. No railway bridges crossed the Thames and Holborn Viaduct had not been thought of. The Thames Embankment, except for the terrace of the then new Houses of Parliament, did not exist.

The names of the first churches and Sunday Schools to be visited by members of the new Association emphasise the difference between Baptist witness in the Metropolis a century ago and today. Most of these causes have ceased to exist. They included, Devonshire Square schoolroom; Keppel Street Chapel; Fox and Knot Court schoolroom; Smithfield; Alfred Place Chapel, Old Kent Road; Buttesland Street chapel, Hoxton; Horsley Wood schoolroom, Walworth; North London schoolroom, Grays Inn Road; Cotton Street chapel, Poplar; and Islington Green schoolroom.

The proposal to hold monthly missionary lectures in the Mission House was soon put into operation. The first team of lecturers included the Rev. C. M. Birrell, Dr. F. A. Cox, the Rev. Joseph Angus, M.A., D.D., the Rev. John Aldis, the Rev. John Branch, and the Rev. Francis Tucker, M.A. In the second session we find the Rev. William Brock discoursing on *Temporal Benefits connected with the Diffusion of Christianity*; the Rev. Frederick Trestrail speaking on *Ireland and her People*; the Rev. J. Baldwin Brown (Congregationalist) dealing with *The Philosophy of Missionary Work from Paul's Life*; and the Rev. J. D. East handling *Heathen Mythology and Divine Revelation*; the series culminating in a visit from the famous Rev. Samuel Martin of Westminster Chapel.

A significant development took place in 1896 when the growing place of women in church and missionary life received recognition in their admission to the Association, with the consequent change of its title to The Young People's Missionary Association. The links with the B.M.S. were strengthened by the appointment of returned missionaries as part-time secretaries of the Association, the duties of this office being combined with deputation work in the country. The Rev. W. J. Price from India held this office from 1897; the Rev. R. Wright Hay, from Camerouns and India, from 1900-1902; and the Rev. Leonard Tucker, M.A., from India and Jamaica, from 1902-1907.

Unfortunately the records of the Association, which included several bound volumes of its magazines and leaflets, were destroyed in the bombing of the Furnival Street Mission House in 1940, and in consequence details of the activities from the beginning to 1900 are missing. But it is known that the Association faithfully discharged its purpose under the leadership of successive honorary or paid secretaries. Occasionally it burst upon the public eye, as when, for instance, it organised a day's

meetings at the Crystal Palace during the B.M.S. Centenary Celebrations in 1892, and when it is presumed that the crowds that were present filled in the intervals between meetings in enjoyment of the fun, frolic and mental stimulus of that famous rendezvous. For many years, too, the Association arranged a public meeting on the eve of the annual denominational assembly in London. This was the forerunner of the notable series of Young People's Missionary Meetings in Spurgeon's Tabernacle on the Thursday evenings of Assembly week, and of the more recent Royal Albert Hall rallies.

The birth of the Congo Mission in 1879 brought a new wave of enthusiasm and activity to the Association. Thomas Comber was a Londoner who had been associated with Denmark Place Church, Camberwell, since the days when he entered its Sunday School Infant Class. There he made his decision for Christ and received his call to missionary service. During his student years at Regent's Park College he found congenial and rewarding work among young people and children of Camden Road Church. Two others of the four men who formed the first Congo party were Londoners—W. Holman Bentley, of the Downs Chapel, Clapton, and John S. Hartland, also of Camden Road Church. All were attached to the Association whose members felt a special interest in them and a deep responsibility for them and for those who followed them to Congo during the thrilling and tragic early years. Their zeal was kindled, too, by the spacious headline, "Africa for Christ", displayed in the pages of *The Missionary Herald* of those days. They maintained contact with the pioneers by correspondence when the latter were at their posts on the field and by contact with them during their furloughs. They carried news of the Congo mission into the Sunday Schools of the metropolis as they visited them and did much to increase interest and support. Since those days the Association and its successors has had its flame of devotion kept at glowing point by the presence in its ranks and on its committee of successive prospective missionary candidates from Regent's, Spurgeon's and other colleges—contacts which were maintained when they took up their work overseas to the profit both of the men and the Association.

Many men since honoured in the denomination have occupied the chair of the Association. Among them were Mr. F. J. Marnham, J.P., and His Honour Judge Bompas, Q.C., whose father gained immortality as the character upon whom Dickens based his Serjeant Buzfuz in *Pickwick Papers*, and a cousin of whom, the Rev. E. Anstie Bompas, is now the Chairman of the B.M.S. Mr. H. Ernest Wood, J.P., found his first sphere of service outside his church at Denmark Place, Camberwell, as the Association's librarian. This was the initial step on the path

that took him to the Chairmanship of the B.M.S., the Presidency of the London Baptist Association and of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and many other avenues of devoted activity inside and outside the denomination.

For some years at the beginning of the present century energetic and far-seeing leaders of the Association had been urging B.M.S. officers to increase organised propaganda among Sunday School and Young People's Societies throughout the denomination by the formation of a Young People's Department. Their overtures and pleadings met with scanty response until, in 1905, a new and virile General Secretary was appointed in the person of the Rev. C. E. Wilson, B.A., then of India. With his advent to office things began to happen in Furnival Street. The Young People's Department was the first of many projects to be realised and Leonard Tucker was called from the Association to become its first secretary. An honorary secretary was appointed to the Association with an office in the Mission House. Such are the uncertainties of life, however, for Tucker was sent almost at once to Jamaica, where his heart was, on special service.

The writer joined the Association in 1902 as a young delegate from Grafton Square Church, Clapham, and soon found a place on its committee. Then largely through the initiative of Mr. E. J. Wigney, a Baptist black-bearded banker of Fleet Street, whose frail body housed a flaming spirit and who was in the true Carey succession in that he devoted his life to Christian service and worked in the bank to pay the expenses, I was appointed to the Young People's Department in 1907. J. R. M. Stephens, home from Congo, was made head of the Department in 1910, in addition to other duties, but he soon returned to Congo for relief service. Meantime the work of the Department increased in several directions, notably in the affiliation of Sunday Schools and Young People's Societies, with the result that the tide of interest and activity, so far as London was concerned, turned in growing degree from the Association to the Department. The former continued to function, mainly through its monthly meetings of delegates in the Furnival Street Mission House Library, but the number of its affiliated Societies and Sunday Schools, registered delegates and personal members steadily diminished until they touched the twenties. It became clear that something must be done if the Association was to continue its existence and its work was to be maintained.

Negotiations were therefore opened between the Association's Committee and the Department's Committee with the happy result that in 1914, the Association was merged in the Department, and a new body for the youth organisations of the Metropolis was formed with the title, The London Baptist Monthly

Missionary Conference. By the time World War I broke out in August, 1914, the new organisation was firmly established.

Then followed many years of growing membership and widespread activity. Most of the London Sunday Schools became affiliated with the Young People's Department, and efforts to secure the appointment of delegates from them to the Conference were so successful that soon nearly 400 were registered. In addition, personal members were enrolled until the 300 mark was passed. The attendances at the monthly meetings showed a corresponding increase, until throughout the War, and almost until the outbreak of World War II, the Mission House Library was crowded up to and beyond capacity at every gathering. Speakers of note from many denominations and missionary societies, including our own, occupied the platform. On other occasions parliaments, lantern lectures and plays were used to effect, and the gatherings were notable also for the sale of missionary and other religious literature and for the exchange of books from the lending library. Other ventures, including the organisation of many series of training classes for leaders of study circles; an annual Garden Party, at one of which at Spurgeon's Orphan Homes, over 1,000 visitors sat down to tea, were outstanding. Speakers' Training Classes, conducted by men such as Dr. F. B. Meyer and the Rev. F. C. Spurr, attracted average attendances of 150.

The leadership of the Conference was wisely entrusted to youth. For instance, Dr. Hugh Martin, M.A., and the Rev. Thomas Powell, B.A., B.D. each occupied the chair for three years, thirty years ago. Other chairmen include Mr. H. Carey Oakley, M.A., Miss Faith Goodwyn, Mr. Arnold S. Clark, J.P., Mr. Ronald Bell, and Mr. H. E. Bonsall, A.C.A. The Revs. Ernest Payne, M.A, B.D., B.Litt., W. W. Bottoms, M.A., A. A. Wilson, M.A., and G. C. Robinson, B.A., B.D., have successively held office as secretary by virtue of their position as B.M.S. Young People's Secretary.

World War II made its mark upon the Conference as it did upon all youth and other church activities. The Mission House was considered unsafe and for a time the monthly meetings were suspended. Then they were bravely resumed, though not in the familiar Furnival Street premises whose Library had been reduced to a gaping shell. The Alliance Hall, Westminster, was secured as a meeting place, and thither, month by month, a company of young people made their way, throughout the discomforts of the black-out and the menace of air-raids and flying bombs, for fellowship and inspiration and for the consideration of the affairs of the Eternal Kingdom, what time temporal kingdoms were being broken into pieces.

The Conference has continued since the War and is once again gathering strength. It suffers through having to meet on neutral ground away from B.M.S. headquarters. Only those who have experienced it can measure the magnetic power of Furnival Street upon the young people of our churches. It has been seriously affected by the widespread dislocation of church life caused by the War and the subsequent unsettlement and stress that have profoundly affected youth. But it faces the future with courage and determination.

It is impossible to estimate the value of this century of service by the youth of the metropolis for the B.M.S. or the effect it has had upon them. Many past members of the Conference have gone to the mission field and the home ministry. More serve as church officers and workers, or as missionary secretaries and leaders. Men and women now well on in middle life are to be met with, in large numbers of our churches, who acknowledge its deep and abiding influence upon them, for in the fellowship of its meetings they received their call to service and saw a vision of the Kingdom of God. Here, at least, London's Baptist youth led the way in a movement through which their fellows throughout the land have been enrolled for the task of world evangelism.

H. L. HEMMENS.

The Book of the Revelation by John O. Barrett. (Carey Press, 5s.)

This is the third volume to appear in the series *The Missionary Message of the New Testament*, and Mr. Barrett is to be commended for producing within the limits imposed by space and the nature and purpose of the series, a clear and readable help for plain men to the understanding of one of the most difficult books of the Bible. He has not given us a running commentary on the text, but an exposition of the book's seven central themes, largely based on what he holds to be the thirteen chapters that enshrine its essential and abiding message. *Revelation* is shown to be neither a work of merely antiquarian interest nor simply a happy hunting ground for "students of prophecy", but a tract for our times no less than for those in which its author lived. Lay-preachers, Sunday-school teachers and any who want a simple, sane guide to *Revelation*, as well as working ministers in search of sermon suggestions, will find this a useful help.

GRAHAM W. HUGHES.