

Editorial Notes

AT the forthcoming Assembly the Rev. Ernest A. Payne is to be nominated by the Council to succeed Dr. Aubrey in 1951 as General Secretary of the Baptist Union. This announcement will have been received by our readers with satisfaction and pride, for Mr. Payne is a Vice-President of the Historical Society and is responsible each quarter for the reviews and the Editorial Notes in this journal. To British Baptists' leading historian the Society extends heartiest congratulations! We believe Mr. Payne to possess that rare combination of gifts which a successful occupancy of this high and responsible office calls for and that by him the denomination will be led into the future with ability, courage and vision. Although we fear that the heavy and diverse duties of the Secretaryship will afford him few opportunities of continuing his historical researches we are consoled by the conviction that, having ably recorded history hitherto, Mr. Payne will with equal distinction proceed in the Secretaryship of the Union to make history.

G.W.H.

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A definitive scheme for a united Church in Ceylon has now been laid, by the Negotiating Committee, before the Churches concerned. It is a document which is likely to play a very important part in the discussions of the next few years. The negotiators have been able to profit by the experience of the Church of South India, but they have prepared a bold and original scheme of their own with several unique features. Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists are involved. If the scheme is adopted, it will probably be the first occasion on which Baptists have joined in a united Church of this kind. We say probably, being at present without adequate information regarding the situation in Japan. Baptists are a small community in Ceylon, but the negotiators have been ready to propose that believers' baptism should be a recognised alternative to infant baptism and confirmation, it being clearly stated that "full Christian initiation is a process which is concluded only when the initiate participates in his First Communion." The new Church which is proposed will be an episcopal one, with an episcopate linked with older successions and with ordination and confirmation (in one or other of its

forms) as among its special functions, but one that is constitutional and chosen in an even more careful and democratic fashion than are the moderators and superintendents of many Free Churches. The declarations as to the way in which the specialised ministry is conceived and as to the responsibilities of the laity and the local "pastorate," as it is called, deserve most careful study by those who will start with some initial prejudices and criticisms of a scheme of this kind. There are important and generous provisions for maintaining fellowship with Churches with which participating groups have been in fellowship, whether these be episcopal or non-episcopal. It is proposed that the present ministries of the various churches be united immediately, without any such interim period as is provided for in the Church of South India. The service of inauguration has been most carefully drawn up and it is clearly stated that "no name or title can be given to describe the nature of this service, as it has no historical precedent."

The individual Churches in Ceylon have now to give their verdict on the scheme, and discussions will no doubt be necessary with those in other countries with whom they have been in fellowship and on whom they have in certain cases depended for a considerable measure of support. The negotiators believe that if the scheme is carried through, the Church in Ceylon "will become a more effective instrument for God's work, and that the result of union will be greater peace, closer fellowship and fuller life within the Church, and also renewed eagerness and power in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ." The Baptist Missionary Society has always explicitly recognised the right of the Churches overseas to make their own decisions on issues of this kind, and will approach the consideration of the delicate matters involved in the scheme with the utmost care and sympathy.

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It is interesting to learn that discussions have already begun between the Church of South India and certain Lutheran and Baptist groups in the area, which were not parties to the original negotiations. A preliminary meeting of an exploratory character took place in December, 1948, at which there were represented, besides the Church of South India, the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Danish Mission, and also the Convention of Telegu Baptist Churches, the American Baptist Mission, the Convention of Baptist Churches of the Northern Circars and the Canadian Baptist Mission. The meeting was of a friendly character and recommended that conversations between the Churches should continue. Certain arrangements were proposed

for the further examination of some of the theological questions which would clearly be involved in formal negotiations.

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These and kindred matters will no doubt claim attention in some form or other both at the eighth Baptist World Congress which is to be held at Cleveland, Ohio, from July 22nd-27th next, and at the Commonwealth and Empire Baptist Congress which is being planned for June, 1951, in London. The number of those who can hope to get to Cleveland from this country is unfortunately small, but very important issues will be discussed and important decisions must be taken by the executive of the Baptist World Alliance. It is hoped that President Truman will be present and speak on the evening of the opening day of the Congress.

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Reports from several different quarters refer to movements of religious quickening in the United States. For some years church statistics have continued to show an upward trend. There are said to have been notably successful campaigns recently in a number of American Colleges. It is good to be able to set beside the more spectacular news from the other side of the Atlantic impressive facts from this country. The unusual success of the mission to Oxford University conducted by Bishop Stephen Neill three years ago attracted a good deal of attention at the time. Its influence has continued to be felt, and in February of this year another series of special meetings addressed by the Bishop of Bristol drew equally large numbers. There is undoubtedly in wide circles a willingness to hear, consider and respond to the claims of the Christian faith. Spontaneous movements like that among our Baptist churches in Kent stir the hope that all our churches may soon experience quickening and revival. The call to "Baptist Advance" sounded by Mr. Aubrey should help to focus our prayers and our planning at what may well be a crucial moment of opportunity.

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ANNUAL MEETING.—The Baptist Historical Society will hold its Annual Meeting at 4.30 p.m., on Monday, 1st May, at Bloomsbury Central Church for the transaction of business and to hear an address by Rev. John Huxtable, M.A.