

The Baptist Men's Movement

THE subject of this particular study is but forty years old this year and is therefore one of the youngest organizations within our Baptist denomination. It may not, however, be inappropriate to take a brief look at what is, for most of us, a fragment of continuing history within our lifetime.

The basic conception of the Movement is traceable as far back as 1912, when the National Laymen's Missionary Movement was formed and claimed the support and allegiance of a number of our missionary-minded laymen. Amongst these was Mr. W. Parker Gray, of Northampton, and it was his experiences at a Conference of that Movement in Oxford in 1915 and a reception at the Mansion House in May, 1916, arranged by the same Movement, which planted securely in his mind and heart the vision of a Baptist branch. He communicated with the Rev. W. Y. Fullerton, the Home Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, and at that time Vice-President of the Baptist Union. Mr. Fullerton (as he then was, his doctorate not being conferred until 1927) seized upon the idea with enthusiasm. He proposed, at the October meeting of the B.M.S. General Committee, that a sub-committee should be appointed to explore the possibilities. It may be of interest to record here the names of the members so appointed: they were Sir George Macalpine, Sir Alfred Pearce Gould, and Messrs. J. Attenborough, A. R. Daggart, C. F. Foster, H. P. Gould, W. Parker Gray, W. Jones, G. J. Long, A. C. Mansfield, E. Morgan, W. W. Parkinson, T. S. Penny, J. Town, A. Tyler, and H. E. Wood.¹

In January, 1917, they reported back to the General Committee and their recommendations were accepted, as follows:

1. That it is the opinion of the Sub-Committee that the time has now arrived when a Baptist branch of the Laymen's Missionary Movement might, with advantage, be formed.
2. That Messrs. W. Parker Gray, G. J. Long, W. W. Parkinson and A. Tyler be requested to serve as a Sub-Committee, with power to add to their number, to consider the matter in all its bearings and, if possible, to arrange that some action should be taken during the spring meetings.²

To these names should be added that of Mr. H. L. Hemmens, for he had been brought in by the Home Secretary at a very early stage

¹ Minutes of B.M.S. General Committee, Oct. 1916.

² Minutes of B.M.S. General Committee, Jan. 1917.

in the conversations as the member of the B.M.S. staff who would be best fitted to undertake the clerical side of the organization, when it was formed. Just how wise that choice was, subsequent history has abundantly proved.

The Baptist Laymen's Missionary Movement was formally launched at a Conference of laymen held at the old Mission House in Furnival Street, under the chairmanship of Mr. Parker Gray, on Wednesday, 25th April, 1917, during the Assembly of that year.³ The Conference began with a brief introduction by the Chairman, and addresses by Dr. Thomas Cochrane, Secretary of the London Missionary Society Laymen's Movement, on "The Laymen's Missionary Movement"; Mr. O. Eatough, of Waterfoot, on "The Work of a District Laymen's Movement"; and Mr. Alec Tyler, of Leicester, on "The Formation of a Baptist Laymen's Missionary Movement and Its Aims." Discussion ensued, after which the following resolutions were adopted :

1. That this Conference of Laymen of the Baptist Denomination having heard and considered the objects and methods of various Laymen's Missionary Movements, approves the formation of a Baptist Laymen's Missionary Movement, and urges its extension throughout the country.
2. The Movement shall exist for the dissemination of information about missions and the promotion of prayers for missions among Baptist Laymen, in order that they may be aroused to take their share in claiming the kingdoms of this world for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The third and final resolution adopted by the Conference appointed Sir Alfred Pearce Gould, K.C.V.O., M.S., as President and twenty-three other men to be the Committee, with power to add to their number. There were forty men present at that inaugural meeting, and it is of interest to note that tea was provided at a cost of 8d. per head, including service !

The other officers, who were elected at the first meeting of the Committee on 18th July, 1917, were Mr. W. Parker Gray (Chairman), Mr. Alec Tyler (Secretary) and Mr. W. H. Crowe (Treasurer).⁴ Mr. H. L. Hemmens, as has been mentioned already and as he himself tells us in his autobiography,⁵ was brought in at the outset to do the routine work and was in effect Secretary from the

³ H. L. Hemmens, in his autobiography, *Such Has Been My Life*, p. 146, states that the Movement was formed in the London house of Sir Alfred Pearce Gould, but this would seem to refer to a meeting of the sub-committee which planned the launching.

⁴ H. L. Hemmens, *ibid.*, p. 146, names William Jones, of Orpington, as the first treasurer. It is clear, however, from the minutes that W. H. Crowe was appointed to the office in 1917. He resigned at the beginning of 1918 to organize the London Federation and was then succeeded by William Jones.

⁵ *op. cit.*, p. 146.

beginning, for it was not long before Mr. Tyler was officially designated Honorary Secretary, a position which he held until his resignation, due to ill-health, in 1925. The office of Honorary Secretary continued to be filled until after the second war, but with the appointment of a full-time Assistant Secretary in 1946 it was then discontinued. A glance at the personnel of that first committee, plus those who were co-opted at its first meeting, reveals the names of five who afterwards became Presidents of the Movement : Messrs. J. Arthur Attenborough, A. R. Doggart, W. Parker Gray, H. L. Hemmens and H. Ernest Wood, and four who later were elected to the Presidency of the Baptist Union : Messrs. Doggart and Wood, Arthur Newton and T. S. Penny.

ACTIVITIES

The B.L.M.M. worked along three main lines, as far as organization was concerned, the first being the setting up in cities, towns and districts, of Centres, each with its duly appointed officers and committee. The function of a Centre initially was to band men together for united service on behalf of the missionary cause, such activity often being briefly comprehended in the words "Prayer, Effort and Giving." "Our task as a Movement," wrote Alec Taylor in March, 1918, "is to move men to deeper devotion, greater activity, more fervent intercession and fuller support of the missionary enterprise."⁸ It should, however, be stressed that the Movement had been an independent body from the beginning (as indeed has the Baptist Historical Society), although it has owed much throughout its history to the sympathetic interest and practical assistance of the B.M.S. in a variety of ways. Centres sprang up quickly in all parts of the country and as early as 1918 the London Federation was formed, with a closely-knit organization covering most of the sectors corresponding to the L.B.A. Groups. Mr. W. H. Crowe was the energetic secretary of this Federation for the whole of its existence (1918-1948) and was responsible on its behalf for arranging an Annual Dinner to the President of the Baptist Union. This began with one to Mr. Herbert Marnham in 1919 and continued without interruption until war again broke out.

The second strand in the Movement's policy was the arrangement of conferences, both national and local. This policy has continued till this day and Swanwick particularly has become a revered name amongst us. Local conferences speedily became the responsibility of the local Centres or groups of them, but at least one national conference was arranged each year by the Council. The first was held in 1918, in Alec Tyler's spacious garden in Leicester, the second in 1920 at Hope in Derbyshire, and in 1921 there commenced in the same county the long line of Swanwick Conferences at The Hayes which was broken only by the second

war and was resumed as soon as the premises were de-requisitioned in 1948. Between the wars these conferences were practically confined to overseas missionary matters but during the last ten years their scope has broadened somewhat, for a reason which will be obvious in due course.

The third line of approach was through the medium of propaganda. Leaflets, booklets, advertisements and articles in the religious press, and correspondence all played their part, but it was early realized that a regular periodical was an essential. In September, 1918, *The Baptist Layman* commenced its life, strangely enough, as a supplement to *Men and Missions*, the organ of the Laymen's Missionary Movement of the United States and Canada. It would appear to have emerged on its own at the beginning of 1920. It has fluctuated in size and format through the years and has progressed in title from *The Baptist Layman* (1918-1936) via *The Layman* (1937-1944) to *World Outlook* (1945 onwards). It was published monthly until 1924 and quarterly thereafter.

The first concerted effort of the B.L.M.M. was the raising of a War Emergency Fund in the interests of the B.M.S., and by the middle of 1919 the total would appear to have been around £6,500, which was a very satisfactory response indeed.

Two outstanding projects were undertaken in the early years, due mainly to the initiative and drive of Alec Tyler who, himself a business man of wide repute, was accustomed to thinking and acting in a large way. The first was the purchase of the house in Kettering where the B.M.S. was formed in 1792. The deeds were handed over to the treasurer of the Society in a ceremony at "Widow Wallace's house" on 2nd October, 1922, the 130th birthday of the B.M.S. The second was the purchase of a property in North London which was opened the following year as the Sir Alfred Pearce Gould Hostel for Indian Students. To quote H. L. Hemmens: ". . . the venture began and continued for some years with marked success. But . . . conditions changed and eventually the hostel was closed. It had served a useful purpose and, gradually, its scope had been widened to receive guests of any nationality, so that its character became international and its fellowship world-wide."⁷

In 1926, the Movement was invited to take over responsibility for the administration of the Missionaries' Literature Association. This appears to have been an interdenominational body dating back into the last decade of the 19th century. Now, carried on by a small and ageing committee, it was in danger of fading away altogether. Its function was the simple and charitable work of introducing donors of periodicals of every kind in this country to

⁶ Circular letter to members of the Committee, dated 18th March, 1918.

⁷ *Such Has Been My Life*, pp. 151-2.

missionaries and pastors overseas who would desire to be the grateful recipients and the Movement placed it in the hands of the Rev. C. T. Byford. He had been one of the earliest band of Baptist Union General Superintendents but had had to relinquish his position in 1920 because of a serious illness which left him almost completely paralysed. His was an undaunted spirit, however, and, accepting the invitation with alacrity, he magnificently continued the work of the M.L.A. from his bed right up to the day of his death in 1948. He was succeeded by Mr. E. H. Butcher, who also served until he died in 1953, and towards the end of that year the Rev. W. E. French, B.Sc., who had just retired from the service of the B.M.S. in India, took over. Under his enthusiastic leadership the work continues to flourish and has expanded to serve friends in all five continents.

1927 saw the formation of the Baptist Young Men's Movement, that might almost have been termed a junior reserve of the B.L.M.M. The first Secretary was Mr. Reginald K. Wright, who removed to Africa in the following year, and is now resident in Rhodesia. The first President was the Rev. Sydney G. Morris and he was succeeded by Dr. F. Townley Lord. A later holder of the office was the Rev. Ernest A. Payne, who was President in 1933. The B.Y.M.M. had regular schemes of Bible and missionary study and was used a good deal in conducting week-end evangelistic campaigns in local churches. The upper age limit was 30 (though this does not seem to have applied to Presidents), upon the attainment of which it was expected that members would become associated directly with the senior Movement. The B.Y.M.M. was a casualty of the second war, for by 1946 almost all the 1939 membership had crossed the rubicon and were too old to continue!

DEVELOPMENTS

The Swanwick Conference steadily increased in popularity, the attendances in the 1930s ultimately reaching 300. Probably the outstanding personality of the pre-war conferences was Dr. T. R. Glover and of the post-war gatherings Dr. S. W. Hughes, but very many men played, and still play, their part in the richness and diversity of these week-ends of inspired fellowship. On the other hand, in all honesty it had to be recorded in 1931 that "not many Centres really function today."⁸ Would the Movement therefore be reduced virtually to the arrangement of an admittedly successful Annual Conference and the production of an excellent quarterly magazine? Whatever may have been the answer to that hypothetical question it did not need to be produced because at Swanwick in 1933 the Rev. G. W. Harte, minister of Elm Road Baptist Church, Beckenham, had the opportunity of enlarging upon an idea

⁸ Memorandum presented to National Council, 29th January, 1931.

which he had already written about in *The Baptist Layman* the previous October, viz., the Contact Club, and in retrospect we can see that this marked the beginning of what was to be a radical change in the Movement's policy and activity throughout the country. To be sure, it was not recognized as such at the time and the published reports of the Annual Conference of 1933 carry no mention of that particular talk. From that time, however, Contact Clubs began to be formed in quite a number of churches, and in 1936 the National Council arranged a conference of men's organizations which was held in London under Mr. Harte's chairmanship. One of the results of this conference was that the Movement was asked to act as a clearing house for ideas and promoting new men's organizations. Similar conferences were held annually in the next three years and then came the war which, unlike its earlier counterpart, caused a virtual cessation of much activity and of all conferences on a large scale for several years.

Towards the end of the war, however, in 1944 to be precise, a conference was held in Oxford which completed the process of change which had begun in 1932-33. At that conference it was resolved that the name of the Movement be altered to The Baptist Men's Movement, the objective was simply defined as "To intensify Christian effort at home and abroad," and it was agreed that the organization should be developed with a view to banding men inside and outside the churches into Fellowships. The pendulum had swung and henceforward, although the missionary passion was in no way abated, the energies of the Movement were to be directed in large measure to sharing actively in the evangelisation of the homeland.

We are as yet perhaps too near rightly to appraise the last decade, but brief mention must be made of the trends of development. In 1946, with the National President, the Rt. Hon. Ernest Brown, C.H., in the chair, a mass rally of men was held in Bloomsbury Central Church. Such a rally has continued to be held every year since, with a normal attendance of between 500 and 700 men. In 1948, a memorandum was prepared by Mr. L. G. Mann, Mr. R. G. Brown and the present writer (who had succeeded H. L. Hemmens as Secretary at the Annual Conference that year), which set out a plan for regional development throughout the country, providing for the appointment of honorary Regional Commissioners in areas co-terminous with the Baptist Associations. New men's organizations in the churches, District Federations and Regional Associations continued to be formed and regional and federation conferences began to be held regularly in different areas.

Many of the old leaders had passed away and a new generation was emerging. The constitution was revised, the National Council was strengthened, and an autonomous Movement was founded in

Scotland. Closer contacts were established with similar movements of Baptist men overseas. The Movement participated in the Commonwealth and Empire Baptist Congress in 1951 and shared in the planning and arrangements in this country for the Jubilee Congress of the Baptist World Alliance in 1955. Some of its members have been privileged to co-operate in the conferences for European Baptist men which have been held in Switzerland at the generous invitation of the Rüschklikon Seminary which is under the aegis of the Southern Baptist Convention of the U.S.A. Now in this present year the Movement has issued a Call to all the men of our Baptist churches to responsible Christian living in the fields of witness, service and stewardship.

The question may be asked as to how the Movement is financed. The answer today is that it is entirely by voluntary subscriptions, mainly from Personal Members and affiliated Fellowships and Contact Clubs. No direct grants are sought or received from any denominational organization, except for three small annual donations towards the work of the Missionaries' Literature Association. Office accommodation and clerical assistance are, however, generously provided by the B.M.S., towards which a quite inadequate grant is made annually by the Movement. Needless to say, the willing co-operation thus afforded by the Society is deeply appreciated.

This brief sketch of the history of the Baptist Men's Movement would not be complete without a concluding tribute to the late Harry Lathey Hemmens, for so long the inspiration, under God, of all its activity. Secretary for thirty-one years, editor of the magazine from 1918 to 1952, President in 1951, he gave lavishly at all times of his gifts as speaker, writer and organizer. He was a modest and gracious man and was deservedly popular wherever he went. When he gave up the secretaryship in 1948 to become editor of the newly-constituted Carey Kingsgate Press, he was the recipient of a testimonial gift and an illuminated address. Immediately following his lamented death in September, 1952, a Memorial Fund was launched, the capital of which now exceeds £1,200, and the interest is applied annually as an H. L. Hemmens Scholarship, awarded initially to a male missionary candidate designated for the Congo field of the B.M.S., in which "H.L.H." had a special interest and which the Movement enabled him to visit in 1938.

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