

Salute to Dr. Latourette

ON 9th August, 1964, Dr. Kenneth Scott Latourette celebrates his 80th birthday. The members of the British Baptist Historical Society join with those of their sister-societies in the United States, and with many other historians and friends, in greeting a scholar of world-wide fame and distinction.

Born in the Pacific state of Oregon, Dr. Latourette was a student at Yale University and on the conclusion of his post-graduate studies, spent a year as a Travelling Secretary of the S.V.M.U. before going to China in 1910. Ill-health caused his return from the Far East, but after a few years as Chaplain, he was in 1921 appointed Professor of Missions at Yale in succession to Harlan P. Beach. To this appointment was added in 1927 the Professorship of Oriental History. For the past forty years, Latourette and Yale have been inseparably linked.

Dr. Latourette's monumental seven-volume, *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, is dedicated to Harlan P. Beach (1854-1933). Beach had himself served in China and then the S.V.M.U. before appointment to Yale in 1906, the year of Latourette's graduation. Yale already possessed a remarkable Library of Missions, assembled by George E. Day, a notable 19th century teacher of Biblical languages. Beach went on adding to the library, which soon became one of the outstanding collections in the world. He also fired and directed the interests of Latourette.

Latourette's first major work was *A History of Christian Missions in China*, which was published in 1929. His *magnum opus*, which has justly made him famous throughout the world, began to appear in 1937 and was completed in 1945. It has been followed by a valuable one-volume *History of Christianity* (1954), by a five-volume history of Christianity in the 19th and 20th centuries, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age* (1958-1962) and by a number of smaller works, based on short lecture courses, the best-known of which is probably *The Unquenchable Light* (1941). One series of lectures was delivered at Regent's Park College, Oxford, in 1947, and Dr. Latourette's presence there gave the University the opportunity of making him the first Baptist to receive the degree of D.D. *honoris causa*. The Public Orator on that occasion referred to the *History of the Expansion of Christianity* as "a sevenfold shield against the bolts of Ignorance."

This has been Dr. Latourette's great contribution to his readers. With tireless industry he has assembled the facts about the impact of the Christian Faith from generation to generation and from land to land. He has recorded its defeats as well as its victories, but has provided detailed evidence for his own belief that "the course of Christianity in the history of mankind has been somewhat like that of an incoming tide. . . . Each major wave carries the waters a

little higher than did its predecessor. Each retreat from a major wave carries the flood a little less farther back than did the one before it." To have this said with such unrivalled scholarly authority in decades which have been so difficult for the Christian Church in many lands, has been an outstanding service. He has himself expressed surprise that no one previously undertook so comprehensive and inclusive a study. In drawing, as he did, so thoroughly on Roman Catholic sources, he was at least two decades ahead of most of his contemporaries, even in the world of scholarship.

In the introduction to one of his volumes, Dr. Latourette states that he was "trained in the school of modern history which looks askance at the supernatural and sees in the flow of events simply mechanical and human factors." He goes on to say that he has been "unable to avoid calling attention from time to time to facts which he regards as insufficiently accounted for on the assumptions of the school of history in which he has been reared." There has been in all his writing, a scrupulous respect for the facts, but also a most welcome modesty and candour in the attempt to interpret them.

Christianity in a Revolutionary Age is dedicated by Dr. Latourette "gratefully and affectionately," "to all, both past and present, who as his secretaries have aided the author." He has always paid tribute to his students and to those who have been his helpers at Yale and his companions on his visits abroad. He has been a great encourager of others and the friend of workers in many countries and of many denominations besides his own. He has been truly catholic and ecumenical in his appraisals and in his sympathies, but unswervingly loyal to his Baptist convictions.

"What does the future hold in store?" he asks at the end of his latest volume. "That, the historian as historian cannot wisely say. . . . As a Christian he is sustained by the realisation that history does not disclose all and that life does not stop with physical death. Believing as he does in personal immortality, not as a mere continuation of existence, but as eternal fellowship with the risen and triumphant Christ and with those who had entered upon the life with Christ in a growing knowledge and love of God, he trusts that in ways which he cannot distinguish the seemingly impossible hope will be realised and that God, 'Who revealed His love in Christ and is ever seeking the wanderers, will triumph not only among human spirits but also in the entire universe, both—to men this side of death—seen and unseen. He sees much in history which puzzles him but nothing that clearly makes this illusory.'"

In prospect of his 80th birthday, we proudly and gratefully salute the *doyen* of Baptist historians, Dr. Kenneth Scott Latourette, and wish him many more years of health and happiness.

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