

The Coming Missionary Conference at Edinburgh.

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“ IS it a hope too unreasonable to be entertained that the power which will heal the divisions of the Church at home may come from the distant mission-field ?” Half a century ago Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand and Lichfield asked this question. We venture to think that the best claim of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of June, 1910, to be remembered hereafter, will be that it did more than had ever been done hitherto to fulfil this hope. This will not be because it is the first missionary conference, or because promotion of unity is its dominant aim ; for it has had predecessors, and puts forward other notable purposes, promising to lead to other substantial results.

So long ago as 1854 there was a conference on missions at New York, for which Alexander Duff, the founder of educational missions in India, prepared eight stimulating subjects for discussion. The Foreign Mission Boards of the United States and Canada have met annually for sixteen years, and twelve Missionary Conferences have been held on the Continent of Europe. Moreover, facilities for international amenities, through easy rapid travel, have led to gatherings from yet wider areas. In 1860, 120 delegates, representing 25 societies, met at Liverpool for deliberations and discussions not open to the public. In 1878, a larger assembly, including American and Continental delegates, met at the Mildmay Conference Hall in London. More widely representative was the Centenary Conference of Protestant Missions in London in 1888, attended by 1,600 members from 53 societies, British, American, and Continental. Unhappily, our own Church was only half represented, because the leaders of the S.P.G. did not see their way to sharing in it. Still more influential was the Ecumenical Missionary Conference in New York in 1900, attended by 2,500 delegates from more than 250 societies.

Various rousing centenary celebrations about that time may also be recalled, especially those of the Church Missionary Society in 1899, and of the Bible Society in 1904, and the Bi-centenary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1901; also the Conference of the World's Student Christian Federation in Tokio in 1907, the first international conference ever held in Asia; and the Pan-Anglican Congress of 1908, where nearly 10,000 members of the Anglican communion met from every part of the world to consider, first of all though not exclusively, missionary enterprise. Lastly may be mentioned the Canadian National Missionary Congress in Toronto, in March, 1909, the first example of missions being dealt with by the Christians of a single nation, acting in a national capacity.

It would probably be superfluous to describe the plans and aims of the coming Edinburgh Conference in great detail, as many readers are doubtless familiar with them through subscribing for the eight *Monthly News Sheets* published from October, 1909, onwards.¹ Briefly it concerns the following circles, widening out from its Executive Committee at the centre: the eight Commissions, each consisting of about twenty members, who have for some months past been considering as individuals and conferring together concerning these eight subjects: (*a*) Carrying the Gospel to all the world; (*b*) the Native Church and its workers; (*c*) Education in relation to the Christianization of national life; (*d*) the missionary message in relation to non-Christian Religions; (*e*) the Preparation of missionaries; (*f*) the Home Basis of missions; (*g*) relation of missions to Governments; (*h*) Co-operation and the promotion of unity. Every effort has been made to select persons who should be fairly representative of the missionary enterprise of Reformed Christendom in all its width and variety so as to form an international and interdenominational body of experts. There are 96 ministers of religion, 55 laymen, and 14 women on it; 92 British and 51 American members, 22 from France, Germany, Scandinavia,

¹ To be had by forwarding 2s. to the Secretary, World Missionary Conference, 100, Princes Street, Edinburgh.

Switzerland, and Holland. Of the British members, about half are Anglicans (including "High," "Evangelical," "Broad," and "Moderate," in fair proportion); about a quarter Presbyterians; while the remaining quarter is made up in about equal proportion of Congregationalists, Wesleyans, and Baptists; all taking counsel together over a common task. Some, looking at the names of four of the eight chairmen and of not a few members besides, might complain that Scotland is over-represented; but apart from the fact that Edinburgh is hostess, can any people, except the Moravians, show such a record of illustrious missionaries and splendid missionary achievement as the Scottish people?

We recognize six classes of persons on the lists:

(1) Leaders of the Church at home, such as the Bishops of Southwark and Birmingham, of Ossory and Aberdeen, and of Massachusetts and Albany, U.S.A.; and the Dean of Westminster. (2) Responsible officials of the great missionary societies, such as Bishop Montgomery and Canon Robinson of the S.P.G.; Bishop Ingham, Prebendary Fox, Dr. Eugene Stock, Mr. Maconachie, Dr. Lankester, and Miss Gollock of the C.M.S.; the Rev. Duncan Travers of the Universities Mission; the Rev. A. Taylor and the Rev. J. H. Ritson of the Bible Society; Mr. Broomhall of the China Inland Mission; the Rev. T. Tatlow, Mr. John Mott, and Miss Rouse of the Student Christian Federation; Bishops La Trobe and Hassé representing the Moravians; the Rev. R. T. Gardner of the Anglican Central Board of Missions; Dr. Wardlaw Thompson of the L.M.S.; and the Rev. Marshall Hartley of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. (3) Missionaries of long experience in the field such as Dr. J. Campbell Gibson, joint chairman of the Shanghai Conference; and Dr. Zwemer, author of well-known books on Islam. A century and a half of service in the mission-field may be reckoned up by adding together the periods during which the missionaries on the Commission about the Native Churches have been there. (4) Students of missions such as Professor Warneck, the historian of Protestant missions. (5) Heads of colleges and prominent education-

alists, such as the Masters of Selwyn College, Cambridge, and Magdalen College, Oxford; the Principals of Mansfield College, Oxford, and of Toronto University; the Dean of Oberlin University, Ohio; the Vice-Principal of Westfield College; the Principal of Wycliffe College, Toronto; Professor Sadler of Manchester; and Dr. Parkin, Secretary of the Rhodes Trust. (6) Statesmen and Empire-builders, such as Lord Balfour of Burleigh, the President of the Conference; Sir Andrew Wingate; Sir Andrew Fraser; Sir Robert Hart; Sir Ernest Satow; and Admiral Mahan. The mere names indicate how far we have moved on from times when it was possible to disparage missions as the fad of a few insignificant people whose piety was more conspicuous than their intelligence; they should compel even the general public to wake up to the vital importance and growing complexity of the missionary enterprise.

Round about the 165 members of the Commissions are several thousand "corresponding members," missionaries, and representative native Christians all over the world, who provide the voluminous material upon which the opinions and conclusions of the experts will be based. One of the busiest and ablest missionaries in India, for instance, devoted the greater part of ten days to answering their questions. Their conclusions will be put before and discussed by 1,100 delegates appointed by all the societies to represent them, the number sent by each being proportionate to its annual income; and from June 14 to June 23 these delegates will fill the Assembly Hall of the United Free Church. Simultaneous meetings for the rank and file of subscribers to missions will be held in the Synod Hall, which holds 2,000, and meetings of a yet more popular kind will be held at Edinburgh and Glasgow during the Conference, and elsewhere, both before and after it.

Its value will depend after all upon the amount of preparation in thought and prayer not only of the few actively organizing it, but of the whole body of those who know and care anything about the evangelization of the world; and the Confer-

ence therefore claims the immediate co-operation in interest and in intercession of everyone who believes it to be the will of God that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

How, then, may its purposes be summed up? Two convictions are forcing themselves upon all those who have any understanding of the times in which we live. That, while of late years missionary work has grown wonderfully, it has been altogether outgrown by the opportunities for doing it, opportunities that the Christians of a hundred years ago would hardly have dared to pray for. The world is one as it never was before, even under Imperial Rome; "the unchanging East" has suddenly become an obsolete phrase; the Orient is crying out to the Occident for its wisdom and its science; and both at home and abroad every Christian must be either a champion of his faith or a traitor to it. The opportunity is great, but it is passing; ever since the Russians' repulse at the Yalu in 1904, we might say since the Italians' defeat at Adowah in 1896, the European's arrogant claim to unquestionable superiority has been challenged; those who are eager and docile to-day may become scornful and even aggressive to-morrow. We live our lives at a momentous crisis of the world's history. The second conviction is that while enterprise abroad has lagged behind opportunity, enthusiasm and effort at home have in a still more marked degree lagged behind enterprise abroad. And all around us are sincere Christians who would care so much and do so much if they only knew a little more; and other Christians who are in danger of losing hold on the faith because they think of it as an entailed estate for themselves, not as a trust committed to them for their fellows. "How much of what is mine must I give to God?" is their question, instead of "How much of what is God's dare I keep for myself?" So of course the societies are struggling with deficits, and the Church is threatened with that doleful condition of the invalid who has consulted all the eminent doctors, tried all the most highly recommended "treatments," and visited all the favourite health-resorts, and who is hopeless of

cure because no one has the insight and courage to say: "Your real need is an interest in life that will take you out of yourself, and constrain you to give of your best to another."

The World Missionary Conference is to be no mere effusion of pious sentimentality, but a practical effort to cope with this state of things. First, it is to be a demonstration of the extent and success of missions, claiming for them from the public a more intelligent sympathy. The long and cordial leading article about it which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* of January 30, 1909, saying that "an event of next year, but demanding preparation at once, may mark an epoch in the spread of Christianity" was a foretaste of what it may mean in this respect. Secondly, it aims at humbling and encouraging the Church, and fortifying it in obedience to its great Commission, so lifting its life to a higher plane. The task before the Church is certainly beyond its present spiritual powers, but not beyond the powers it may hope to receive as it rises to the whole responsibility and glory of its calling. Thirdly, it will subject the plans and methods of the whole missionary enterprise to searching investigation, and co-ordinate missionary experience from all parts of the world, so that the means at the disposal of the societies for fulfilling their task may be turned to the very best account. It is an official of one society who says that "doubtless as a result there will be a good deal of change in the policy and administration of some societies."

In olden times a battle resolved itself into a series of single combats, and its issue might be determined by a sudden onrush of half-equipped irregulars. Nowadays combatants fire at long range with weapons of precision on an unseen foe, and accordingly not only prowess but proficiency in science and mathematics is demanded of the aspirant to a commission from His Majesty. During last century, missionary enterprise was often but a reconnaissance in force, spasmodic, and unorganized in relation to the field to be occupied and the forces engaged. But in this century such experimental methods must give place to a plan of campaign depending on an exact science of missions, for which

material has long been accumulating and now waits to be worked up.

The avowed hope of the organizers of the Conference is, then, that it will prove not an end but a beginning of wider public support of missions ; of deeper spiritual life in the Church, which needs energizing at home quite as much as it needs extending abroad ; of more efficient service in the field, when a constructive and statesmanlike policy has been thought out ; and beyond and behind all these important purposes, we may foresee that it will bring about a new sympathy and mutual understanding between Christians who look at different aspects of the common truth, who have been too ready to suppose that their own is the only point of view from which truth can be seen at all. Bishop Westcott prophesied that reunion would begin at the circumference rather than at the centre ; and of all the reflex influences from the mission-field which we trace in the Church at home to-day, none is more blessed than that which makes us review our religion as it presents itself to those who are altogether detached from the historic origins of those differences which often loom so large here. The Pan-Anglican Congress of two years ago demonstrated that Churchmen of different schools of thought could work towards a common aim in absolute unanimity. This year we are to go a step farther, "except in opinion not disagreeing," through this Conference. In the vigorous words of the Bishop of Manchester, "common action without surrender of conscientious principle" is the keynote of the World Missionary Conference. So far from discussing ecclesiastical differences, it will ignore them. And yet such a "burning" subject as the organization of Native Churches is to be thrashed out by assembled representatives of the Universities' Mission in East Africa, Presbyterian missions in China, the Baptist Missionary Society, the Congregationalist London Missionary Society, the China Inland Mission, to say nothing of American, German, Canadian, Swedish, and Swiss societies, all ecclesiastically separate from ourselves. They dare to grapple with this problem together because it has to be dealt with somehow in the

field ; there it is not an academic question to be settled some day, but a practical question that must be settled at once ; and we are learning to face it together, not by obliterating, but by rising above our differences, through the realized absurdity of perpetuating them in the regions beyond. A hundred years ago a Scottish Synod deprecated "the lowering of denominational testimony by promiscuous association in mission work." We are slowly learning, as we study the New Testament and Church history, that the Church must stand or fall as it is faithful or unfaithful to its "marching orders"; that the work which it dares not leave undone can only be achieved if all Christians stand shoulder to shoulder in doing it, and if large funds hitherto devoted to other objects can be claimed for it. What if this Conference were so to educate our own Church that a self-denying ordinance could be passed, whereby for five years one set of Church-people resolved to halve their expenditure on choir and flowers, and to do without the costly needlework and the richly carved reredos ; and another set, who regard such luxuries of worship as hindrances rather than aids to devotion, resolved to take the risk of leaving error unrebuked by organized and expensive campaigns of fierce invective ; while the moderate Churchman who dislikes all extremes resolved to revise his personal expenditure, to taste the privilege and joy of giving to missions, not what he can spare, but what entails genuine sacrifice of ease and pleasure? We believe that at the end of the five years the Church would be more reverent in worship and more Scriptural in doctrine ; that the lives of Church-people would be in every way richer and happier ; that the incomes of the missionary societies would never fall back to their present utter inadequacy.

What we need most of all is clear vision of the world's need and of our own duty ; we are bound to pray that this vision may come to thousands of Christians through the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910.

