

A Great Venture

BY THE BISHOP OF BRADFORD

NEVER in the history of the world have such concerted efforts been made to tackle the problem of illiteracy as those which have been made during recent decades. To mention the name of Frank Laubach is to mention but one (if the most famous) of those who are seeking to wipe out a scourge which deprives a great percentage of the world's population of what we so readily take for granted. Millions of people, young, middle-aged, and even old, are learning to read every year. *What will they read?*

One of the things which most forcibly strikes a visitor to Africa is the passion of the younger generation for education. The reasons for this may not always be of the highest—the motives may be mixed or even base. But there it is, a fact to be reckoned with. And to meet that desire enormous efforts are being made. I had the privilege of visiting, at the beginning of the year, the University College of Ghana at Achimota, and the University College of Ibadan. Vast sums of money are being spent in both countries on the buildings which Maxwell Fry has planned so spaciouly and imaginatively; great effort is being put forward to supply adequate staff and—perhaps, a greater problem this—to find enough students of calibre good enough for University education. Such effort means that a steady stream of educated Africans will be poured back from schools and universities into African society, and this stream will increase in volume as the years go by. These young men and women will in turn influence others. Will that influence be for or against the Christian faith and the Christian way of life? Will these educated young Africans have an intelligent grasp of what Christianity really is and of what the Christian really believes? Or will they give, with all the prestige that a good education brings them, a garbled version, a caricature of the real thing? Much depends on *what they read* during school and university days. To educate, but to fail to put into the hands of the newly educated the right kind of books, would be to create a vacuum which would hold vast possibilities of disaster. There are plenty of others, Communists included, who would like to fill such a vacuum.

Three months spent in East Africa during 1955 impressed upon the writer the utter urgency of supplying the clergy there with books with which they could implement an education often necessarily sparse, and enliven and deepen a ministry which often made almost impossible demands on them. There was all too little to recommend for these godly men to read.

What I have written of Africa could probably be written of all the younger Churches, though the levels of culture and standards of education no doubt vary from place to place.

And here in England the need for books which will present the Christian Faith simply and intelligently, and at a price within the reach of all, is clamant. For the attacks on the Christian Faith are powerful; the misinterpretations of the Christian Faith are pathetic; the assumptions (and the assertions) that the Christian Faith is out-

moded are persistent. The Church has her apologists of the highest rank—we need not be afraid while we have a Dodd, a Coulson, a Hodgson, a Raven, and so on. But the two-guinea specialist books of such men cannot be put into the hands of the majority of general readers. What shall *they* read?

In the above short paragraphs I have tried to sketch some of the areas in which it is of primary importance to have at hand and to circulate widely, books on the Christian Faith which are untechnical, clear, and cheap. "Of *primary* importance"—I use the adjective advisedly, for I can conceive of few things more urgent than the provision of such books to-day for use at home and overseas.

Some four years ago the International Missionary Council (together with other bodies deeply concerned about the provision of Christian literature) sponsored the production of "a series of books covering the whole range of the Christian Faith in the modern world"—a daring concept indeed! They chose as their editor Bishop Stephen Neill, scholar, missionary, writer. The twenty-four slim volumes, which are before me as I write, are a tribute to his vision and tenacity of purpose as he has worked amid great difficulties and handled well nigh intractable problems of production, translation, distribution, inflation (horrid word!) and so forth. Few of these books are of more than 100 pages; none of them cost more than half-a-crown; many of them have been translated into a great variety of languages. Book 24 brings to an end, a triumphal end, the first series. The second series, which is in direct continuity with the first, is well under way. The editor has gathered round him an international team of scholars and churchmen to write the books, and is to be congratulated on an astonishingly fine job. Who can say what effect this almost pioneer piece of work will have all over the world?

Perhaps the best way to indicate the range of these books is to give a list of titles and authors. They are as follows:

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| (1) <i>The Christians' God</i> | by Stephen Neill |
| (2) <i>Christian Giving</i> | by V. S. Azariah |
| (3) <i>Mark's Witness to Jesus Christ</i> | by F. Lohse |
| (4) <i>Christianity and Science</i> | by Charles E. Raven |
| (5) <i>The Christian as Citizen</i> | by John C. Bennett |
| (6) <i>The Christian Character</i> | by Stephen Neill |
| (7) <i>Reading the Bible To-day</i> | by D. T. Niles |
| (8) <i>John's Witness to Jesus</i> | by George Appleton |
| (9) <i>From Brahma to Christ</i> | by L. Tilak |
| (10) <i>Beginning from Jerusalem</i> | by John Foster |
| (11) <i>Jesus and His People</i> | by Paul Minear |
| (12) <i>Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?</i> | by James Martin |
| (13) <i>The Cross is Heaven</i> | by A. J. Appasamy |
| (14) <i>Who is Jesus Christ?</i> | by Stephen Neill |
| (15) <i>A Letter of Wise Counsel</i> | by E. A. Maycock |
| (16) <i>Religious Liberty</i> | by Giovanni Miegge |
| (17) <i>Living with the Gospel</i> | by D. T. Niles |
| (18) <i>Livingstone in Africa</i> | by Cecil Northcott |
| (19) <i>Christ's Messengers</i> | by C. F. D. Moule |

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| (20) <i>Japanese Witnesses for Christ</i> | edited by
Norimichi Ebizawa |
| (21) <i>One Lord, One Church</i> | by Robert Nelson |
| (22) <i>The People of God in the Old Testament</i> | by H. J. Kraus |
| (23) <i>Matthew's Witness to Jesus Christ</i> | by H. M. Ridderbos |
| (24) <i>The Psalms as Christian Praise</i> | by R. B. Y. Scott |

This list shows how the editor has drawn on the wealth of the ecumenical Church, in the realm of scholarship and of missionary experience. No doubt as time passes, the proportion of writers from the younger Churches will increase—indeed, it may be part of the function of these series of books to “discover” writers who, by later and bigger books, will bring the treasures of their Churches’ scholarship and devotion to the feet of Christ and for the enrichment of His Body. The late Bishop Azariah’s book on *Christian Giving* (prefaced by a short “Life” written by his close friend, Bishop Stephen Neill) has already been translated into some two dozen languages, and if read by us at home and debated and acted upon by our Parochial Church Councils, would do us a power of good. *Japanese Witnesses for Christ* (edited by the Reverend N. Ebizawa) introduces us to six Japanese fellow-Christians, unknown even by name to most at least in this country; while Bishop A. J. Appasamy’s *The Cross is Heaven* gives us an over-all view of the life and writings of Sadhu Sundar Singh, Indian saint and mystic. Mrs. L. Tilak, in *From Brahma to Christ*, gives us glimpses of her husband and his family, of his poetry, and of his religious experience. These books alone will do much to draw together the various nationalities within the Catholic Church of Christ, and to help us to share in its riches.

Some of the best work in these twenty-four books is that devoted to Biblical exposition. The New Testament field is better tended than the old, though in the latter we may be grateful for Professor H. J. Kraus’s *The People of God in the Old Testament*, and Professor R. B. Y. Scott’s *The Psalms as Christian Praise*. We have something of an introduction to the Gospels in D. T. Niles’ *Living with the Gospel*, a commentary on St. Matthew (No. 23), on St. Mark (No. 3), on St. John (No. 8), on the first part of the Acts (No. 19, by Professor C. F. D. Moule), and on I Peter (No. 15). That, together with a volume on *Reading the Bible To-day* (No. 7) is a good proportion of strictly Biblical material.

Straightforward theology and ethics are well-represented too. Outstanding are the editor’s three volumes: *The Christians’ God* (No. 1), *The Christian Character* (No. 6), and *Who is Jesus Christ?* (No. 14). The resurrection of Jesus is dealt with by the Reverend James Martin (No. 12) and Church unity by Dr. J. R. Nelson (No. 21). What is meant by Christian citizenship is the theme of volume 5, while the need for Canon C. E. Raven’s *Christianity and Science* (No. 4) can be gauged by the fact that already it has been translated into some eleven languages. Church History just gets a look in, in an excellent little book by Professor John Foster (No. 10) which traces the expansion of Christianity through seventeen centuries.

I close with a plea and some suggestions :

(i) *The plea* is for yet another series, to be produced while the present series goes on, designed for those who are newly literate or very badly educated. There are multitudes on the fringe of Christianity, or recently baptized who could not compass the reading of these books. They have an urgent claim on the attention and care of the Church. I realize that Bishop Neill and his very small staff are hard pressed. I realize that those who could write such simple books as I have in mind are few and far between. But I believe the need is urgent and immediate.

(ii) *Some suggestions.* *World Christian Books* is one of the exciting, creative acts of the Christian Church in this century. Those of us who are alive to the demands of evangelistic educational work at home and overseas ought to line up behind those responsible for this work and see that, so far from allowing it to go by default, we assure its increasing success. What can we do? I would suggest four things :

- (a) *Pray.* This is a work with vast potentialities for good, and indeed (if it were to be mishandled) for ill. The editor, the writers, the translators, the business agents, all need the prayers of the Church.
- (b) See that these books are on the bookstall of your own Church and well known among your Church people.
- (c) See that your local public library knows about these books and takes them.
- (d) See that the missionaries who have gone from your Church get a copy of each book as it comes out. This might well be a gift from the Church to them; and the offer to provide more copies as needed on the field would be very welcome.

The publishers and distributors of *World Christian Books* are the United Society for Christian Literature, 4 Bouverie Street, London, E.C.4.

The Theology of Baptism

BY THE REV. MARTIN PARSONS, M.A.¹

I BEGIN with a quotation which I think will receive universal agreement. It is from Donald Baillie's lecture on baptism in the book, *The Theology of the Sacraments*, edited after his death by his brother, and containing a charming biographical memoir. He says : " Those who are entrusted with the care of souls in the pastoral ministry must frequently ask themselves with some misgivings what the sacrament of baptism means to the main mass of Church people who bring their children to be baptized. But, indeed, a great many ministers must sometimes feel that they themselves have more questions to ask about the meaning of baptism than they are able to answer, and that they are thus not very well equipped to give clear and sound guidance to their people as to what they should believe about this

¹ A paper read to the London Diocesan Union of Evangelical Clergy.