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The Fraternal

New Series.

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THE MINISTRY OF LAYMEN.

THE supply and training of Lay Preachers, both men and women, for service in our Baptist churches is a matter which is becoming acute. In some cases economic pressure makes a full-time pastorate impossible. The grouping of churches is a further indication that the custom of "one church, one minister" can no longer be regarded as the rule. There are difficulties to be overcome, not the least being the unwillingness of many churches to grant the Lay Preacher the place which is given him in Methodism. We are glad to know, on the other hand, that in some Associations nearly all the pulpits are supplied by lay brethren or sisters for one Sunday in the year.

The Polity Commission is considering this question of the ministry of laymen; meanwhile the following extracts from letters received recently may be found helpful.

A North of England correspondent who, for twenty years, was an honorary pastor, quotes from Ingli James's article:—"We cannot place a stipendiary minister in every church; but why not employ pastors who earn their own living, as many a Baptist pioneer was compelled to do? Then, when they have attained a prescribed standard, why should they not be ordained to the pastorate?"

On this the writer comments:—"There is no doubt that existing conditions in our churches call for some revision.

Generally speaking, the pulpits of our larger churches are practically never opened to a layman, unless he happens to be a man of outstanding importance, and even then he is not likely to be regarded as a possible candidate for a vacant pastorate. If, therefore, some system of training and examination could be devised, with something definite at the end of it, such as the position of assistant, or an honorary pastorate, I believe a good deal of our present trouble would be met."

A second letter comes from a retired minister who, for many years, was one of the most trusted leaders in his Association, and who now attends one or other of a group of village churches in the West of England: "I have learned one thing; we in cities talk easily about grouping, but such a project will not be successful unless at the same time we seriously undertake classes for the training of the Lay Preacher. I am neither a sermon taster nor a critic; I admire the sacrifice and labour of 'the Local,' many of whom walk or cycle miles to their engagements; yet something needs to be done if we are to hold our young people and to build up spiritual churches. Grouping may be arranged; but can men be supplied for two services out of three—men who are able not merely to preach acceptably, but to lead a worshipful service?"

Our third quotation is from a minister in the Midlands, who for several consecutive Sundays attended the ministry of laymen: "The messages I heard were well worth hearing; in the conduct of the services there was all that could be desired, and the delivery was characterised by that self-effacement, earnestness, and reverence which greatly pleases and helps when present. We owe a debt of gratitude to the lay preachers, and to them I would say a big 'Thank you' and assure them that if they show Jesus Sunday by Sunday to their hearers as they did to me they will never fail to be a blessing."

All three writers are at one in appreciation of the service rendered by laymen, but all would agree on the necessity for our ministers—(1) to discover young people of education who would consecrate their gifts to the work of preaching; (2) to organise systematic training, leading to a qualifying examination; (3) to grant to those thus qualified a denominational standing and an opportunity of consecutive ministerial service exceeding that which has obtained hitherto. Here is an urgent post-war problem needing to be thought out while, alas, war is still with us.

THE DIVINE STRATEGY.

THE Principal of a Theological College relished the story of another divine who said: "I am not afraid to preach to probationers, nor am I timid about preaching to ministers, but there is a thing called 'a divinity student'; may I be preserved from preaching to it!"

What is the difference between the divinity student and the minister if it is not the fact that when the student has graduated into the preacher, he finds that preaching is not so easy as it looked, and he comes to a humbler conception of his own powers and a warmer appreciation of the powers of other people.

The ministry does not occupy to-day the high elevation once attributed to it. There was a day when Cowper could exclaim: "There goes the parson, O illustrious spark." The spark is not extinguished, for the true vocation of the ministry is not of man but of God, and from one spark He can kindle in the land and in the world His sacred flame, His holy fire.

At this season of the year we take occasion to review the public situation to see where and how we can measure our resources against the demands of a sorely distracted world. We more commonly require to be reminded than to be instructed. It is good for Christians, says Bunyan, to be often calling to mind the beginning of grace with their soul. We can go further back than that; we can go back to the beginning of the grace of Jesus Christ, Who chose to be born a member of a depressed and captive race, Who grew up in enemy occupied country, and made the first messengers of His scheme of world dominion a handful of men of the same disadvantaged race.

But the New Testament strikes no despondent note, wastes no emotion deploring the inequality of the disciples' equipment against their stupendous task; the supernatural good was on their side; no sense of inferiority depressed or disabled them. They mounted to the height of their privilege and set in motion forces that will not cease to work till God has made a new heaven and a new earth. These same supernatural forces are with us for this gigantic time.

God's purpose is as wide as the world and as long as time. Lovers of art have remarked that the pictures of Watts are intimate and near in their perspective, whereas the paintings of Turner are projected into far vistas. It is sometimes good for us

to change our perspective, to relieve the tension of the close-up view by the prospect further afield :

For, not by Eastern windows only,
 When daylight comes, comes in the light; ·
 In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
 But Westward look, the land is bright.

The situation may be reversed for our good, our encouragement may be at our own door; these keep us going even if elsewhere reverses are reported.

Our Lord gave us no precise programme of action; our warrant is to go into all the world and make disciples. That is vague enough, but it is also precise enough as a commission of action. Alexander, setting out on his conquests, remarked to Aristotle that he wanted to make all men Greeks; Byron is credited with having taken the English mind on pilgrimage through Europe; Tagore is said to have taken the Indian mind on pilgrimage through the world. "We have the mind of Christ," said the apostle, the only mind great enough for the comprehension of the world. The mind of Christ suffers no limitations; it bears no national prejudices or colour; it is the mind of God located in a human brain for a season, and able to locate itself in every brain throughout the world up to the measure of every man's capacity.

God's purpose for all the world demands all one's life. An American writer has said that Britain is at this hour a lighthouse on the edge of a dark and stormy sea. That is the vocation of a people, but it can never be completely discharged until every soul feels that in its own sphere it has charge of a lighthouse; every life lighted from heaven helps the general illumination.

I wonder sometimes if the appeasement mentality, which has been so disastrous in politics, has affected the religious realm, so that we have made terms with conditions with which our warrant permits no compromise at all. Under the influence of custom and accommodation, of tolerance and broadmindedness, we accept circumstances and associations with which only the severely modified claims of Jesus Christ could be at peace. Detail is unnecessary; we are facing a period of unprecedented difficulty and strain; but it will be our privilege to prove that our resources in God are equal to our responsibilities among men. We are matched with one of the great hours of history; this cannot be an accident or a mistake. The question "Who knoweth

whether thou hast come to the Kingdom for such a time as this?" is true for more than the Hebrew maid to whom the words were first addressed.

Wordsworth, in one of England's great hours, wanted Milton back again; England had need of him. Carlyle saw no hope for our country except God would give us new Cromwells and another race of Puritans. But we must think in a bigger way than that, and count ourselves by the election of God the privileged servants of His grace for such a time as this. We may have to think in a big and generous way about the co-operation of all truly Christian forces.

Wherever we can share a common doctrine that will inspire a common deed for God and for mankind, we must make that doctrine serve. It is inconceivable that all who serve the Axis Powers should be in complete agreement about details of political belief and administration; it is equally beyond belief that all who are associated with Britain's cause share a common faith or a common hope concerning religion and public life. The work of Christ throughout the world is big enough to make us feel that this is no time for petty indispositions and feeble escapes. When Brutus visited Ligarius he found him out of condition and lying on his couch. "O Ligarius," exclaimed Brutus, "what a time is this to be sick?" The man turned on his couch and, raising his hand toward the visitor, exclaimed: "But if Brutus has any cause worthy of himself, Ligarius is well."

The cause of Christ is great enough to cure countless indispositions; to get sick men off the couch and put them on their feet, face to face with tasks that demand all the vigour of our lives and all the power of Pentecost. Our Lord came upon men for whom the world seemed to have neither place nor purpose; when He inquired the reason of their idleness they replied that no man had hired them. Jesus Christ is out to engage all the capacities that He can recruit, to bring into play every latent talent, and find full employment for our half-occupied hours. That is the strategy of God for such a time as this—every life at its utmost and its best, and God within it, God behind it, for the execution of His designs.

Let us be persuaded of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ for the tasks before us. He never failed the faith of the faintest heart. His patience outlasted the intolerance of His disciples. When they were harsh and vindictive concerning the Samaritan village

that refused Him welcome He led them to another village, conducting them away from inward fires which he had not lighted, to a cooler air and a calmer view of life. Where all others fainted and failed and His disciples were humiliated with defeat, He said concerning the life that had resisted their attempt at magic "Bring him unto me."

He is sufficient for the deepest, darkest tragedy we can anywhere encounter; His grace has perpetual virtue. Our Bethesdas exhaust themselves at the first cure; we suffer countless limitations of effort, energy and achievement. His Bethesda has exhaustless potency; the last to come will get as much as the first, for there is no end to Christ. Where politicians and monarchs fail, the messenger of God will say: "Let him come now to me, and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." We are servants of the supernatural, and the supernatural that is of God knows neither failure nor limitation.

Our people must share our ministry; they must themselves be the distributors of the bounty of God; they must be the communicators of His purpose and love till all men shall see the salvation of God and the knowledge of Him shall overspread the world. It is the contribution of every leaf of every tree that clothes the forest with summer glory; it is the effort of every blade of grass that makes the pastures green; it is the service of every Christian man and every Christian woman that will make the whole world good. God shall be Guest in every home when He owns a shrine in every heart. Out of new homes will arise the new community, and from the new communities will appear the new order of the Kingdom of God. The structure that God does not rear will have neither place nor permanence.

JOHN MACBEATH.

AN URGENT APPEAL TO OUR MEMBERS BY OUR CHAIRMAN.

OUR Fellowship, from its inception, has felt that there are defects in our ministerial order that need remedying, but no fact has disturbed us so deeply as the inadequacy of the stipends received by some of our brethren. In letters we have received from members blessed with higher salaries indignation has been expressed in burning words, and action has been urged by us ministers to remove a reproach that denies the practical reality of our brotherhood in the Baptist ministry.

Our Committee has not been idle or silent in the matter. Our Secretary, in season and out of season, has expressed our point of view, and now the Baptist Union has decided to adopt a minimum stipend, which will mean at least £4 a week for all our married ministers. Mr. Aubrey has launched the scheme in his page in the *Baptist Times*, and we are grateful to him for such a forcible and finely worded presentation of the case. All our ministers have received the statement and appeal issued by the Baptist Union, and we know that even this modest effort will require a fund of £7,000 a year.

Our Committee ask all our members, as a matter of urgency, to do their utmost in helping to raise this amount. This campaign is the official answer to our desires and hopes, and the writer feels that the challenge of it comes home to our Fellowship. Let us, by our whole-hearted response, prove to the Baptist Union that, when they respond to our appeals, we have something more than high-sounding phrases to offer, and that we will support them until success is achieved. We can help in the following ways:—(1) Send in our personal gift, in proportion to the salary we receive. (2) Approach those in our churches who are in a position to help and who will gladly give if the case is presented to them on its merits. (3) Give our churches the opportunity of sharing in this effort to lift the remuneration of faithful and devoted ministers to the level of something like a living wage.

Frankly, as Chairman, I feel our Fellowship is on its trial. The gauntlet has been thrown down to us. I have no doubt it will be picked up with alacrity, and that we will all experience a great joy in coming to the assistance of brethren who never complain, but in these days of difficulty and perplexity carry on their work as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

E. CORNS DAVIES.

ASPECTS OF BAPTIST POLITY.

THE Polity Committee was set up "to examine Baptist Polity—together with any matters relating to the status and conditions of the ministry—with a view to reporting what changes it deems necessary in the relationship of our churches to one another, to the ministry, the colleges, and the Union." It has made the most comprehensive study of the problems of our polity that has yet been undertaken. The Committee issued an Interim Statement last March, and a further report, embodying its con-

clusions over the whole field of its investigations will probably be issued in 1942. The findings on Stipends, Settlements and Changes in Pastorates, and the Time Limit are embodied in this article, which is intended to provide a starting point for discussion in fraternal on questions of Baptist polity which relate specifically to our ministry. We shall value the considered views of fraternal and members on these matters. Another article, dealing with other aspects of polity, will appear in a subsequent issue of "The Fraternal." I assume in what I have written below that no adjustments in our denominational machinery, however helpfully they may contribute to greater efficiency in the discharge of our tasks in the churches, will of themselves generate spiritual revival. I would, moreover, ask the brethren to bear in mind one important consideration which is sometimes forgotten—namely, that in any advance to a better Baptist polity we must carry the churches with us. Without their co-operation nothing effective can be achieved.

1. *The Training of the Ministry.*

Here are two questions for college-trained men.

- (a) As you look back over your college course in the light of your work as a minister, what changes, if any, would you suggest to make that training more adequate?
- (b) Have you felt conscious of any need for guidance and help during your ministry, especially in the years immediately after leaving college, which is not at present available, or do you consider that the present scheme of probationary studies is sufficient?

Here is a question for non-collegiate men.

In what ways do you consider the Denomination might give more adequate help in carrying out the tasks of your ministry? Would you welcome, for example, a yearly summer school, with lectures on theology, sermon making, and pastoral work?

2. *Stipends.*

Our ministry has for a long time been conscious that its brotherhood ought to find fuller expression in regard to stipends. Many of our brethren are receiving stipends which inevitably mean continuous financial strain. It is important to realise the magnitude of the problem, viewed financially. It has been suggested that if our better paid ministers contributed part of their stipends to a fund from which their brethren could be

helped, something effective might be done. The amount available from any such scheme would be comparatively small and quite inadequate to the need. The recent War Emergency Fund (Low Stipend Augmentation) appeal has revealed that it will cost about £7,000 a year to raise the minimum stipend of our accredited ministers to £4 a week for married men and £3 5s. for single men. Our ministers have an opportunity, in face of this appeal, to prove their concern for one another both by securing a generous response to it and by their own contributions.

If this new standard is secured, we cannot with self-respect contemplate going back on it when the war is over. How can the proposed new level be permanently maintained and, if possible, improved? Two possibilities suggest themselves:

- (a) If the collections for the Sustentation Fund could be improved to the extent of £5,000 a year, the new minimum could be maintained, provided also that between £5,000 and £6,000 a year could be found to replenish the rapidly shrinking Supplemental Fund. Is this a feasible plan?
- (b) A more ambitious scheme, commended by the Polity Committee in its Interim Statement, would be to make the Sustentation Fund, not as it is to-day, a scheme for aiding weak churches, but a scheme for maintaining an adequate ministry for the whole Church. To make this possible an appeal would have to be made to the churches to contribute a fixed quota to a central fund, and to add to that (on the Presbyterian model) a contribution over and above the minimum stipend previously agreed upon. This would help to avoid discrepancies in stipends, and so would assist the movement of ministers. Every accredited minister would then receive his minimum stipend from the central fund. Such a scheme would enable the Baptist Union to assure a minimum stipend to all its accredited ministers holding qualifying office. A plan of this kind would in effect only be carrying out the implications of the considerable measure of responsibility for ministerial training and support which the Denomination has already undertaken through its Accredited List, its annual service for ministers who have been admitted to this list, its Sustentation and Superannuation Funds, though it would constitute a more thorough-going

recognition of the significance of the ministry in the life of the Denomination.

3. *Settlements and Changes in Pastorates.*

At present there is no accepted method of settlement amongst us. Churches are sometimes guided by the General Superintendent, a college Principal, or by ministers whom they know. There would probably be substantial agreement that what we want is a plan of settlement, accepted by ministers and churches alike, which will lead to the avoidance of the competitive element, and which will make impossible long vacancies in pastorates. The following recommendations have been made by the Polity Committee :

(a) Each Area Committee shall be empowered to set up such sub-committees as may be necessary to advise and co-operate with the churches in matters relating to ministerial settlements.

(b) When a church becomes vacant, the General Superintendent shall invite the church to form a Selection Committee. This committee shall act in consultation with the Area Committee (either through the General Superintendent or a specially appointed sub-committee) concerning candidates for the vacant pastorate, in order to ensure that :

- (1) A vacant church shall consider only one name at a time, and a definite decision shall be reached on each candidate before the next name is submitted.
- (2) No one who can be regarded as a candidate shall be invited to preach, other than the one agreed upon by the Selection Committee of the church. A list of possible supplies for other Sundays would be available from the General Superintendent. Churches receiving letters from ministers asking for preaching engagements would refer them to the Area Committee, and any minister invited to preach at a vacant church would not do so unless assured that his name had gone forward in a regular manner.
- (3) A minister who desires a change of pastorate shall advise the General Superintendent. (This would apply to all ministers.) The Denomination cannot accept any financial responsibility for ministers out of pastoral charge unless they have resigned in the manner prescribed in the scheme.

4. *The Time Limit.*

The widespread conviction amongst ministers that the compulsory Time Limit is not in the best interests of the work of the churches calls for an examination of the possibilities of finding some alternative. Objection is taken in particular to the special church meeting required by the present scheme, and to its explicit statement that the minister will be leaving his pastorate unless re-invited. We have to remember that the Time Limit is part of the machinery for administering Trust Funds, and it was doubtless partly for this reason that the Time Limit Commission of the Pastoral Session took the view that a bare proposal to abolish it would not be accepted by the Baptist Union Council and Assembly. Fraternalists are invited to consider the following recommendations of the Polity Committee :

That the compulsory Time Limit be abandoned, and that all churches, aided or unaided, shall be free to issue invitations to their pastorates on the same conditions.

That a Guaranteed Period proposal be commended to churches and ministers, on the ground that this would secure the advantages which the Time Limit affords, without the necessity for a special church meeting required by the present scheme. The Guaranteed Period proposal would mean that churches would invite ministers on the understanding that the pastorate may be terminated by either side, but with a guarantee that the determination clause will not be put into operation by the church for a definite period. In normal circumstances the guaranteed period should not be less than five years. The church would be advised to insert a clause in the invitation as under:

“That the Rev. — be invited to accept the pastorate of the church at — on the understanding that—

- (1) In normal circumstances, either the minister or the church may terminate the pastorate by giving nine months' notice at any time, in the manner prescribed in the Scheme of Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation.
- (2) In exceptional circumstances (including the receipt of an invitation to another pastorate) it shall suffice for the minister to give three months' notice to terminate the pastorate.

If the Rev. — accepts the invitation, the church gives a guarantee not to put this clause into operation for at least five

years, unless circumstances arise which, in the opinion of the church and the Sustentation Executive, justify an earlier termination of the pastorate, in which case the church may reduce the period of notice required to terminate the pastorate."

I shall be glad to receive the findings of fraternal members in due course. They should be sent to me, together with comments upon any other aspects of Baptist polity which it is desired to make, at Fuller Manse, Broadway, Kettering.

JOHN O. BARRETT,

Hon. Associate Secretary, Polity Committee.

POLITY AND PURPOSE.

IN this day, when the matter of Church Polity is being discussed, it is well that we should not lose sight of the purpose of it, for that is of primary importance. It can surely be assumed that the readers of this article would agree that the commission "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel . . ." expresses the purpose of Christ for His Church. The Church exists for the purpose of evangelism—for the proclaiming of the Gospel of Saving Grace that both saves from sin and builds up in righteousness. As Bernard Manning expresses it, in his stimulating book "Essays in Orthodox Dissent," pages 72-73, "The Beginning is the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Church is the creation not the proprietor of the good news. The Gospel is not what the Church proclaims; but the Church is that which proclaims the Gospel. The Church is defined rather than tested by its proclamation of the Word and its celebration of the Sacraments. . . . The end for which the Church, the fellowship, exists is the good news." The Church, then, is not an end in itself, but it is an instrument for the fulfilment of a purpose. The overlooking of this fact has often had dire consequences. "The long pre-occupation of the Church with its own continuance as an institution instead of a pre-occupation with its mission to evangelise society, has resulted in an entire secularization of national society" (J. McMurray, "Clue to History," page 105). We must evangelise or perish, and our polity must accordingly be determined by the purpose of bringing men to a saving knowledge of the Gospel and to a building of them up in the Faith. Function must determine structure, and not *vice versa*.

The question now arises: "Does any one system of government further this intention of evangelism more than any other?"

Until we have tried to answer it we have not worthily faced this matter of polity. The consequence may be disturbing, as McMurray suggests (page 12) when he says: "The effort to achieve an intention may, and often does, result in the discovery that the line of action chosen for its realisation is actually the wrong one." There may not be any one answer, but in endeavouring to get light on the matter there are three questions we might well consider. They are: (1) In times of revival, when the true purpose of the Church has been most evidently fulfilled, has any one system of government been spontaneously and generally adopted? (2) When there has been persecution and a danger of the whole body of Christians being exterminated and the Gospel truth lost, have the believers, to preserve themselves and their faith spontaneously organised themselves in any particular way? (3) In the building up of the character of Christians that they might become responsible and worthy sons of God does any one system of government make this more possible of achievement than any other?

It is noticeable that in times of revival the newly-won disciples and revitalized Christians have gathered together in local groups (often apart from the official Church). There has been, in other words, a 'gathered church.' These groups of believers have usually been more or less self-governing and self-contained, at least at first. It was so with the Lollards, with the Brethren of the Common Lot, and the Hussites and Anabaptists. In each case they were companies of disciples gathering together in more or less self-contained local groups. During the Methodist revival the converts spontaneously gathered together into local groups for instruction and mutual edification. "The earliest Methodist societies were incipient Congregational churches, with the same craving for mutual edification," says Mackennal. Later they were organised by John Wesley into his own rather cast-iron system, but each subsequent revival within the movement resulted in a breakaway, with an insistence on the local group and the responsibility of each member. Such a mere glance as this is not adequate, but even this does suggest that if any system of government is to be in accord with the true purpose of the Church it must leave a real place for the local church, giving to it definite authority over local affairs and a measure of self-government.

What of times of intense persecution, when the preservation of the Church has been threatened? Has polity mattered? It is

evident that at such times any official hierarchy would cease to function effectively. A persecutor can more easily dispose of a small group of officials and interfere with their activities than he can with a large number of small self-governing groups of believers. So if any branch of the Church is so governed that its organisation depends almost entirely on a few officials, it can soon be made innocuous. At such times even the believers within such churches form themselves into "gathered churches" for their own preservation as Christians. In a recent Christian Newsletter Supplement a correspondent on the continent of Europe, writing on the conditions in the Evangelical Church of Germany, says: "These obstacles, and the partial destruction of the central leadership, are leading to a growing transference of the centre of gravity of Church life to the individual congregation. The individual congregation is more and more becoming the form in which the Ecclesia expresses its life. This Church is beginning in an astonishing way to take on certain features of the early Christian Church." Information also suggests that the same is generally true in Russia—there it is a matter of the individual church meeting in the house of — being the hope for the future and the centre of present Christian activity. These facts do point to the conclusion that the congregational system of government has definite survival value. The same conclusion is borne out by a reference made by John McMurray to the Jews. He is writing of their amazing vitality and power of survival despite intense persecution. What is the secret? Not, he says, elaborate organisation or hierarchical efficiency, but the fact of small live family groups bound by religious ties (how apt a description of a local gathered church!). His actual words are: "The community of Jews has been maintained by religion alone. This in itself proves that human community is created, not by common attachment to the soil, nor by devotion to a leader, nor by political organisation. . . ." It isn't, then, close organisation or elaborate machinery that makes for survival, rather a too dominant hierarchy is likely to make for the extinction of the Church in case of intense persecution. Have we not here one of the principal causes of the almost complete disappearance of the Presbyterian Church in England? There was too much dependence on the central organisation, and the local groups of Christians were unable to stand on their own feet after it ceased to function effectively. The best of our missionaries have realised the same truth, and are encouraging and strengthening the local

groups of believers. So Spacy Waddy, of the S.P.G., said that his aim was so to work that "the native churches could continue without a break even if the Church of England was ever forced to go out of action."

The third point is concerned with the more constructive part of the purpose of the Church—the building up of the individual Christian in faith and character. Character and faith do not fully develop without responsibility. Those who are babes in Christ are never likely to be anything else if they are always made to feel dependent on others—on their authority and guidance and governance. What Mr. Churchill said of the people of Italy is true spiritually as well as politically, and applies to the Church as well as to the nation that is excessively totalitarian. He said: "Perhaps they have been so long controlled and disciplined and ruled, and so much relieved of all share in the government of their own country, that they have not felt those virile emotions which are the foundation for the actions of brave armies, and which are best nourished by discipline imposed upon freedom." For both citizens of the world and citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven there is a real and close connection between responsibility and character. Whatever be the defects of the congregational system of church government, it does emphasise the responsibility of the local group and of each one within the group. In fact the main emphasis of it is responsibility and not isolation, as Dr. N. Micklem points out in his *What is the Faith?* (p. 218).

It is significant to me that a consideration of the three points does at least indicate that if the Church is to fulfil its true purpose it must leave a real place in its organisation for the local church, and give to it a large measure of self-government, and to each member of it a sense of personal responsibility. The need surely is to strengthen, and not to weaken, the local church, if the true purpose of Christ's Church is to be fulfilled. In all considerations of federation and reunion we need to keep this firmly in mind, and not neglect, for a temporary advance, a vital truth.

L. J. MOON.

PENCIL MARKS IN A BOOK OF DEVOTION.

DORA GREENWELL has a poem with this title and an appropriate motto from *Robinson Crusoe*. It was recalled by the discovery, in a dusty heap of secondhand books, of an old copy of her lovely *Patience of Hope*. This treasure-trove

had belonged to Victoria Welby, and on the fly-leaf is written: "From my own precious Augusta Stanley (just before her marriage and mine, and with her own pencil marks). Let the thoughts of the greatest saint of our age be treasured. Given 1863. Wrote the above 1876." Lady Augusta Stanley, the wife of the famous Dean, died in this last year, and it is her pencil marks that still remain, "footprints on the sands of time."

The very first mark is against a passage so characteristic of Dora Greenwell:

"Is there not now in Christ something which corresponds with what we trace in the gospel narrative: something, I say, *which disappoints an apparently reasonable hope* like that of the devout Jews for the temporal Messiah; disappoints it to fulfil it far more gloriously, more completely, yet in a way that contradicts our natural expectation."

And, a few pages further on, the pencil-line notes:

"Do not trials and sorrows (also, it is true, deep joys) shared between two friends, partings, dangers, above all the having stood together in the presence of death, deepen the channel of our affection in deepening that of our existence? Are not such moments as it were sacramental, bringing us nearer each other in bringing us nearer God, from whom the poor unrealities of time, *unworthy of us as they are of Him*, too much divide us?"

We can almost hear the sigh that accompanied the mark against the words:

"We are made poor by what we miss as well as by what we lose; a little more patience, a little more constancy, and to what might we not have attained!"

It was a great Age, in some ways the greatest since the Elizabethan, but the advance of science was shaking the edifice of faith. There could be tragedy in Geology, as Edmund Gosse's painful *Father and Son* shows. Darwin's *Origin of Species* seemed to undermine the foundations of religion. And Biblical Criticism was beginning its revolutionary work. The Church owed a greater debt than it realised at the time to men like Dean Stanley, who faced the new issues with honesty and courage. But Dora Greenwell's faith, too, was based on unassailable foundations, and the future wife of the great Dean had marked:

"In an anxious and inquiring age, 'when men shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased,' we are

told that 'the wise shall understand.' They shall find their safety, not in placing faith and science in an unreal opposition, not in closing their hearts to the revelation of God's power, but in opening their hearts to the secrets of His wisdom, 'double to that which is.'"

and again :

"We let living facts stiffen into doctrinal abstractions, until Truth itself begins to wear a cold and fictitious aspect; it is not in fact true *for us* until we have made it our own through needing it and loving it."

And who would not mark to-day, as she marked in those days of trial, the triumphant assurance?

"And let the heart of man be comforted; it cannot outgrow its Christ; yes, let the heart be comforted in Him out of its poverty and its riches alike."

A friend, after her death, called Augusta Stanley "that sweet content, that brightest gift of God," but her brother-in-law, Locker-Lampson (of *London Lyrics* fame) spoke of her "tameless energy." Perhaps her secret is betrayed in two marked passages :

"One drop of this love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost; one expansion of the renewed mind in pity, in forgiveness, in love to the Father, in good will towards men, will teach us *more of what God really is* than we could learn from a thousand disquisitions upon the Divine character and attributes."

"The lowly Christian, lifting up holy hands to God, is at the same moment strengthening those of some unseen brother; the ground on which he kneels may continue dry as was the fleece of Gideon; the object upon which his heart's desire and prayer is set may fail, yet his labour has not been in vain in the Lord."

The last part of the precious little book brightens with a supernatural radiance, and here the pencil marks are doubled. There is room only for the last brief passage so marked :

"There are moments in the Christian life upon which the spoil of a long conflict seems heaped, in which it can rejoice even with the joy of a late yet abounding harvest. Seasons, too, sometimes prolonged ones, which recall what the historians of the Middle Ages tell us of the Truce of God—set, appointed times when the land had rest, and war and violence were no more heard within its borders; so

are there blessed intervals, wherein the soul reckons up many desolated Sabbaths, and enjoys a God-given, God-protected rest."

There can be autobiography in slight pencil marks, when they are Augusta Stanley's, and when they are in such a book as *The Patience of Hope*.

Dora Greenwell, Augusta Stanley, Victoria Welby. The hand that wrote the book, and the hand that made the faint revealing marks, and the hand that inscribed its affectionate memorial are long since dust. But the bright spirits who once animated that miraculous dust, like the friends of the Silurist, "are all gone into the world of light," and as we close the book with tender reverence,

"Some strange thoughts transcend our wonted themes,
And into glory peep."

B. G. COLLINS.

"THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN CHINA."

THIS is the name of the largest body of Protestant Christians in China. It includes one third of their total membership. It embraces Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, United Brethren, United Church of Canada, and some independent Chinese churches. It was consummated in 1927, and has passed the experimental stage and grown in power and evangelistic activity. To all intents and purposes it is one living Church, with its own Moderator and Secretaries, its own hymn book and magazines, its central organisation, and its annual assemblies, to which each component part sends its elected representatives. The separate labels of the various partners have been dropped. It may be asked: "What's in a name?" "Very much, especially in the title of an institution." The old names, corresponding to the denominations which began work in China, were confusing to the Chinese. Imagine a Chinese being called a member of the "English Dipping-Rite Church (literal translation of the Baptist Church), or of the "London Church" (the Congregationalists), and so on. Such imported foreign names could have no intelligible meaning, for they had an exotic and not an indigenous flavour. It has been an undoubted gain to drop these sectarian labels.

But more than this, it gives the ordinary member a real inspiration to realise that he belongs to a nation-wide organisation. The larger unit is strong enough to make effective representation to the Government on questions of common interest in

a way impossible to the weak separate bodies. Moreover, when discord or persecution breaks out in any area, the Moderator is soon on the spot, and by his wider experience and sound counsel succeeds in restoring peace and harmony, which the local community unaided could not attain.

Best of all, the existence of this united Church has made possible new evangelistic efforts of importance in the newly-opened-up Western regions.

The movement began by negotiations between the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, and by their courtesy our Shantung Baptist Church was invited to send two of its pastors as visitors. These men on their return gave a report to the Shantung Baptist Union and showed that entrance to the United Church would in no way jeopardize the maintenance of our Baptist witness or affect our local autonomy. After full deliberation our self-governing Church solemnly and unanimously resolved to join, and a few years later the churches in Shansi and Shensi spontaneously took similar action.

This was an epoch-making decision, and there has been no subsequent regret, but a settled conviction that the movement was of God and not of man. In all this the missionaries played a very small part, for our Church had long been self-governing, and was fully competent to make its own decision without interference from the B.M.S. or its agents. At the same time, it may be asserted that the missionaries on the field almost unanimously approved the action of the Church, which was a natural development of its past history.

A very different position obtains on the mission field from that with which we are familiar in England. In China the field was far too vast for any one denomination to evangelise. From early days a friendly division of territory was agreed on and loyally respected. Thus from the first it was purely an accident of geography whether a Chinese became a Baptist or a Presbyterian, since the individual was offered only one form of Protestantism and knew nothing of others except by hearsay. This prior adoption of comity paved the way for closer co-operation. This was specially manifested in the sphere of Higher Education, where students and professors from many different Churches met on equal terms and learned to respect one another and each contributed something of value to the common pool. Candidates for the ministry of different Churches were trained in the same college to the advantage of all concerned.

It was impossible to halt the trend to unity at this stage. A great current had set in which nothing could stop.

This is the background out of which in due course issued the Church of Christ in China. There was nothing artificial about its genesis and growth. It just grew out of the fundamental roots of friendship. The contacts of the past gradually led on to the final union. As long ago as 1893 the first Federation of Shantung Churches was formed, and there was close comradeship between the two chief missions—the Presbyterian and the Baptist.

It may dispel misgivings to show how the distinctive tenets of the constituent parts are preserved. In a word, the adoption of comity safeguards the maintenance of the distinctive practices of the uniting bodies. Within the limits of the area allotted to any one body there remains the same freedom as before, so that a Baptist is just as much a Baptist as before. And in case of any member removing to another territory he is freely received on presentation of a letter of transfer, and enjoys all the privileges of the whole Church without being called on to surrender the special tenets in which he has been brought up.

Such is a rough outline of the origin of the Church of Christ in China. It is practical union evolved step by step under the Spirit of God out of the unique conditions on the mission field. It does not pretend to be perfect, but it is developing on healthy lines, and the logic of events may bring into its embrace other bodies who for the time being still maintain their separate existence.

E. W. BURT.

ON PREPARING FOR THE 1942 CELEBRATIONS.

THE B.M.S. Committee will not be deterred by the War from drawing attention in every way possible to the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Society. Europe was in upheaval in 1792, and the first two decades of B.M.S. history covered the fateful years of the struggles against Napoleon. We should be unworthy even to name the pioneers if we omitted special celebrations because Britain is once more fighting a European dictator. But the 1942 celebrations will be different from those of 1892, though their influence need be no less. Certain "national" and "interdenominational" gatherings will, it is to be hoped, prove possible, and, if the Assembly can meet in London next Spring, we shall together remember the brave men

of the Napoleonic generation, and call the whole denomination to be more worthy of them. If the anniversary is really to stir our people, however, it will be because of what is done in the local churches. The B.M.S. Committee suggests that Friday, October 2nd, 1942—the great day—should be set aside by each church for a celebration in its own building.

Much will depend on the lead given by the minister during the twelve months of the special Celebrations Campaign; he will be looked to for the educating and enthusing of his people. Headquarters are busy preparing helpful material. Dr. Townley Lord has written a Popular History of the B.M.S. An attractive 1942 Diary is available recording memorable dates in the story and giving each week a descriptive item, which may be used in various ways.

There are many, however, who will want to refresh their minds on missionary origins and history, reading not short books but more substantial volumes.

For such, best of all would be a careful working through of Latourette's *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, of which the first three volumes are obtainable; but this takes us only as far as 1800. Unfortunately, our grandfathers in 1892 missed the opportunity they then had of preparing an authoritative history of the B.M.S. The Centenary Volume will naturally be dusted and opened again in preparation for 1942, but it is a poor affair, with articles of varying style and value, and comparatively little detailed history. The L.M.S. did much better, providing itself with two fine volumes by Lovett. Shortly afterwards Eugene Stock gave the C.M.S. a three-volume history of outstanding merit. The Bible Society commissioned William Canton to tell their story, and he produced five first-class volumes, which give many a sidelight on the political and religious life of the nineteenth century. Then, in 1921, the M.M.S. began the issue of Dr. G. G. Findlay's competent and well-written five-volume history of its work. The L.M.S. also has a most valuable Register of Missionaries, with biographical details.

These books are mentioned—first, because the suggestion has been made that the B.M.S. should prepare a first-class history, and the carrying out of such a project depends on a few being understanding and vocal enough to demand it; secondly, because a reading of the first volume of any one of the histories mentioned would give an excellent background against which to set the early story of our own work.

For the detailed telling of that we have to go to older books. There is F. A. Cox's *History of the B.M.S. from 1792 to 1842* (two volumes), published for the jubilee and still very readable; Marshman's *Carey, Marsham and Ward*, both in its longer (1859) and shorter form (1864), is, of course, the richest account of all that went on at Serampore, and it is the work of one who grew up there. These volumes may often be picked up second-hand or should be obtainable at any public library.

The most familiar missionary biography is Pearce Carey's wonderful book on his great-grandfather, a ceaseless fount of inspiration, which we are indeed fortunate to possess. This we shall surely read again during the coming months. George Smith's older life of Carey has much valuable material in it, and is now in the Everyman Series. A life of Fuller should also be read, if one can be obtained. Ryland and Morris provided contemporary accounts, and Fuller's son and grandson were the writers of later biographies.

All these books deal with B.M.S. origins, and it is there no doubt that much of our emphasis will rest. We need not be afraid of this, for the parallels to our own day are many and challenging. But what of Jamaica and the Cameroons, China and Congo, and the most recent developments? What of the present situation? There is no room here to give lists of books. The pamphlet, *The B.M.S. and its Tasks* (2nd ed., 1938, Carey Press, 3d.), gives a bibliography for each field, and these, as well as the other information it contains, should prove specially useful in preparing for this important ter-jubilee.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.

WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE ABOUT GOD—AND PROVIDENCE?

WHEN we ask this question we are not enquiring how many things we can believe, but rather what are the inescapable things we *must* cling to, even in these days, because they fit the facts of life.

Discussion reveals that our first need is to get our perspective right. We must try to see things in the light of "In the beginning—GOD." Those who read the record of the rocks are feeling their way back into the story of unmeasured ages; they get but a flashing glimpse of the tremendous fact that God IS; and they discover that there are depths we cannot plumb, and secrets not revealed.

Seeking guidance, men are quick to seize on "special interventions," such as Dunkirk, or the crossing of the Red Sea, as proofs of God's Providence. A man known to us all has announced that Nottingham will not be seriously hurt because he has prayed for the town's safety; but this implies that in Coventry, Liverpool, London, there was no one to pray! Or if someone did pray, he hadn't enough faith. Can we imagine for a moment that every boy who fell in the last war was a "bad lot," and that every boy who had a praying mother came back safe? Herod was allowed to kill James; but God delivered Peter out of his hand. To get our perspective right we need to take in *all* the circumstances and experiences of life.

Our second need is to get our interpretation right. It is evident that the Old Testament writers were as perplexed as we are. While Ps. 1 says of the righteous "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" and uses the symbol of a tree flourishing, Ps. 37 speaks of the wicked flourishing and "spreading himself as a green bay tree." That is to say, there is contradiction, due to the contradictory facts of life. The assurance "A thousand shall fall at thy side, but it shall not come nigh thee" is very beautiful, but to whom does it apply? The whole question baffled them, as it does us; and we must mind how we quote texts.

It is significant that not a single Bible character wholly escaped sorrow, misfortune, pain; and yet, even when their interpretation of the cause was wrong, not a single one ever suggested that it was an unprofitable thing to trust in God and to do His will. These men are baffled, yet each one is sure that God IS, and that He is at work.

Yet He clearly does not always get His perfect way. Our **problem** is to reconcile a world like this with a God like that. We cannot face the problem squarely if we do not recognise that man has power to thwart God's purpose. It is possible that we should never need to doubt His Providence, but for our sin; that we should never be baffled at all if we lived in the unclouded light of His Love. But evil, disobedience—these things have clashed into God's purpose and disturbed His plan, and cannot be ignored. No view can be true that does not recognise sin and the part man plays in bringing sorrow and distress upon himself and to the world. Nor can we ignore man's return to God, by faith and prayer. Outstanding characters like Müller and Livingstone have lived on a high plane of co-operation with God's purpose, and have found every need supplied. There

seems to be possible so great a "community of interest" between a man and God that not a single thing goes wrong. God works by laws universal and unchanging. He is not the victim of these laws: He operates them. Even we adapt them and direct them, to serve our ends. He can bring a higher law to bear upon a lower, and so change the course of things. Prayer and faith undoubtedly reopen channels along which God's Providence can flow.

A right perspective and a right interpretation help; but it is most important that we learn to make a right use of experience. There are some things we can know. What lies behind it all? The idea that God IS; is in control; creates, sustains and orders all. This is God's world. What do we know about Him? All that Jesus revealed. Our standard is the New Testament.

Jesus reveals a general Providence over all alike; sun shines on evil and on good. Man ought to be happy, safe, content in the home God has provided for His children. But Jesus goes further. God cares for sparrows; He cares for us; we matter to Him, each individual child. "The hairs of your head are numbered." From Jesus we learn that God is; God is at work, at work for the highest good of man. That is the key, the highest good of man.

We think of suffering as the negation of blessing. It may indeed bring eternal blessing with it. The same experience may make one bitter, resentful, another sweet and gracious. Each one according to the use he makes of it. We must avoid at all costs a materialistic conception of God's care. There is no guarantee of mere physical safety. We have no promise of immunity from suffering or death. Suffering has actually been the lot of some who loved Jesus best. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," He said. It may be brought on—

- (a) By sin = penalty = God's check on wrong-doing. (Is not that a good thing, even on a world-wide scale?)
- (b) As the chastening of God's Love = discipline, making for enlargement of spirit, development of soul, man's highest good.
- (c) It may be vicarious = endured for others' sake, in order to fulfil God's purpose. (Paul = "For the furtherance of the Gospel.")

"All things work together for good"—not indiscriminately to every one, but "to them that love God, who are within His

purpose." That is the key to our problem: not our happiness or material good, but His purpose, which places growth of spirit first, ("Grow in grace.") Jesus could say, while His work was unfinished, "Mine hour is not yet come"; yet God's purpose for Him led to persecution and death. We do not know when material calamity may overtake us, but we do know that when it does we are still children of God and safe in His care. Life will go on, and we may see the ultimate fulfilment of His purpose for each, and for the race, not here, but in the realm beyond. We triumph over everything when we say:

"'Tis my Father who my life has planned."

(Deliberations of the Nottingham Ministers' Fraternal,
summarized by F. P. Skillings.)
