

Baptist World Movement

from an American Point of View.

I.

THERE is much talking and writing of "world-vision," but it is safe to say that outside a comparatively small number of our people, including leaders and close students of the work of missions, no one has really had any deep sense of a world responsibility, and comparatively few have had any real world-vision. But the events especially of the last ten years have not only brought America into contact with Europe as never before, but have awakened all nations to a new realisation of the mutuality of concern in each others' affairs that is forced upon all by the complex interrelationships that have grown up among them since the dawn of the modern era of rapid and easy communications. Furthermore, it is coming to be more and more widely realised that unless these relationships are somehow regulated along different lines from those which international diplomacy has previously known, civilization is in serious and almost certain danger of going on the rocks.

It has been often enough stated that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the one principle or force sufficient to regulate all kinds of human relationships, including international and interracial relations. But the Gospel must first of all become operative through human lives, become embodied in positive human efforts on behalf of the establishment of righteousness, justice, freedom, and mutual helpfulness among men. And the plain truth of the matter, as most intelligent Christians are now willing to admit, is that a large part of what is called Christianity to-day is but such a poor mixture of original Christianity and selfishness, that it is entirely ineffective under modern conditions.

When it is realised that the Baptists represent one of the very few religious bodies with really *very considerable international ties* which have not compromised the principles of Christianity for the sake of political advantage or of obtaining an enormous number of adherents, we cannot but feel that it is not merely a question of opportunity, but actually of a tremendous world-responsibility that faces us to-day. To-morrow Japan will in all probability find itself strong enough to demand of the white nations a fair consideration of what it counts as its national rights. By the following day China may be strong enough and

active enough to stand with Japan and any other darker races she may be able to enlist, against the continuance of white domination.

Fortunately, these issues, while demanding study and the taking of all possible anticipatory measures, may be left for the future to settle finally. What cannot be left for to-morrow however, but must be solved to-day, is the question of Europe. As Europe is the birthplace of modern civilization, so it is here that it seems to be, if not on the decline from great age, at any rate suffering from a terrible and dangerous malady, the effects of which are seriously felt to the ends of the earth. Europe is the chief source of the poison in the blood of the entire modern world. It is not merely that it contains gun-factories and aeronautical laboratories in proportion to the high degree of its industrial development: but the multiplying of goods, of capital, has given occasion to the rise of jealousy among the various individual nations. And increased communication and intercourse have not only caused a heightening of the friction between various peoples, but have invited the belligerently-inclined to unprecedented military activity, by increasing the possibilities for the movement of armies. And science has added still further fascination to warfare, until Europe especially threatens to plunge itself to destruction in a last orgy of internecine strife, unless the fundamental conditions of jealousy and suspicion can be somehow changed. And since these are passions of mutuality, each individual nation seems to be helpless in the face of such a situation.

There has never been a time in history when so many people lived so comfortably, enjoying the blessings of well-built and well-furnished homes, plentiful supplies of food, many of which would have delighted royalty a century or so ago, sanitary protection and medical aid such as science never even dreamed of a few generations back, rapid and cheap transportation and locomotion; means of audible and other communication over any sort of distance, from that of an adjoining room up to half the earth's circumference; and a system of gathering and imparting information that is infinite, because it is increasing not merely every day, but every hour, every minute. And yet, over against this there never was a time before when one nation or two or three nations together could manufacture enough materials and equipment in a few years' time to wipe an entire race from the face of the globe, much less when any man dared suggest the idea of putting such a possibility into practice. And yet, there never were so many Bible classes, mission study circles, bands of voluntary workers and institutions for the training of professional workers as are to be found to-day among the Protestant religious

bodies in the several Anglo-Saxon nations. The combination of responsibility and opportunity is without even the suggestion of a parallel since the dawn of human history.

Not merely from the highest philanthropic and evangelistic motives, but in sheer self-defence, Americans and Britishers breakfast or dine on products brought from the ends of the earth, work or study in well-lighted and well-equipped buildings, take the country air on any favourable day in speedy motors, or leave the din of the city at the end of the working day by quick trains that set them down before quiet suburban homes; and not only these, but the comparatively poor as well, all but a minority of whom actually live under conditions in many respects better than those enjoyed by the nobility of two centuries ago: all must be made to realise that the foundations of this civilization have been so shaken that nothing short of a mass effort involving not simply a sharing of surpluses, but actually lives of sacrifice on the part of the present generation, can save the structure in its integrity for the next generation. But they must be made to realise not only that their own highly organised system for the supplying of wholesome foods is less safe for every year while the spectre of famine stalks across Russian plains or hovers constantly like a threatening cloud on the horizon; that western homes are less safe for every season that passes and sees vast numbers of families in Poland and other countries living in misery in dug-outs and other places scarcely more comfortable; and that civilization itself is menaced by the bitter or uneasy thoughts that flood the brains of uncounted multitudes of politically and economically helpless in all lands, who, stripped to the skin and bleeding in many cases from the blows of war, groan under the burdens of poverty and of cruelly selfish capitalistic systems. Our own people must be made to understand further that the necessary financial means are in their hands. They must be brought to appreciate the fact that the fields of philanthropic, humanitarian, and Christian service open to-day offer for their sons and daughters not merely sources of unique and deep satisfaction, but even glory of a kind that business success under conditions of merciless competition, notoriety in a blasé society, or even mere learning and travel in this age when the "distance that lends enchantment to the view" has been annihilated through the power of steam, electricity, and explosive gas, and the whole world has become in a measure commonplace—none of these, or all, can give.

This, however, will be little, unless they hear the Christ of the New Testament and the God of the prophets calling above the storm of passionate strivings and from out of the midst of the chorus of wailing that rolls up to us from white and black, yellow

generation or two some of the latter may be expected to become dangerous for the white nations.

III.

For no country in Europe will a large number of foreign evangelists or, comparatively, of foreign teachers even, be needed. But of teachers a certain number will be needed, and also of leaders of demonstration groups of various kinds.

But apart from purely religious work, modern Christianity has worked out a vast system of humanitarian and philanthropic service in the line of applied Christianity. And now the way is opening up for sharing our highly developed medical science with its abundant facilities for reaching the masses, with the impoverished and suffering peoples of Europe. And in some countries even other forms of social service might find favourable fields for development: as, for instance, organising child-welfare centres, conducting agricultural demonstration stations, organising native efforts for the struggle against alcoholism and the combating of adult illiteracy. All such would, in fact, be especially valuable in proportion as they drew the attention and enlisted the efforts of devout Christians in the respective countries, in the extension of such work through native organisations.

Three years ago a Serbian bishop, Nicolai, visited America and advocated the organisation of some sort of effort to give a number of demonstration schools for Serbia. His plea was that the peasantry, which has not lost its original homely virtues, should be educated in the proper atmosphere and along proper lines to save it from the blighting influence of the currents of cheap materialistic philosophy which, beginning with the universities, had ruined Europe.

The great mission campaigns in America have called forth a host of idealistically-inclined young people. Among the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, at least there has begun what is practically a mass movement in the direction of interesting and training them in various kinds of Christian service. Only a small percentage of them can be used by the mission boards, but many of the others might find places in other lines of service, such as I have suggested, if only the latter could be financed. That leads me to say that, along with the enlistment of as many as possible of the older generation in giving liberally for the support of such undertakings, another step in the organising of our people for a world campaign must be the interesting of a great number of intelligent young people in the idea of consecrating their business ability, their earning power to the service of Christ. And the wider the range of Christian service we

undertake, the wider will become the circle that it is possible to enlist both in the consecrating of self for personal service and in the contributing of means. And, it need not be added, the stronger the appeal of Christianity will become in those lands where we work.

On the other hand, if many of the European peoples are in a more or less plastic condition socially and otherwise at the present moment, there is an exigency in the situation also with respect to America. The latter apparently stands on the threshold of an era of even far greater industrial and economic development than that which she has already attained. The people of her great middle class are beginning to step out of the circle of quiet provincial, small bourgeois life, with its atmosphere of comfortable prosperity and homely content, into the wider circle of highly organised commercialism, with its international connections and interests. And no one can claim that the latter is inducive to humble Christian devotion or to the living of a life of personal service to God and humanity. I cannot help feeling that this moment of comfortable prosperity, while the old traditions of Americanism and Anglo-Saxon Christianity are still more or less treasured by the greater part of the people, is THE moment of opportunity, the crucial moment in the life of the Church in America. Given a great and worthy task, American Christianity will grow mightily in strength, and may develop a power of resistance sufficient to break the strangle-hold of opportunistic materialism upon modern civilisation.

However, as large as we may make our programme of service in European and other countries, we cannot possibly make use of all these young people even who are already offering themselves for service, and even this wide circle in turn must widen further still, as with the extension of our work greater and greater numbers are interested. But there is plenty to do at home among various classes, and in America especially among negroes and immigrants. One can invest his talents in work among Europeans without ever setting foot on European soil. We now have a new and strict immigration law, but it will take us years to Americanise those foreigners we already have. We have settlement houses already, but what we need is more settlement houses whose programme and whose atmosphere are distinctly Christian. We need more night schools conducted by Americans whose Americanism is founded on the rock of Evangelical Christianity, to enlighten and to tame the turbulent men who do not yet understand the new world, and to lift them out of the grips of industrial slave drivers. And for their children we need day-nurseries and kindergartens where the light of Christianity shall glow like morning sunshine during their formative years. And

keeping in mind still further that the rich or well-to-do exploiter of the poor is himself actually as much an enemy to civilisation as the ignorant rebel against what appears to him to be a ruthless system, I would suggest as a formula to express our aim in undertaking a world programme: "TO MAKE THE DANGEROUS NATIONS CHRISTIAN—INCLUDING THE DANGEROUS SECTIONS OF OUR OWN."

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