

## "International Christian Meeting."

THE proposal to hold an "International Christian Meeting" is familiar to our readers. It emanated from the Scandinavian Lutherans, and was discussed by a British Council. It is expected that the meeting will be held this month in some neutral country, but we should imagine that the British representation will be extremely small in number and insignificant in position. Some of the reasons which make it difficult for British Christians, with a sense of responsibility, to attend the meeting are forcibly set out in the following letter which the Rev. H. J. R. Marston, Rector of Lydford-on-Fosse, Somerset, has addressed to Miss M. E. Ellis, Honorary Secretary of the British Council:—

The Rectory, Lydford-on-Fosse, Somerset.

*July 20, 1918.*

Miss Marian E. Ellis.

DEAR MADAM,—I beg to thank you for your courtesy in sending me the Report of speeches delivered last March in London, with reference to a proposal to hold an International Christian Meeting next September; as also a Circular Letter from the British Council inviting expressions of opinion thereon.

The doctrine of the Lordship of CHRIST in human affairs forms what may be called the text of the speeches and circular. This doctrine has no necessary connection with the proposal to hold the meeting. The two points may be treated separately. An International Christian Meeting may assemble and achieve nothing, or may achieve very little, towards practical pacification. This would be regrettable, but may be inevitable, owing to conditions over which the promoters have no control.

To assert in the most challenging manner possible that JESUS is Lord of all is both a permanent duty and would at the present time be a source of immense advantage to the cause of human liberty; for it involves consequences fundamental and vital in the operation on all life. I feel, in fact, no doubt that unless His Lordship and Leadership be asserted and acted on, a chaos of blood, fury and misery will probably overwhelm all human things. Allow me, therefore, to offer a few observations on each of the points separately.

An International Christian Meeting would at present labour under inevitable disadvantages.

First : It could not meet in such numbers, with such freedom for debate, or with such calmness of temper, as to be really representative either of International or Christian sentiment and conviction. Most people will feel this to be the case.

Second : It would be impossible to secure such a meeting against the working of secret influences, or at least against the suspicion that secret influences were at work. It will be really impossible to prevent such influences being set to work.

Third : I must confess that such a meeting would imply a sort of betrayal of the men who have died in defence of righteousness, in the very entry into the Council Chamber, on equal terms, with persons who uphold the Prussian War-lords and their accomplices of Austria and Turkey. By the very joining with representatives of leaders who have launched upon the world a war unexampled in its criminal defiance of human law, we should become, to some extent, participators of that crime. Personally I could not consent to hold as it were in solution and abeyance the principles of war enunciated and defended by Bernhardt and Freytag, and discuss ways of pacification as if those principles had never been preached and as if the inevitable consequences of that preaching had never occurred. I could not discuss pacifics in the abstract, while I remember the massacre of the Armenians by Turkey, the ally of Prussia and Austria, or the piratical sinking by Germany of the *Lusitania* and of many hospital ships. And I know that the French Protestant Churches have declined the invitation to the International Christian Meeting on this very ground.

For these reasons I am sorrowfully forced to conclude that the proposed International Christian Meeting would be both useless and actually provocative of more bitterness and misunderstanding. I am accordingly unable to associate myself with those who promote the said meeting.

There are two conditions which, if carried through, might alter my attitude. The first would be that the meeting should pass a solemn decree of excommunication against the German Emperor. The second would be that the meeting should pass a solemn decree of censure against the Papacy for moral complicity in the crimes of the Central Powers, because it has failed to denounce those crimes.

Under these two conditions, many Christian people might approve the meeting, even if they thought it would do but little good. I have, however, only to write down these conditions, to feel that they have no chance of being carried out.

Let me now offer a few observations on the second point.

Most Christians do in general terms avow the Lordship of CHRIST in all human things. They would profess the desire that His Lordship and His Leadership should be acted on in practice. But in practice many Christians hold views about Christianity which prevent them from applying this doctrine to the larger spheres of life. In this way the testimony to it is lopped and mutilated. There are also many persons who ignore the doctrine altogether; many more who are indifferent to it; and many more who are hostile to it. These melancholy facts do but enhance the duty of asserting the doctrine which is incumbent on all who really hold it.

I specially agree with two of the speakers at your Council. We must leave room for the action of the Spirit of GOD. We ought to endeavour to create an atmosphere which shall promote His blessed action.

I cherish no illusions as to the effects of the political proclamation of Peace. That proclamation will not necessarily entail the return of good-will among men; nay, it may be only the signal for an outbreak of fresh sorrows. The only solid ground for hoping for a peace fruitful in good-will and mutual helpfulness consists in the unity of Christians resolved and prepared to resist anything that is incompatible with the principles of the Christian religion in all parts of human life. This is the true outcome of the belief in the Communion of the Saints.

I trust that what I have written at some length will not be irksome reading, but that it may serve in some degree to illuminate the situation which confronts us all with dreary and menacing proportions. The gloom and the threatening is relieved very much by the resolve of Christians to rally to CHRIST'S cause under the shelter and the banner of the Cross.

I beg to remain, yours most faithfully,

(Signed) HERBERT J. R. MARSTON.

