

Report

THE CHURCH HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

(A History of the Association from 1935 to 1960)

In the year 1931-32, a Church History Deputation to the Orient from the West visited India. In connection with this a Conference was convened by the National Christian Council at Serampore. The purpose of the Conference was to discuss plans for stimulating the study of Church History, as well as for collecting and preserving valuable records of the history of the Church in India. One of the suggestions made was 'the formation of a Church History Association for India'. But unfortunately nothing came out of these proposals for some time.

Nearly three years later, the Senate of Serampore took up the matter. In its meeting of the 7th of December, 1934, the Senate welcomed the proposal that steps should be taken for the formation of a Church History Association for India, Burma and Ceylon. The Rev. Dr. G. H. C. Angus, then the President of Serampore Senate, the late Bishop Pakenham-Walsh, then Principal, Bishop's College, Calcutta, and the Rev. Dr. C. E. Abraham, then Registrar of the Senate of Serampore, jointly called for a meeting on the 1st of February, 1935, at Calcutta, of some leading Christians in the city to consider the formation of the Association.

It was in this meeting that the Church History Association of India, Burma and Ceylon was formed. The meeting adopted certain provisional rules and elected an Executive Committee, with the Most Rev. Foss Westcott, the Metropolitan Bishop of Calcutta, as Chairman, and the Rev. Dr. C. E. Abraham the Secretary. While recognizing that the Executive Committee should be representative of India, Burma and Ceylon, it decided that 'until the time when the Association got into proper working order, the membership of the Executive should be confined to those living in and around Calcutta, so that they could meet often and discuss plans for work without entailing any financial obligation on the Association'.

The first meeting of the Executive was held on the 19th of February, 1935. This meeting adopted a plan of work, and the plan was faithfully followed. The Secretary's statement for the

year 1935 shows that the Secretary was busy collecting information regarding the availability of source materials in North-East India for a history of Christianity in India. Replies had been received from the A.B.F.M.S. in Assam, Bengal, Orissa and Burma, the L.M.S., the Church of Scotland Santal Mission, East Himalayan Mission, etc. A small library, as a nucleus of a first-rate library of source materials to come into being, was formed with a few books, reports, etc., presented by various Societies and individuals. There were also proposals for writing a History of the Christian Church in India and another small volume on the Lives of Saints. A third suggestion entertained was to prepare a book on Biographies of Indian Christians.

From 1936 an Annual Bulletin was published every year. The Bulletin appeared in 1936, 1937, 1938 and 1941, giving information regarding the work of the Association. But the War seriously interfered with that work. The after-effects of the War and the disturbances following Partition virtually brought the work to a standstill. To add to these difficulties, the great President of the Association, the Most Rev. Foss Westcott, died and some of the active members either retired or left the country. The Rt. Rev. Noel Hall of Chota-Nagpur, the new President, and the redoubtable Secretary, the Rev. Dr. C. E. Abraham, at any rate kept the Association alive.

During the first six years, 1935-40:

- (i) Information regarding the availability of source material was gathered.
- (ii) The active co-operation of Missions and Correspondents was enlisted.
- (iii) Plans for the writing of a History of Christianity in India were set afoot and invitations to write sections of it were given to eminent writers like Bishop Stephen Neill.
- (iv) Corresponding members were appointed in various places.
- (v) Interest in the work of the Association was created in different places.
- (vi) Regional Church History Associations were formed as in Dornakal, Andhra.

The National Christian Council was quite interested in the work of the Association as is evident from the letter the Secretary of the Council, the Rev. J. Z. Hodge, wrote to the Secretary of the Association, an extract from which I quote here: 'I may add that interest in your Association is extending. The Andhra Christian Council for example have taken the matter up and are organizing a branch there. I expect you are in touch with them. We hear also of interest developing in Bombay and I think your Executive might now well consider the desirability of giving the Association an all-India basis. We shall be very happy indeed to co-operate with you should you decide to do this by putting the

matter before the various Provincial Christian Councils. We remember that the Association emerged as a result of the Church History Conference held at Serampore and convened by the N.C.C.' (Bulletin 2, page 5).

In 1940 the Executive Committee was reorganized 'so as to include representatives of Missions and Churches outside Bengal.' This was a great step forward for it brought into the Executive such eminent men as Dr. C. E. Chaney (Rangoon), Dr. M. H. Harper (Jubbulpore), Dr. A. H. Sword (Gauhati), the Rev. H. I. Frost (Balasore), the Rev. H. Sumitra (now the Moderator Bishop of the Church of South India), and Dr. W. G. Griffiths.

The Association has to its credit published the following booklets also:

1. *Pioneers and Leaders of the Church in India* (1938),
2. *A Calendar of the Church in India, Burma and Ceylon* (1940) and
3. *The South Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas*, by Mr. K. N. Daniel (1952: the occasion being the 1900th anniversary of St. Thomas).

On the retirement of Bishop Noel Hall, the Rt. Rev. R. W. Bryan, Bishop of Barrackpore, was elected President, and when Dr. Abraham, the founder-Secretary, retired the present Secretary took over.

The Executive, which has a membership of 5, is anxious to continue the good work begun by the founders of the Association and they have already met twice and are doing what is possible to set the Association up again. They are much cheered by the sympathy shown by the Board of Theological Education of the National Christian Council and the real interest evinced by leaders of the Churches and Principals of the Theological colleges whose response to our letters is most encouraging.

The Association has as one of its chief objects the collection of source materials and storing them in archives. It also aims at the publication, in due course, of useful volumes on the history of the Church in India. It will faithfully try to carry out the other aims of the Founders, such as perpetuating the memory of the leaders, stimulating research, and promoting instruction in Church History.

D. A. C.

GRACE

The freedom of the man under grace is founded upon the good pleasure of God, and has no other foundation; it is the freedom of the will of God in men, and freedom of no other kind. Free in God, ye are imprisoned in Him.

KARL BARTH: The Epistle to the Romans.