

THE BAPTIST WORLD CONGRESS—A STUDY.

BY W. O. CARVER, TH. D., PROFESSOR IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

The Baptist World Congress, held in London, July 11-18, 1905, has, in the current phrase, passed into history. The somewhat bulky and well-executed volume recording its proceedings is in our hands and easily accessible. The Congress has been extensively reported, praised, discussed and criticised in the religious press, especially the Baptist weeklies. Many have written wisely and well and to such writers any intelligent student of the Congress must now give extensive credit for any views he may hold or criticisms he may express. By this time the weaknesses and faults of the Congress have been detected and displayed to the utmost; for no great undertaking or significant achievement was ever wanting critics and detractors, and the more so in proportion as it projects itself significantly into the future where it is to prove a factor in the forms and extent of human development. It may be pardonable, therefore, if one shall give permanent form and dignity to a study of this Congress designed to summarize some features of its significance.

I. HISTORY.

How the Congress came to be it is aside from our purpose to detail and for the programme, personnel, and popular features we must refer to the official reports. Such a meeting could not be the mechanical product of any man. It was the product of a sentiment, the outcome of a spiritual preparation. Suggestions had been made before which, while they bore no immediate fruit, were seed that sprang up and grew while men slept. Other international religious meetings, different in

scope and type, had cultivated the sense of possibility of such a meeting. The spirit of the times for some years was characterized by a wide spirit of federation. The idea of unity was in solution in the Baptist consciousness. The persecution of English Baptists, along with other Independents, under the education act, attracted universal attention; and the sympathetic fires were fed, also, by persecution elsewhere, notably in Russia. It only remained for the idea in solution to be precipitated in concrete crystalization. The *Baptist Argus* had been building up a world-wide band of readers, with only vague ideas of the uses which such a constituency might serve for the Kingdom of God. At the "psychological moment" this paper made the suggestion and discreetly pushed it until the response was imperative. The invitation was made by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland which put the consummation in the hands of a committee which won the admiration and appreciation of a universal brotherhood for its successful skill.

The programme was wrought out by the collaboration of British and American committees, with the final authority in the British committee. There was a caution to avoid subjects possibly lending themselves to friction or controversy, which was wise, but which will be less necessary in the future. The programme may be criticised somewhat also as lacking in constructive unity. It is well to know, however, that the defects were little felt in the meetings and the scope of discussion was ample, including as it did, Baptist principles and obligation, theological and general education, social aspects of Christianity and missionary principles and problems.

The speakers were conscious of the opportunity and responsibility of their appointment. There were not more than two or three poor addresses and the only serious breaches were in one or two brief *ex tempore* addresses-- a truly remarkable record.

The attendance was remarkable alike for numbers, approximating four thousand, and for its national universality. Pentecost was the illustration which alone met

the demand for describing the diversity and number of countries represented.

It is not easy adequately to characterize the spirit of the Congress. There was a magnificence and grandeur about it that was a constant surprise to the meeting itself; not productive of haughtiness or over self-confidence but inspiring and exalting.

The social feature of the meeting was very marked, both in the cordiality and completeness of the reception and entertainment accorded the visitors by London Baptists and other Christians whether officially or socially, and in the delight in social fellowship between men from various lands.

But it is of the religious spirit we would especially speak. In general this may be well summed up in the two points of Dr. Maclaren's address of welcome and the two points of Dr. Strong's "Congress Sermon." In the simple, great address there was persuasive emphasis upon the proper religious ideals summed up in the phrases, "In the Name of Christ," "By the Power of the Spirit." The sermon set forth the sum of Christian duty and opportunity in the two commands, "Know Christ," "Make Christ Known."

We may articulate the dominant notes of the Congress, in such principles as found both most emphasis in the addresses and most hearty response in the audiences.

1. Here the first thing to be named is *loyalty to Jesus Christ*. This was most universally accentuated by the speakers with clearness and reverent conviction and met the deepest and most enthusiastic response in the audiences. It was at the foundation of the discussion of every topic and determinant of every attitude that found general approval in the Congress. The divine Savior was the Lord of loyal hearts. It was declared that no statement of principles could be approved in the Congress that did not speak unequivocally for the deity of Jesus Christ and loyalty to his idea of the ordinance of baptism.

2. Another note of primary emphasis was *in-*

dividualism in religion. Man stands essentially and inalienably face to face with God, and no man nor institution must intervene. "Every man shall give account of himself to God." This every man must do and must be permitted to do. Every phase of hindrance to this primary truth was condemned.

3. Out of this last grows at once the contention for "*a free church in a free State.*" The local situation in England served to emphasize this Baptist fundamental and to reveal the incompleteness of its recognition in many quarters in all the lands.

4. *Brotherly love* was in free flow and found varied expression. So much was this time that most of these who attended the meetings are unable to sympathize with, or well understand the causes for disagreement and the occasions for slight fellowship so vigorously urged by a few brethren who were not in attendance. Whatever occasions for misgivings and suspicion any may have felt were for the time, surely, swallowed up in the brotherhood of love to a common Master. There was not disloyalty to conviction, nor surrender of opinion, not even of well-grounded prejudice, mayhap, but the "bond of perfectness" made at least temporary unity.

5. There was also manifest enough a sense of *Baptist opportunity effectively to deliver the Baptist message* to the world and so to justify our denominational existence. Such may serve as a summary of the intellectual and religious marks of the meetings.

II. SIGNIFICANCE.

Such a meeting must have real and large meaning or be condemned as abortive. We have seen that it could only be a product of a genuine and wide interest looking toward some end more or less defined. The meeting itself must further define its idea and determine its end. The Congress has a meaning for the Baptist denomination within itself. It tends to heighten its self-consciousness and so to disclose its functions, its task and its equipment.

There is also a meaning for the denomination in its relation to the Christian world and further to the world as a whole. We inquire, then; What is the outcome in ideas and ideals? It will remain to ask, finally, of the practical outcome which lies in the future.

1. If in other respects our denomination shall prove worthy, it is of great significance that there has come about an uncovering of the Baptist body and position. The body has become conscious of itself and has made the world conscious of it in its proportions and contentions to a degree hitherto unknown.

The rise of the Baptists in modern history has been more rapid and real than could be appreciated. In numbers, intellectual life, social influence and political impress the Baptists have advanced steadily but rapidly. This advance has not been attended by the blazing fervor of evangelistic enthusiasm of the Methodists, nor the bizarre attractions of the Salvation Army. For the most part our impress on the other people has been quiet and pervasive and to a degree permeating, as will be increasingly manifest hereafter. Our missionary primacy served to set other Protestants at this divine task but not continuously to attract attention to ourselves. Our principle of individualism, expressing itself in our polity of local church autonomy, combining with the practical division of our forces in organizations for more general enterprises, left no sufficient opportunity or occasion for taking stock of ourselves.

But the time was ripe for union of forces and when we came together we surprised first ourselves, then the Christian community, then the world at our numbers and distribution. On the principle by which such religious statistics are usually compiled it was found that the world holds a population of 20,000,000 of Baptists, while the actual communicants overtop 6,000,000. Here are facts that call for attention. Baptists are no longer either despised, or obscure, or insignificant. This they know themselves and the world will know with interest. The London daily press, little given to religious affairs, turns

aside to give to the Baptist Congress attention and space accorded to no other religious meeting of similar duration unless it be a meeting of the Church of England at which state issues are prominent.

2. But as these Baptists really one people? Are they not rather several "churches" only related and not to be identified? The *sense of unity* realized in this Congress pronounces a distinct negative to this last question. With somewhat varying accent and somewhat dissimilar emphasis we have found ourselves speaking the same denominational language. We have our provincialisms but are one religious race. And our coming together has so exalted into prominence the fundamentals which all agree in owning and supporting that the minor and provincial nature of our divergencies has become apparent. It is of immense value in many ways thus to see ourselves and be seen of men as one, for so shall Christ be glorified in us.

3. Unity in action spells *fraternity*. We look one another in the face, and in the heart, and we love. There is realized *the brotherhood of faith*. We now know as truly as before, that we differ, in some respects widely it may be; but we know also why we differ, and no longer guess; and knowing why, we better understand and tolerate. We shall soon cease to tolerate, because we shall have learned to respect, the differences. We are able to see what Baptist principle has been exaggerated because of our environment here or there, and as well what has been neglected, and how the exaggeration and neglect have combined to produce Baptist peculiarity of type which we may designate irregularity. Love and loyalty to Jesus Christ is basal with us all and produce love and loyalty to each other. Out of the same quarry we got our stone and by the same pattern shaped it. Our space was not always the same and our structures of doctrine or form vary but never so far as not to fit together into a temple of unity. Common origin, common spirit, common task, common Lord; one people and the vitalizing sympathy will flow through all the body and make its growth grander and more uniform.

4. Our principles are not only common but we have brought into bold relief *the finality of Baptist principles* for the religion of humanity. It has remained for the most individualistic of all Christian denominations to effect the most real and vital unity of its forces. This unexpected fact has disclosed the basis on which it rests. Baptist principles in each human sphere state the final principle of the religious relation (See address of President Mullins, *Review and Expositor*, October, 1904). It has been suggested that the next Baptist Congress may do well to build its programme on the conception, *Baptist Principles the Ultimates of Our Faith*.

5. Finally the Congress signalizes the truest conception yet gained of the *Baptist Mission*. It is a world mission. We have seen the world before in a way; but at London we heard the voices of the world calling to us in varied tongue for that which we became conscious anew of holding for the world. And we heard anew the Master's message of old, "Go, teach all nations."

III. FORECAST—CALL.

And the practical issue of it all?

1. The true and worthy elements of the Congress are to perpetuate themselves in the Baptist World Alliance with quinquennial meetings, the first to be held in America in 1910. There will be more than perpetuation, there will be projection and expansion. We shall see what, after all, is left of net results of this Congress and on this we will build and advance.

2. We shall see that God is thus uniting the Baptist people of the world into a definite force that they may become a great definitive force in the world's redemption. We come into our self-consciousness when the time is ripe for the operation of our principles and our form of the Christian faith, at the time when most of all the world needs us and will receive us if we come as expressing truly the spirit of our Christ. The political, social and religious movements of the world in many of their phases unite in making this an age for the Baptists.

3. Baptists in all the lands where they are so few as to feel a sense of segregation and loneliness, and at the same time of missionary obligation will have new courage for their tasks as they realize their share in the common brotherhood. Already we learn how this is true on the continent of Europe and in heathen lands. As our unity becomes more a fact and bears the test of time the power of fraternity will increase. Our people will be more hopeful, aggressive and successful.

4. Baptists must take up their mission to the Christian world. We shall not become a horde of proselyters, God forbid! We shall go to others in the same spirit in which we are approaching one another. Many of us shall be amazed to find how far much of the Protestant world has grown toward the Baptist position and how our own attitude toward others has been undergoing modification. If humbly we express the spirit of Jesus Christ; if while loving the name Baptist for its history, we still make no contention for the name; if eschewing all spirit of the proselyte we show the "sweet reasonableness" of the Baptist principle we shall contribute enormously to the union of believers in spirit and fact and realize in our measure the prayer of Jesus to this end.

5. Finally, we shall reduce the differences and increase the oneness of Baptist faith and practice in matters which now partly divide and differentiate us. At the same time we shall hope to lift into vital activity and loving fellowship that mass of Baptists which constitute the most deplorable sect among us, the careless and indifferent who came not with us to our task.

Such is the work ready to the hand of Baptists in their World Alliance. For it there must be the living alliance with the world of God's power.