

THE MEETING OF THE CONTINUATION COMMITTEE OF THE WORLD MISSIONARY CONFERENCE

LAKE MOHONK, SEPT. 26, to OCT. 2, 1912

THOSE who are interested in the work of the Continuation Committee may be glad to hear not only the authoritative report¹ of its proceedings, but also something as to the impression produced by the meetings on one who was present. In what I am going to say, I speak only for myself, and aim at giving only a personal impression. But whilst I say this and wish it to be clearly understood that no other member of the Committee is committed by anything I may say, I yet feel that so great was the harmony and unity of spirit amongst us all, that I could never have received such deep and permanent impressions either by myself, or for myself alone.

There is sometimes a tendency for international and even national conferences and committees to be made excuses for excursions, receptions and other entertainments. There is nothing of this sort in connexion with the Continuation Committee. Last year amidst the historic surroundings of Bishop Auckland Castle, this year in a large American country hotel belonging to a member of the Society of Friends and often the scene of conferences of various kinds, the Committee met with a stern determination to spend their time in real work. In both cases it was a relief to be away

¹ Subscribers to the Review who desire more detailed information with regard to the work of the Continuation Committee and its Special Committees may obtain, free of charge, on application to the secretary of the Continuation Committee, a sixteen-page pamphlet containing an *Abstract of the Proceedings of the Continuation Committee*, which has been sent to mission boards in Europe and America.—EDITOR.

from the noise and bustle of a town, and the fresh air of the Lake Mohonk Park was a delightful refreshment when sometimes half an hour's walk was possible. But not all members of the Committee got even that every day. Even on the way to Mohonk, when the Committee were the guests of the Hudson River Company on one of their splendid boats, instead of spending the hours in enjoying the lovely scenery of the Hudson, a considerable time was given to preliminary committee meetings to prepare for the real work. At Lake Mohonk itself the whole Committee sat generally morning, afternoon and evening. Sub-committees entrusted with important pieces of work had to be fitted in as was possible, and were often held even at the meals in the large dining-hall. Sometimes the whole of the evening had to be given to sub-committees rather than to a meeting of the whole committee, and it was often eleven o'clock or later before the members could get to bed. These few details will show that the Committee believed that it was sent to Lake Mohonk to work, and that it did work, perhaps not always without a grumble from some one sorely tempted to enjoy the beauties of the country. Yet it was not its willingness to work that was the most striking thing about the Continuation Committee.

Dr. Westcott taught us to believe that we should get back from the mission field far more than we had ever given. Above all he insisted that it was from the lessons of the mission field that we should learn best to understand the consequences of our divisions, and as we realized them should learn to work for that unity which the Church needs if she would rightly face her great task. Thoughts such as these were deepened and strengthened by the Edinburgh Conference. It showed them also in a new light. As the great task of the Church was faced by men of many nationalities and belonging to many branches of the Christian Church, it was realized that great as was the need for unity, it was not the moment to frame schemes for reunion or to discuss

our differences. That was not the road by which we might hope to reach unity. The Conference recognized frankly the differences between Christians, but abstained from all attempt to discuss them, whilst it respected all convictions. What it claimed was recognition of the truth that all were engaged in one task for one Lord. For the present it felt that our business must be to cultivate the spirit of unity in the light of that one task, in the presence of that one Lord, and so, as we thought, and consulted, and prayed together, to grow to understand one another better.

Differences were neither ignored nor undervalued, and each recognizing that he could do his own part best by being true to his own convictions, was ready to believe the same of others. It is a full, not an attenuated unity for which we long, and for which we are willing to wait, believing that even as we wait, we may work towards it through mutual fellowship and common discussion of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

The Continuation Committee appointed at Edinburgh to carry on the unfinished tasks of the Conference has felt the perpetuation and the deepening of this, the spirit of Edinburgh, to be its first duty and its greatest privilege. Some have talked as if the memories of the Edinburgh Conference were already growing dim. If this is the case in the committee rooms of mission boards and societies, oppressed by the drive and routine of the work of administration and organization, it is all the more necessary that an attempt be made to keep it alive elsewhere. Certainly in the Continuation Committee the spirit of Edinburgh is not dead, on the contrary it grows and deepens. At Lake Mohonk the spirit of love and understanding which had prevailed at Bishop Auckland showed itself again strong and living, and thoughts and hopes were born in that atmosphere of love and trust too great to take definite shape. Yet we believe them to be foretastes of that unity which probably no one of the members of the Committee will live

to see set up on earth. In that atmosphere individual opinions were not suppressed, glossed over or weakened, rather a desire was shown for the full contribution of each which enabled each to give of the best that he had. Some probably felt that they had gained most from those with whom they differed most. I think that all must have felt that perhaps the best way in which they could tell others of the result of the meetings was to carry with them, and strive to make prevail elsewhere something of the spirit that prevailed there. Such a gathering should do much to save those who took part in it from getting absorbed in routine, and should help them to put a soul into their organizations, and to realize the spiritual force behind the daily work of details of administration. As one of the Committee said : ' Much of our missionary enterprise lives on very old food, we must try to give it new food.'

Though their successors were gladly welcomed, the presence of two who had been with us at Bishop Auckland was much missed. M. Boegner, director of the Paris Society of Evangelical Missions, was an example of that type of saintliness which seems peculiar to France. His bright, eager spirit led to such untiring and devoted labours as to wear out his frail body, and he died a comparatively young man. We missed his quick, eager words, his simplicity, the impression of unfailing love and sympathy and zeal which he carried with him. Equally did we miss the wide experience, the wise counsel always making for peace of Dr. Stock. We rejoice that we still have him with us and know that we can count upon his constant interest and help.

As at Edinburgh, prayer and intercession were felt to be a necessary part of the Committee's work. Each session was opened by prayer, and each morning half an hour was given to devotion. It seemed to make closer the touch with the French and German members when they prayed with us in their own language. For the Sunday nothing special had been arranged for the Committee beyond the general services

held in the Hotel. But as the day drew near, it seemed as if something more were needed. It was decided that we should meet in the afternoon to give those of the Committee who felt that they had something special to say, some message to give, an opportunity to speak. The meeting, begun in the late afternoon, was continued during the evening. No report exists of what was said, and it is only possible to record a few brief impressions of the many deep and searching thoughts which found utterance. One member reminded us that the Edinburgh Conference had showed us that what was primarily needed for the missionary enterprise was an increase of spiritual force, and that for each of us the problem was how to keep that thought central in our work. The deeper life must come to us in and through our activities; but the whirl and hurry of the work of organization drives it away, hence the compelling need that we should help one another to keep it prominent. From another speaker came the call that we should as we thought of the oneness, the intricacy, the complexity, the urgency of the task that had been laid before us at Edinburgh, ask ourselves what was the secret of Christ's doing mighty works. After such thoughts as these came fitly the reminder that our attitude must be one of receptivity towards God. We must bring to Him open vessels that He may fill them. This spirit would preserve us from growing fond of our own plans. The speaker pointed out the difference between work for this world when we look for originality, spontaneity, and genius, and work for God which must ever be reproductive, since God alone is original. He warned us against the use of words which have grown common in the discussion of missionary matters such as strategic, and statesmanlike, saying that there is danger in drawing comparisons with the world's statecraft. The statesman's work is to rule, ours is to serve. He thinks of the power behind him, we need the prophetic eye to help us to see the little things, the mustard seed and the leaven, which God

uses in building up His kingdom. Through all the words spoken that afternoon there pierced the conviction felt by each speaker of the Committee's insufficiency for the task before it. As one member put it, 'The trouble of Edinburgh is that it has aroused all the problems that exist, we are in the midst of them, and we cannot get out of them again. There is nothing for it but blind, desperate faith.' Whilst another, filled with the thought of the greatness of the task, said, 'The Committee must be reborn.'

During that afternoon Dr. Richter called attention to the intimate connexion between missions and the peace movement. In forcible words he said that there is in the work of missions a secret power to overcome differences between different countries, and that a sense of the greatness of the missionary task will lead to the conviction that we have no time for warlike feelings, whilst to realize it as a common task will forge connecting links between the nations. At a later meeting Dr. Hodgkin took up his words, speaking of the call to us in this connexion as being the only body that is internationally considering the work of establishing the kingdom of God. The responsibility of the West towards the East was further urged by Mr. Oldham as a reason for the imperative duty of maintaining peace. At this critical time in the Far East and in the whole Moslem world the Church of Christ is bound to try to give to the people of the West some vision of the responsibilities of the civilized nations of the West towards the less civilized East. A conception of their great moral responsibility might prove such an inspiration to the more advanced peoples as to make impossible the hindrance and disaster which a war must cause. These thoughts found expression in the resolution to appoint a sub-committee to consider how the Committee might aid in the removal of racial misunderstanding and prejudice, and serve the cause of peace without departing from the principles upon which the Committee is founded.

There can be no doubt that at the Committee itself links

are formed between the nations which should help to remove misunderstandings. Even discussions about the dry bones of organization, so necessary at the beginning of any new work, had a peculiar value, for they enabled the representatives of different nationalities to know and understand one another's methods and points of view. Mr. Oldham's admirable service as an interpreter made it always possible for those who could not follow a German speech to appreciate the original thought and suggestive ideas of those who preferred to speak in their own language.

The central point of the Committee's discussions was concerned with the question of the formation of an International Committee. There was a strong expression of opinion in favour of at once approaching the missionary societies with regard to the formation of such a committee. But when practical details were discussed, the difficulty of framing any constitution adapted to the very different conditions in the various countries, and of defining the functions of such a committee so as to secure both its proper relation to the missionary societies and its necessary freedom for real international action was found to be very serious. It was felt to be wisest not to be in a hurry but to content ourselves for the present with the strengthening of the Continuation Committee by the addition of some new members, and to seek to discover more as to the views of the societies with regard to the formation of an International Committee and its possible functions before proceeding farther.

The Committee heard with deep interest from its chairman, Dr. Mott, of the plans made by him for a journey to the mission fields of the East which was to be undertaken in accordance with the request made at its last meeting. We look forward to gaining much new light on many of our problems from the conferences and talks which Dr. Mott hopes to hold with many of the most productive and thoughtful minds amongst the missionary leaders and workers.

It cannot but be difficult to make others feel the inspira-

tion of those days of prayer, intercession and conference. The Committee is a small thing but it has a mighty force behind it, the force of the spirit that animated the Edinburgh Conference. Whatever new developments it may be led to make, it dare not as the Bishop of Winchester said, 'break the entail'; it must carry on the task committed to it by the Edinburgh Conference. It is an immense responsibility and a blessed privilege. Without the co-operation and the sympathy of those who work for missions it must be impossible. All that the Committee asks is the opportunity to serve, and it wishes increasingly for advice and suggestion as to how best it may serve those who are working in the one great cause.

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