

Canadian Churches and a Gentleman from Japan

Who Though Mythical, Prompts Suggestions for a Unified and Therefore Effective Church

By A. M. BELDING

I HAVE a friend who is a devout member of the Roman Catholic Church. He is a man of honour, faithful in the performance of his duties as the head of a family and as a citizen. All men respect him. By the accident of birth he is a Roman Catholic. Had he been born into a Baptist home, he would have been as devout a Baptist, but not a more honest or sincere man.

I have a friend who is a devout member of the Anglican Church. He is a man of honour, faithful in the performance of his duties as the head of a family and as a citizen. All men respect him. By the accident of birth he is an Anglican. Had he been born into a Presbyterian home, he would have been as devout a member of the Presbyterian Church, but not a more honest or sincere man.

Similarly I have a Methodist friend who would have been as sincere a Baptist if he had been born into a devout Baptist home; a Baptist friend who might have been a Congregationalist; and a Jewish friend who might have been a devotee of Christian Science. So much are so many of us influenced by the accident of birth.

Now multiply each of these individuals by some hundreds and you have as many groups in a community, the majority of whose members are what they are in the matter of sectarian religion because they were born into this or that group. Yet, theoretically, each group is separated from the others by the belief, now or at some time in the past, held with firm conviction, that this particular group was given a fuller or clearer conception or revelation of the thought and purpose of God, in relation to mankind, than any of the others. Necessarily this belief involved a degree of separation, if not of prejudice; and each group fenced itself about with a creed or a set of doctrines upon which great emphasis was laid by the respective teachers. Hence, in a typical Canadian community are found Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, and other churches, each of them teaching its peculiar doctrines, and sometimes laying greater stress upon points of disagreement

than upon the essential religious principles.

Into such a community comes, let us say, a Japanese philosopher. He notes the various religious groups, and begins to ask questions such as:

"How does this system work out? Do these various groups embrace the whole population? Have you no social problems? Is there any vice in the community? Is the feeling of human brotherhood strong and compelling in its influence?"

What would be the answer to these questions? Would it not be that the various churches do not reach nearly all of the population; that there are very grave social problems, and far too great a prevalence of vice; and that the acceptance of the principle of human brotherhood has not yet reached the stage of practical demonstration to such an extent as makes it a source of universal pride?

UNDER such conditions, would the Japanese philosopher have suggestions to offer? Would he tell us, for example, that the Government of his country, sadly impressed by bad moral and social conditions, invited the leaders of the three great religions represented in Japan to get together, and aid in framing an educational system which would uphold morals and build character? Would he suggest that the different sects in a Canadian city, if they could not unite in religious worship, should at least unite to promote moral and social betterment; forget their other differences, federate their brotherhoods, set out to secure specific reforms, and by the co-ordination of forces bring to bear the driving force of all the churches upon the legislative machinery of the city or province, whenever legislation was needed; or to unite the humanizing influences of all in the promotion of social centre work to bring every boy and girl and man and woman in the community within the realm where the community spirit does its great work for moral and social regeneration?

Whether the philosopher from Japan would coun-

sel such a course or not, it surely has its merits. To those who look broadly out upon the course of human history, noting the changes, gazing upon the ruins, contemplating the upward march of the human race through all the ages, there is something ridiculous as well as pathetic in the mental attitude of the complacent individual who regards himself as one of the elect whose chief concern is to avoid too close contact with those of a different faith. The plea of Rev. Dr. Symonds for a cosmopolitanism that recognizes the unity of the human race, while it does not sacrifice in the slightest degree one's fidelity to family, city or country, should appeal with special force to Canadians, into whose territory are pouring people of all races, with vastly differing national ideals and religious beliefs, to many of whom Anglo-Saxon traditions do not appeal.

Let us go back for a moment to my friends the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, the Presbyterian, the Methodist, the Baptist, the Congregationalist and others. Should not they get together in the various communities and say to each other: "You may worship in a cathedral, and you in a kirk, and you in a meeting house, and you in a chapel; but, for the sake of our common humanity let us organize a federation for moral and social welfare work in this community, and place behind it the driving force of cathedral and kirk and meeting house and chapel, to bring to pass those things which in the interests of all of us and of all our children should be accomplished without delay?"

Then every school building would become a social centre and civic neighbourhood club; social conditions everywhere would improve; vice would meet a formidable competitor; child welfare would cease to be the care of a few; prison reform would become an accomplished fact; political corruption would become a less potent force in civic, provincial and national affairs; the housing problem would approach solution; and the building of character, which is the greatest work of any nation, would assume a new importance, and take its rightful place in the estimation of the people.

Huge London Demonstration for South African Deported



The workers of London have been showing strong sympathy with the workers of South Africa by processions and demonstrations for the nine labour leaders who were deported from South Africa and who recently arrived in London. This is a view of the crowd listening to an address from Mr. J. T. Bain, leader of the nine, in condemnation of the South African government.