

From THE TIMES of December 19, 1936

YOUTH AT THE ABBEY*

A VISION at once noble and practical is made known this morning. The Coronation has once more begun to loom very large in the public mind. There is much talk of it, much pleasant anticipation of it, much work being done for it. But to those who think of the Coronation of the KING and the QUEEN as something more than the most splendid of Imperial ceremonies, the fulfilment of earthly pomp and the supreme assertion of Royal state, it may have occurred to wonder whether the fullest use is wont to be made of a great spiritual opportunity. A Coronation may be counted upon to stir in all but the shallowest minds a deeper than ordinary strain of well-wishing for the crowned ; and, besides that, a more exalted than ordinary conception of the origin, the nature, and the responsibilities of Empire. In those last the humblest are as closely involved as the highest ; and it is a seemly thought that Westminster Abbey should offer, and that British youth should welcome, an opportunity, before the influence of the great and solemn ceremony has faded, to affirm their faith, and to pray for guidance, in their mission and their destiny.

That is the idea at the root of the DEAN of WESTMINSTER's scheme outlined in these columns this morning, a scheme having its origin in a suggestion made from oversea. With the approval of the Office of Works and the Coronation Committee the Abbey will be left undisturbed after the Coronation until a week has gone by. The object is not merely to make use of the increased seating. At the proposed service for youth on May 19 everything no doubt will be done, first to give the congregation the feeling of having been brought very close to the Coronation itself, but also to bear in upon it the inspiring truth that this is indeed the shrine of the Imperial Monarchy, the church in which not only KING GEORGE VI and QUEEN ELIZABETH were crowned, but also their predecessors for nine hundred years. The vision of eight or nine thousand youths from all parts of the Empire and members of nearly all the Christian Churches assembled in Westminster Abbey is imposing indeed, especially when their worship can be air-borne all over the world ; but if the vision is realized to the full, if Westminster Cathedral and other great churches in the KING's Dominions increase the numbers beyond reckoning and ensure that no form of Christian faith is left outside, then the power generated should do much more than give a start to the temporary fraternization of youths from different countries and of different sorts of schools and ways of life. A Youth Movement so founded should make a new and not easily suppressed or diverted force for the world's well-being. It would be no machine of conscripted children and no political nursery. It would be a free association of Imperial youth in the service of peace and freedom.

YOUTH OF THE EMPIRE CORONATION AS LINK

A SERVICE for the youth of the Empire is to be held in Westminster Abbey on Wednesday, May 19, a week after the Coronation. The Abbey will still be in its Coronation setting, and between 8,000 and 9,000 youths, whose ages range from 16 to 18, will be present.

The service will be held at 4 p.m. The Archbishop of Canterbury will be the preacher, and it is hoped that leading representatives of the Free Churches will take part in the service, which will be broadcast to the Empire. It has been suggested that services should be held at the same time in cathedrals in different parts of the Empire. A rally of Empire youth at the Albert Hall is also being organized.

DR. FOXLEY NORRIS, Dean of Westminster, who is making the arrangements for the Abbey service, said yesterday that while every great country was pressing forward the organization of its youth, in England we were doing almost nothing. The Coronation seemed to present a great opportunity for laying the foundation of a youth movement under strictly Christian influences, starting from the Abbey, which they regarded as the central shrine of the Empire.

CANON BARRY, who is cooperating with the Dean in the organization of the service, said that they were not trying to organize any sort of political youth movement analogous to those on the Continent. They were convinced that the only hope for this country and the Commonwealth was on the basis of Christian conviction and Christian conduct.

OVERSEA SUGGESTION

Some weeks ago a suggestion reached the Abbey authorities from oversea that the Coronation would afford an opportunity of inestimable value for gathering together representatives from public and secondary schools, Boy Scouts, Toc H, and similar organizations from all parts of the Empire at a central consecration in the Abbey at a time when all the Coronation arrangements were still in being and the solemnity of the great occasion still persisted.

The idea was taken up with enthusiasm. The Office of Works, who will at this date be in possession of the Abbey, and the Coronation Committee agreed to the service being held, and a central committee, of which Mr. L. S. Amery is chairman, was formed. The development of the plan was checked by the events of the past few weeks, but the arrangements are now being pushed forward. It is known that a large number of

* Particulars of the Organization of the Service and Rally are given overleaf