

FACE TO FACE

with

**GREAT
-NEW-
TASKS**

The survey of the General Secretary, the Rev. C. F. Gribble,
M.A., before the Annual Meeting of the Board of Missions,
1956.

FACE TO FACE WITH GREAT NEW TASKS

The Centenary year that has passed has been marked by an endeavour both here and in the Mission Districts, to speak to the Church on the new responsibilities that face her in this dangerous and exciting era into which we are entering and to emphasise both the obligation and privilege of the Church here and overseas to rise to its high calling in this new age. The Rev. Austin James has made known throughout the Commonwealth, the crisis that is before the Younger Churches and the need to assist them to "freedom and maturity in Christ whereby they will be able to lay rich gifts of culture and thought at His feet." The fact that the Church has raised £20,000 for what Mr. James has called *the Church's Colombo Plan* is important but of more importance is the vision of the Church overseas preparing itself in full partnership with ourselves for the role it must play in the days ahead if it is to be the Church of God.

REVOLT

A writer on Africa said recently—"reporting Africa now is like keeping watch on a series of overheated boilers. Some have safety valves. Some not. But on all of them the gauge reads, "Danger". The trick is to guess which one will blow up first." The danger spots are in Africa all right, from Casablanca in the north to Capetown in the south. But they flicker far beyond. Cyprus, Jordan, Syria, Malaya, Indonesia all remind us that restlessness and revolt are across the world. For us, I believe the most important international event of 1955 was the Bandoeng Conference. Here almost all the peoples of Africa and Asia were represented. The Conference became the voice of more than half the people of the world announcing their desire for recognition and status.

We in Australia are involved in the tensions that were faced at Bandoeng. Our immigration policy with its emphasis on colour and race is an affront to our Asian neighbours and sooner or later must be modified if we are to keep their goodwill. How much more liberal England is than her children in many things with her 35,000 West Indians living and working

there and accepted as citizens. We are involved in these racial tensions too, because the sincerity of our Christian profession will depend to a large extent on the impact we make upon our visitors from Asia and the Pacific — our attitudes toward them, our friendship with them. The Church and its mission is involved because its message will be judged by the response of Christian people to the problems which are crucial for the millions of Asia and Africa to-day — the great social factors of foods, water, land, health, education. Religion which does not make clear God's care for His children will not have the ring of truth for the depressed peoples to whom we proclaim God's Word.

NEW BOUNDARIES

In the areas of our commitment we are standing face to face with great new tasks. Our boundaries of service both geographical and spiritual are expanding. In the last five years we have gone into three new areas—Central New Guinea, Indonesia and the part-European work in our Western State. In the past ten years our missionary enrolment has increased by 105 and since the war 144 new workers have gone out from our Australian Methodist Church. Not only have we added greatly to the number of missionaries serving and extended the area of our service — the Church's conception of evangelism has moved out to make the Word of God relevant to the whole human situation. The classifications of our activity include farmers, builders, engineers, printers, accountants who are as called of God as the minister, the teacher or the nurse to be in Paul's words "messengers of the churches and the glory of Christ." A further challenge added to the geographical and social extensions is the growth in stature of the people themselves — a growth which is measured in new confidence, self-respect and independence and which will demand more of them and us in the future.

TRIBUTE

To read the reports of the missionaries each year is to be taken into the more intimate life of the Church on the Field—to be given a close up picture of its doubts

and hopes, its weakness and strength, its failure and victory.

It is fitting that at the outset of our sessions we remember the men and women who have gone out from the home Church, that we give thanks for them and their work and that we ask for them—

The grace of gentleness.

*The power to soothe and cheer and bless.
And break the might of sin.*

OMINOUS THINGS

From almost all Mission Districts, come reports of objective factors which weaken the witness of the Church — Roman Catholic aggression, the increase of indulgence in strong drink, the advance of the Sects. If I were asked what are the two greatest challenges to the work of the Church in the Pacific area I would have to reply—militant Roman Catholicism and the sinister inroads of the drink traffic into the life of the people. The vigour of the Roman Catholic Church is everywhere to be seen.

The right to take strong drink, in most places of the Pacific is held by all Europeans, but only by a privileged class of permit holders among the local people. The permit system is abused and illicit drinking and brewing is common.

The solution is not easy. As long as the right to drink in these communities is a European right the accusation of discrimination and of violation of human rights will be made.

One cannot see the devastating effects of liquor upon a rapidly increasing number of people without grave fears for the future of these races.

The growing work and interests of sectarian Christianity is becoming marked in the Pacific — Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, Pentecostals, free-lance evangelists and others.

Although small in numbers their work is seriously disruptive in the Christian community and in a world where vast populations are still untouched by the Christian gospel their target is always the areas already evangelised by others.

THE EASTERN PACIFIC

It was a great privilege to be the guest of the Church in Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. These areas, now (with the exception of the Fijian Indian community) fully evangelis-

ed, will call for our friendship and help for a long time to come. There are external signs of strength—growing membership, an amazing sense of stewardship and a recognition of God and the Church which has become part of their culture. But the pulse of real relevant faith burns low and formality and pietism threaten to obscure the Church's mission to the community.

The hopeful factors are the virile movements of the Spirit among the youth of the Church and the fact that the Church is recognising its temptations and imperfections and asking serious questions about them.

PAPUA AND NEW GUINEA

The policy of the Administration in Papua New Guinea is to hasten the social and political development of the people, which is to be commended but which is presenting the Church with new and perplexing problems. New ways of life are jostling with the old and old ties are giving way to newer loyalties. Good and evil is in both the old and the new and the task of the legislator, teacher and pastor is to make it easier for the people to choose the good.

New pagan cults are emerging. In the Baining Mountains last year one of our churches was burnt down and the village teacher of our school was killed in a fanatical outburst. In the restoration of order five men were shot by the Government patrol. In some of our Papuan Circuits sorcery and witchcraft is reported. Here, in one of our Christian villages a boy becomes ill. Later it is found that he has eaten from a tree with a tabu upon it. All treatment failed to save him from languishing into weakness and emaciation. One by one the people closed their houses and moved away from the village until only the boy's house was occupied. He died. The sorcerer had done his worst with his evil power and not even the policeman's threat could prevent the villagers from taking the boy's body far away to be buried on a mountain where the spirit would not molest them.

In the remote central highlands of New Guinea, the encounter of the new world with the old continues; hunger, fear and war only slowly moving out before health, peace and order or, what people are calling "secure sleep." The destructive power

of civilization is at work. It is hoped that both Church and Government will make sure that as the evil things go, the good in their ways will be handled gently and with respect. In this sixth year of mission there, we are proud of the international nature of our team with missionaries working together from Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Tonga, New Britain, Papua and the Solomon Islands.

INDIA

The floods of India have brought the need and suffering of that great land tragically and dramatically before us and the people have been much in our thought and prayer. Ten thousand pounds was given by the Church here for relief and we were touched by gifts from Fiji, the Solomons and the Aborigines. The needs of our own area are great. We sent help also Mr. Nehru's Relief Fund and to the National Christian Council's Fund.

If we read the news of international events with discernment we will know that the proclamation of the Christian gospel to this nation so strategically between East and West, the testing ground for democracy in Asia, is an urgent task for the whole Church.

THE ABORIGINES

There seems to be a growing interest in the Australian aborigine and the danger is that it will be a superficial thing. Newspapers feature incidents exaggerating the progress made towards the improvement of his condition and distorting the reports of his neglect or ill-treatment.

There are no spectacular spiritual results to report from our work in Arnhem Land but upon us has been placed the responsibility not only of the spiritual oversight of the people but also of their social and economic development—health, hygiene, housing, schooling, agriculture, industry—in this transition stage from the nomadic to the settled existence. It is a slow and in many ways discouraging work but there are flashes of light in it all.

MOGUMBER

At Mogumber in Western Australia we are caring for 81 part-aboriginal children.

Mogumber is not only a shelter from the harsh and sometimes cruel pressures to which aboriginal and mixed blood young people are submitted in our society — it

is a place where they get what they need, what they have never had and what is their due—human affection.

INDONESIA

The first year of the new century marks our entry into Indonesia at the invitation of the Council of Churches of that country. A gifted young missionary, Rev. Gordon Dicker, left Australia in October and after seeing something of the Church at Djakarta sailed to Timor to take up his appointment at Kupang. The Church of Timor consists of 400 congregations with a community of 250,000 baptised persons who came into the Church in a great mass movement and who remain to be nurtured in the Christian faith and built into the Universal Church.

In a land where Nationalist, Marxist and Muslim parties compete for power, the Christian minority of 2½ million was seen at the recent elections to be a significant factor in the situation. The future may prove that we took a historic step when we forged this first link with the Church in Indonesia.

FINANCE

We are deeply grateful to the people of our Church in Australia for their continued loyalty to this great arm of the Church's work. The home income reached the highest level yet recorded—£128,998. The voluntary income for general work was £114,125. The W.A.O.M. gave the fine sum of £26,869. The general voluntary income represents an average of 17/5 per member. While we rejoice that the giving of our people has increased greatly it is a disturbing thing that in terms of purchasing power this voluntary income for our general work is about the same as the income of 1945, and since then we have added 105 new missionaries to our staff.

CONCLUSION

Today there is a new urgency upon us to proclaim Christ's saving Word to a world that is losing its way. The words of our Lord should sound to us as grave and stirring as they must have sounded to the first disciples—"Do not say there are yet four months, then comes the harvest. I tell you, lift up your eyes and see how the fields are already white for harvest. Pray therefore the Lord of our harvest to send out labourers into His Harvest."