

# WORLD DOMINION

The World Dominion Movement advocates Informed Continuous Co-ordinated Evangelism to reach everyone at home and abroad. Its basis is belief in the Deity and Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the World's Only Saviour, and in the Final Authority of Holy Scripture.

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## Conditions in Czecho-Slovakia

UNTIL 1938 Czecho-Slovakia was hardly known to the ordinary Englishman. Frequently it was confused with other States which had gained or regained their independence as a result of the 1914-18 war, for instance, Yugoslavia. Yet there have been contacts between Britain and the Czechs, or the Bohemians as they were better known, in the past. Every school-boy will remember how, in the fourteenth century, the Black Prince is said to have captured the blind King John of Bohemia, assuming his crest and motto '*Ich dien*' (I serve). This has been the motto of the Prince of Wales ever since. Again, many sing the Carol about 'Good King Wenceslaus' Christmas after Christmas, but how many know that Wenceslaus was king of Bohemia in the tenth century? His saintly character, however, accorded ill with the turbulence of those around him, and he was murdered in church by his brother, Boleslav.

The great epic of the Czechs, however, is associated with the name of John Huss, and if we are to understand something about the ideals and aims of these people we must know something about this man, for he is the national hero. He was born in 1369 of poor parents. In order to support himself he sang in churches, and even while at the celebrated university of Prague he was sometimes compelled to live on dry bread. From the first a great patriot, he showed intense zeal in giving new literary expression to the Czech language, and persistently opposed the encroachments of the Germans in the government of the University. At the same time, he always declared that he would prefer a good German to a bad Czech, even if the latter were his brother. Some years before, Richard II of England had married a Czech princess, Anne, daughter of King Charles V. This princess became an enthusiastic admirer of Wiclif, the 'Morning Star of the Reformation,' and, through her instrumentality, Wiclif's teachings, in spite of the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, became widely known in Prague. At

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first suspicious, Huss, who had become the rector of the University at Prague, finally embraced the Reformation doctrines and came under the grave displeasure of the Roman Church. Like Luther, at a later date, he especially attacked the sale of indulgences, and in 1415 he was summoned to attend the Council at Constance. In spite of misgivings he went. Here he was charged with heresy and urged to recant. He refused to do so unless it could be shown from the Holy Scriptures that he was in error. In spite of the Austrian Emperor Sigismund's safe-conduct, he was burned at the stake. The indignation of the Czechs at this treacherous murder led to a great deal of unrest and rioting, and the war between the Reformers under Ziška and the Roman Catholic party followed.

In 1620 the independence of Bohemia was finally lost at the Battle of the White Mountain (now a suburb of Prague), when the Austrian Emperor Ferdinand completely defeated the Czech forces. Many of the Czech leaders were executed, and thousands were either destroyed or compelled to leave their country for ever.

With such an historical background, the enthusiasm with which the Czechs seized the opportunity of freedom in 1918 can be imagined. Led by T. G. Masaryk, a provisional Government was set up in October, and for twenty years Czecho-Slovakia presented the picture of a progressive liberal democratic republic. Religious and political freedom was practised to an extent unheard of in earlier days, and the country became the most stable State in Central or Eastern Europe.

The events of 1938 are still fresh in our memories. Those who spent the summer and autumn in Prague were deeply impressed both by the dignity and the discipline shown by the Government and the people. The dramatic events at Prague, in the Malá Strana, the great grief-stricken crowds that spread over the streets of the capital in those fateful September days, are moving memories that will not soon fade. Those twenty years of independence are now but another closed chapter in the long history of these attractive and lively Slavs.

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What of the future? The political and military independence of this land appears to be a thing of the past; Germany has a preponderant position. The structure of the State has been loosened, and the three sections, the Czechs, their cousins the Slovaks, and the Ruthenians, or Ukrainians, have been given local autonomy. Only for such vital services as defence, finance and communications is there a central Government. The numerous political parties of the old republic have been dissolved. In their place the Czechs have formed two parties, the Slovaks one Government party, led by a Roman Catholic Priest; in Ruthenia, too, there is only one party. No others will be allowed, and the character of the Governments has become authoritarian, much more power having been placed in the hands of the new president. Dr. Emil Hácha, who has been elected to this important position, is a leading jurist with a reputation for great probity and impartiality. He is also a loyal Roman Catholic.

Roman Catholicism has been the preponderant faith since 1620, and it is likely to acquire still more influence under the new conditions; there are, however, Protestant bodies which wield more influence than their numbers would suggest. They were closely identified with the republic that arose after the Great War, though their roots stretch back to Reformation times, when they were in the majority. They furnished many leaders of the nation, including Dr. Masaryk and Dr. Hodža, the last Prime Minister. As a result of the settlement of Munich, about one-third of the republic's territory and population has been lost. Czechs and Slovaks to the number of 1,100,000 find themselves cut off from their own kinsmen, between 7-800,000 being in Germany. The Protestant Churches have had severe losses. A number of their congregations now find themselves separated from the Mother Churches in Prague. In many cases they are not in a position to support themselves. At Křižlice, for instance, one of the many purely Czech villages in the Giant Mountains, there is one of the oldest congregations of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. The writer

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visited the pastor only last year, and enjoyed a holiday in this most beautiful district. The congregation was founded in 1782, and consists mostly of small farmers, who industriously till the steep slopes of the mountains. The standard of living is but modest, and it will be a very great problem to decide how their pastor will continue to be supported, now that no help can come from Prague. There are many such cases, some of them known personally to the writer.

Then, there is another type of difficulty. In some places the Czech population of towns taken away from them has had to return to Czecho-Slovakia in a destitute condition as refugees. In the south, for instance, half the population of an occupied town, which was eighty per cent Czech, has had to flee to Czecho-Slovakia. The Germans, it seems, are aiming at Germanizing it as soon as possible. Here there was a flourishing congregation, with a newly-built church and other buildings, belonging to the Czech Brethren. More than half the congregation has vanished, and the buildings are nearly useless. One, indeed, has been taken for the use of the National-Socialist party. The pastor has now settled down in a town on the Czech side of the new frontier, and, together with a few of the old members, is trying to build up a congregation again. While a church stands nearly empty on the other side of the frontier he does not know where to turn for a church building. In Slovakia the Lutheran Church has lost many congregations which have been handed over to Hungary. Some thousands of members have returned to their country as refugees. These and other burdens have fallen on the Churches just at a time when many of their members are unable to help as they would have normally, owing to the fact that their own means of existence have, in one way or another, been lost or reduced through the events of last September.

The first very natural bitterness of feeling has given way to resignation. The prompt financial help that has been afforded by the various Christian bodies in Great Britain, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries, and

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others, has been received with gratitude. A Protestant Professor expressed to the writer his thankfulness for this token of love, for it had opened his eyes to the underlying unity of all Christians. Yet more help is necessary. Much has been lost that cannot be replaced, but many crying needs of the Churches can be met if fellow Christians in other lands rise to their responsibilities. In Czecho-Slovakia the Reformed Churches have suffered not only materially, but above all, mentally and spiritually. Their eyes have ever been directed to the democratic nations, and the apparent failure to help them in their time of agony last year has struck them a heavy blow. Through the present helplessness of their State they see evil influences flooding in upon their people, and their people are not strong enough to resist them alone. Only an evangelical revival can give them the moral and spiritual stability which they need.

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### ‘ Life with a Purpose ’

THE SIXTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL MILD MAY CONFERENCE

17TH-22ND APRIL, 1939.

*Chairman of Conference:* The Rev. T. Wilkinson Riddle, F.R.S.L., D.D.

*Speakers:* The Rev. F. Cawley, B.A., Ph.D., Prebendary W. Wilson Cash, D.D., the Rev. John A. Patten, M.A., the Rev. A. Douglas Adam, D.D., A. Lindsay Glegg, Esq., the Rev. Hugh C. C. McCullough, H. Broadbent, Esq., the Rev. A. Stuart McNairn, J. Savage, Esq., the Rev. A. Baxter and Dr. Thomas Cochrane.

A full programme will be sent on application to : National House, Mildmay Centre, London, N.1.

The Report of last year's Conference was sent to two thousand mission-stations. So many letters have been received telling of the spiritual help and inspiration given by the Report to lonely and hard-working missionaries that we are most anxious to send this year's Report to the remaining mission-stations throughout the world.

*If friends care to send a donation towards this, it will be a piece of real missionary service.*