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ANABAPTIST COUSINAGE

Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation, [ed. Paul Toews, Kindred Press, 315 S Lincoln, PO Box V, Hillsboro', KS 67063, USA; 261pp, \$15.95] is not a report on the recently concluded bilateral dialogue between the two families, but a series of essays on relationships over four and a half centuries. The first essay, by Bill Estep, looks again at Baptist origins and their Anabaptist and Puritan contexts, whilst the second, by Abraham Friesen, is a fascinating study of Baptist historiography of their Anabaptist predecessors. The rest of the book, however, concerns later relationships between the two families in more recent times from the revival of the Baptist movement in the continent of Europe from the mid-nineteenth century onwards in Poland, Prussia, and especially in Russia. Other chapters deal with relationships between the two bodies in Canada and the USA, and joint mission work in India. One chapter has German Baptists in its title and that suggests another complication: here the reference is to Baptists in Germany but another kindred group, once called 'German Baptists' in North America, is the Church of the

Brethren, another of the historic peace churches, which parallels the Mennonites in coming to a similar churchmanship from Lutheran pietism in the eighteenth century. Two chapters complete the collection: one analysing Augustus Strong as a Baptist theologian for the Mennonite Brethren - could there not have been a corresponding chapter, 'John Howard Yoder, a Mennonite theologian for Baptists'? James McClendon of Fuller ends with a thoughtful perspective on 'The Baptists and Mennonite Vision'.

* * * * *

BEDFORDSHIRE NONCONFORMIST DEVOTION

Another Look at the Agnes Beaumont Story (1674)*

'My dear Children, call to mind the former days . . . remember also your songs in the night . . . for there is treasure hid . . . Have you forgot the Close, the Milk-house, the Stable, the Barn, and the like, where God did visit your Soul?'¹

These familiar words, part of the preface to *Grace Abounding*, offer Bunyan's apologia for publishing in 1666 his personal testimony to the grace of God. His appeal to recall specific locations where the believer has had an encounter with God was not lost on one member of his congregation, Agnes Beaumont, the subject of a recent article by Patricia L. Bell in the *Baptist Quarterly*.² The suggestion that we come to Bedfordshire for our Annual Meeting prompted me to look again at the familiar *Narrative* of her 'persecution', describing events when she had been a member of Bunyan's church for little over a year. Writing in her early twenties, this young believer recalls her 'songs in the night' and does so not only as a tribute to God's unfailing love but also as an honest reminder of her personal frailty and momentary failure:

And, the Lord knowest it, their was scarce A Corner in the house, or Barnes, or Cowhousen, or Stable, or Closes, vnder the hegges, or in the wood, but I was made to poure out my soul to god.³

It is a fascinating story, not the familiar testimony for Church Meeting with its account of 'the work of grace' in her soul,⁴ nor one of the longer spiritual autobiographies of the period.⁵ Her artless narrative, unpublished until the following century, was written primarily for her own benefit, vividly recalling not the compressed story of a lifetime but, almost in diary form, the events of one traumatic week in her early Christian experience. Patricia Bell's article carefully reconstructs the story, illuminating it with relevant genealogical, topographical and sociological detail, and it is unnecessary to repeat it fully here, but some brief recollection of the events might be helpful.

The year is 1674. The times were not easy. Charles II's short-lived Declaration

* The Baptist Historical Society's Annual Lecture, delivered at the meeting at Elstow, Bedfordshire, on 10 July 1993.