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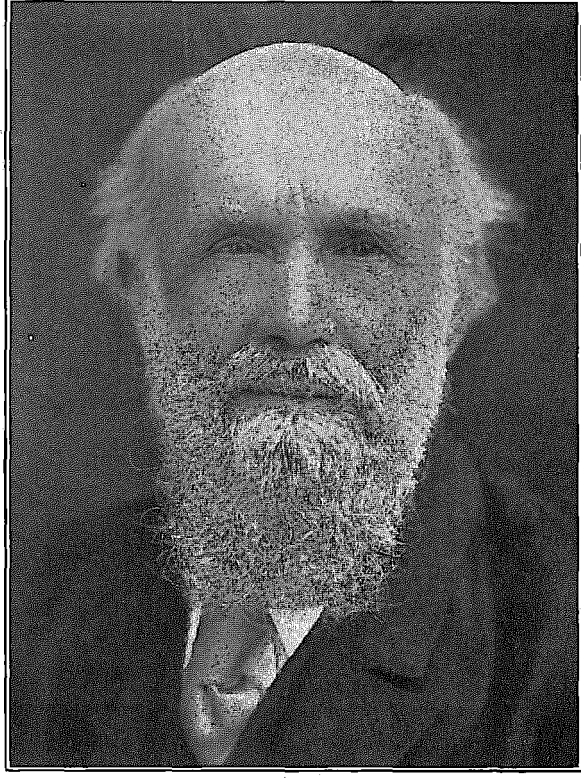
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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bq\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php)

"John Clifford, 1836-1923; with Portrait," Baptist Quarterly 2.1 (January 1924): 1-3.



# The Baptist Quarterly.

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John Clifford.

1836—1923.

WE should be ungrateful to regret the passing of Dr. Clifford after so long a life, filled with such worthy service, yet his home call brings to the denomination and to the whole Christian world a sense of heavy loss. His greatness, acknowledged even by those who differed from him, made him a typical figure in our midst, so that our very Gospel seemed to be invested with charm and increased persuasive power so long as we could point to him and say, "This man is a Christian." To those who loved him, that is his greatest distinction. He was a follower of Christ, and in that difficult task of following, John Clifford achieved.

Others have spoken of his winsome personality, his rare qualities of mind and heart, his catholicity of spirit and his influence on almost all Christian communities, not to speak of the nation at large. Here we must confine ourselves to some estimate of his service to our own denomination, and of his position as a *Baptist*. Any denomination might be proud to claim him; it will be forgiven us if we boast a little that he was one of us.

Even during his lifetime he was frequently numbered with our worthies. Spurgeon and he did not see eye to eye on matters theological, but their names are inseparably linked. It is well. Every just mind in the future will think of them as twin stars of great magnitude, nor will men when they speak of Robert Hall, Fuller, Carey, Maclaren, and the rest, hesitate to add the name of one who was second to none in virile piety, and equal to any on the devotion with which he served his day and generation. Too early it is to measure the obligation under which he has laid us; but a place for him in our Baptist history is assured. His name liveth for evermore.

Like Carey he sprang out of the quiet life of the village community, and again like the great missionary he owed much to his own grit, perseverance and patience. His life-story is one of

the romances for which the religious life of the nineteenth century is famous. He was a strange product of the "hungry forties," lived through the blackest time that the Midland counties have seen, claimed life and found it through Christ, and in his prominence at the capital city of England, he preserved his simplicity and sanity of his early days. This accounts to some extent for his unfailing optimism—he had witnessed so much progress through the years. This accounts, too, for his hatred of all social and priestly tyranny. From the beginning he knew life as it is, got down, so to speak, to the very bone, and then found that Christ, and Christ alone, is great enough to meet man's individual and corporate need. Never did he enjoy himself more than when expounding Baptist principles, and his exposition of Baptist principles will stand for a long time. If we have any distinctive emphasis, then Clifford surely was the embodiment of it. And always for him the centre was Christ. Called on at the first meeting of the Baptist World Alliance to welcome the delegates from all countries, he began by noting "the place which Jesus occupies in the Baptist faith and in Baptist life. . . . His place is supreme in the life of the individual, supreme in the life of the Christian church, and supreme also and ultimately in the life of the world." Those who knew him, recognize here the characteristic note of his personal religion. It was the well-tune note also of his public ministry.

We venture to think that his influence will live in the modern movement to secure the reign of Jesus in every department and realm of life. That idea is one of the deep factors operating to-day in Christendom, and John Clifford was a pioneer of it. His social sympathies were something more than the result of early memories and experiences; they sprang straight out of his apprehension of the Gospel, and had behind them the compulsion of clear thinking and a stern logic. He knew that the Sermon on the Mount is for all time, the final and only ethic, because he discerned that Jesus is indeed the Son of God; and if he had any intolerance in his nature, it was for systems of thinking or worshipping which tended to place the great Master in the background and obscure His meanings and significance for the *whole* life of man. It was this that made Dr. Clifford *something of a prophet*, whose word will live on in this new age which happily he was spared to greet.

The high value he set in education will also be part of his legacy. There is no need here to tell how he struggled in the early days to acquire knowledge or to enumerate the number of degrees he took after entering on his first and only pastorate. The fact of significance is he was an educated man. He be-

lieved in education. Believed in it as an additional equipment for the ministry, and in his own ministry proved that faith has nothing whatever to fear from enlightenment. Indeed, he stood always for enquiry, and to this end he was found with open and alert mind. He was one of the few who never stop thinking, with the result that he was alive in old age. Many will strive to emulate him, and already his example has counted for something in our ideas and ideals. As a denomination we are committed now to an informed and instructed ministry, and one of the reasons why we are so committed is John Clifford.

Brought up a General Baptist, Dr. Clifford always had a great love in his heart for the old body. His interest in Baptist History was very deep, and his knowledge wide. He was from the beginning one of the Vice-presidents of our Historical Society, recommending its work on many occasions, and taking to the last a loving interest in the *Quarterly*. He recently recalled with great pleasure the various Baptist publications with which he had been connected. Always it was a joy to him to see his beloved denomination striking out on new lines, attempting fresh ventures, and visualizing future tasks. His soul had its windows open towards the East. It is from the dawn he beckons us to-day.