

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

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)

the backward glance, the vision and the memory, belonged together and required each other. Directly or indirectly, it is hoped that the following pages confirm this integrity as our own abiding need and possibility.

---

## Come Wind, Come Weather!\*

WE have come together this afternoon to thank God for the life and work of Ernest Alexander Payne. We have also come as his friends to honour his memory, to share our sorrow at parting with him, to offer our sympathy to his immediate family. Above all we have come to rejoice in that sure and certain hope in Christ which we have shared on earth with Ernest Payne and which he now knows in that place where faith is turned to sight and struggle to victory.

It is fitting that this service should be held during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. So much of importance in his life was done in the wider fellowship of the Christian Churches that we are both glad that justice will be done to that wider work and witness at the service in Westminster Abbey in February and also that so many friends of his and ours from other Christian communions are here with us today. Mrs. Payne has asked me especially to thank all of you who have come to this service whether of the Baptist family—we rejoice to have the President and the Secretary of the Baptist Union here—or of the wider family of the Christian Church.

But this afternoon our service does not focus upon the wider scene of Ernest Payne's life and work. Today, we shall be thinking less of his work for the Baptist Union, for the British Council of Churches or for the World Council of Churches. These were the activities which led the Queen to make him one of her Companions of Honour. Today, we shall be thinking of him particularly as he was in his family, among his friends and in this College which gave him so much joy across the years.

Many years ago when, I suppose, he could have had no thought of the wider responsibilities which would one day be his own, he wrote these words in a *Memoir* of Dr. Wheeler Robinson:

"Some who read this memoir will perhaps be most surprised to discover Robinson's unwavering loyalty to the Baptist denomin-

\*Address given at Regent's Park College, Oxford, 21st January, 1980.

ation and the self-sacrificing service he gave to it throughout his life. To Baptist witness in general, and to Baptist ministers in particular, he offered the best that was in him. Often he might have excused himself and concentrated upon other interests, but he desired and was content to serve truth, beauty, goodness and holiness as a Baptist minister, and one always loyal to the brotherhood. And this attitude he maintained though he had sometimes to endure the suspicion, the misunderstanding and the ingratitude of his fellow Baptists".<sup>1</sup>

A generation later those words could, with astonishing accuracy, refer to Ernest Payne himself though the wounds he bore were not because of his Biblical scholarship but because of his steadfast ecumenical commitment. I have often wondered what his feelings were as, near the beginning of his *History of the Baptist Union*, he recorded John Rippon's explanation, nearly a century and a half earlier, about why it was that he did not play a greater part in the denominational leadership. "Why," John Rippon is said to have explained, "Why, I see the Dover coach go by my house every morning and I notice that the leaders get most lashed".<sup>2</sup>

I can touch only lightly upon Ernest Payne's life with his family. He was, in some ways, a very private man, yet with his family—and often, in earlier days, with the extended family of a Baptist Missionary Society summer school and similar occasions over the years—he would relax and join in the fun with a complete absence of the cautious dignity or the discretion which so often later seemed publicly a natural part of him.

I have been told something of the joy which he had in his family's successes: of the happiness his grandchildren gave him, of the many hours he spent in writing to this one and that one, week after week. I have been told that he was always proud to be a Londoner—and, by one who hoped to be here today, of holding the five-year-old Ernest Payne on his knee to see the Lord Mayor's procession pass by in 1907. And I know of his joy in his adopted county of Northamptonshire with its rich family links and even richer Baptist heritage.

I have also come to know, since their return to Oxford, just how much he depended upon Freda, his wife, to make possible the incredible amount of travelling both in this country and abroad of which he proved capable at an age when most men would be seeking a quiet retirement. She has faithfully kept his home for him, nursed him through illness, taken care of his daily needs and, time after time, driven him in their car all over the country. Once or twice I have come down with him late at night from London in quite appalling weather to find her, when the train was sometimes running abominably late, ready at the station to take him—and me—home after an exhausting day. Of her own exhaustion she made no complaint. We can thank God today for that loyalty at home which made his public ministry possible.

I know that many of you who are here this afternoon can testify to

the value of Ernest Payne's friendship. Most of you will know that last Monday he had gone up to London the day before the committees he hoped to attend so that he might have some time with friends who needed his counsel and his comfort.

Over and over again, I have been with those who have told me that it was his friendship which helped them through a time of darkness or grief; or that it was his friendship and his counsel which determined, under God, some of the most important decisions of their life.

He always had time for younger people—even right down to young Benjamin Fiddes, aged eighteen months, who lives just next door. He had time for younger ministers—and took a great interest in contemporary members of this College, especially, but not only, those preparing for the ministry in the eighties. Morris West, who will be preaching at the service in Westminster Abbey in a few weeks' time, is one whom he has counselled, cared for and trusted down the years. Ernest Payne was, I believe, usually a good judge of a man, and a wise judge of a situation. Infallibility has gone, I believe, out of fashion, even in those circles where it once seemed most secure—and Ernest Payne was the last man to believe himself to possess any such quality. But few of us would differ from him without at least *some* inward qualms!

But it is not enough to speak of him as one who gave friendship, generous as he was. He valued the friendship of others too and drew strength from it. He deeply enjoyed such routine Baptist occasions as church meetings or association gatherings when he came not as a dignitary, nor as a speaker, but for the sheer joy of being among friends. Of such occasions for fellowship he once quoted a hymn from Daniel Turner of Abingdon, pastor there for over half a century:

"Here thy waiting people see

Much of heaven and much of Thee".<sup>3</sup>

I possess Robert Child's copy of the Festschrift *Outlook for Christianity* which was given to Ernest Payne upon his retirement as secretary of the Baptist Union with a letter thanking him for the introductory memoir which Mr. Child had contributed. In the course of the letter Ernest wrote: "One thing you perhaps could not include and that is what I have owed to the friendship of a small company, among whom you have had a special place for now forty years". The names of some of the others, many who are here today can guess: Grey Griffiths, John Barrett, Seymour Price, Ronald Bell and his brother. He was one who both gave his friendship—and who deeply valued his friends.

I know that both Freda and Ernest Payne counted the years when he taught at Regent's (1940-1951) in the Faculty of Theology some of the happiest years of their life. I believe that always when he came to Regent's he had the sense of coming home. We always rejoiced to have him. At the reunions he was at his most relaxed and the likelihood of his presence has been one of the attractions to many men coming back. At the College committees and the Council he was always wise, never

over-bearing in his advice or in the advocacy of policy, and always, sometimes startlingly, *adventurous*.

Last summer, as Walter Bottoms reminded me last week, he told some of us that of all the projects he had shared in the one above others which gave him most satisfaction was that of helping to ensure the establishment of Regent's in Oxford. I believe that, when all is said and done, when the part played by Wheeler Robinson, by Robert Child and by Henton Davies is properly and justly weighed, it will be reckoned true that Ernest Payne's part stands worthily alongside theirs.

Just over a fortnight ago, when the Chairman could not be present. Ernest Payne presided over the College Council. Two adventurous moves—the more adventurous, some would say downright dangerous, in the present economic climate, were decided. One was the appointment of a fifth Tutor and the other was the completion of the south-east corner of the College site. It was Ernest Payne who, both in public and in private, was quite certain that the two projects should go ahead. I have quailed before such prospects, he has never done so: repeatedly he has told the Council—"when we have built we have been right, when we have postponed building, we have been wrong."

But his interest in the College has not been merely in the bricks and mortar or in the library which he has so generously helped us to enlarge. He shared the College interviews the day before his last Council meeting, interviews which led to the acceptance of nine men for ministerial training. He also came to know some students of the present house, to recognise and to remember names. . . . But what of his personal faith? It never obtruded itself upon the reader in his many historical writings yet, here and there, among the matters he chose to highlight there are hints of the things he believed to be of ultimate importance.

For example, when he wrote of Wheeler Robinson, "To the last, and at the last, his trust and hope were in Christ and Him crucified"<sup>4</sup> you catch the echo of Ernest Payne's own conviction. Similarly, in his essay on "Doddridge and the Missionary Enterprise" he surely expressed his own lifelong commitment to the work of overseas missions when he quoted Doddridge's earliest hymn. He explained that it expressed Doddridge's lifelong faith, a faith that inevitably issued in missionary interest and activity—

"Jesus, I love thy charming name

'Tis music to mine ear

Fain would I sound it out so loud

That earth and heav'n should hear".<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, it is the expression, I believe, of Ernest Payne's personal conviction when he speaks in his book on the Free Churches, of the way renewal comes: "by prayer, by study of the Bible, by theological discussion, by courageous protest, by a firm faith that 'the Lord has more Truth yet to break forth out of his holy Word' ".<sup>6</sup> And what of the Christian hope beyond this life and in eternity? The answer comes

from his memoir, written only just over a year ago for John Barrett, his friend for half a century, "Dare we doubt that for him death was other than an awakening to a richer and more glorious existence?"<sup>7</sup> Nor need we doubt that of Ernest Payne himself.

Last Monday evening, when the shock of his death was only an hour or two old, Freda Payne told us that we must have Bunyan's pilgrim song at this service. As I looked at the sermon and the service he had already prepared for yesterday's service at Bunyan Meeting, Bedford, I knew she was right—and I knew it for another reason than that strange coincidence. Always through his life he had been moving on, with his face to the future. The history projects uncompleted in his study bear witness to that—they are witnesses not just to his untiring industry, but to the pilgrim spirit. That spirit is embodied in the words from Kierkegaard quoted in Ernest Payne's most well-loved book, the *Fellowship of Believers*: "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards".<sup>8</sup> Those are the words which will serve as the motto for one who was a historian and a steadfast pilgrim. . . .

Come wind, come weather!

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Payne, *Henry Wheeler Robinson* (1946), p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union* (1958), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> E. A. Payne, *The Baptists of Berkshire* (1951), p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> *Henry Wheeler Robinson, op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> E. A. Payne, "Doddridge and the Missionary Enterprise", in G. F. Nuttall (ed.), *Philip Doddridge 1702-1751* (1951), p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> E. A. Payne, *The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England* (Revised Edn. 1965), p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> E. A. Payne, *A 20th Century Minister: John Oliver Barrett 1901-78*, (1978) p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> E. A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers* (2nd Edn. 1952), p. 4.

B. R. WHITE.

---

#### OUR CONTRIBUTORS

B. R. White, M.A., D.Phil.,  
Principal, Regents' Park College, Oxford.

W. M. West, J.P., M.A., D.Th., LL.D.,  
Principal, Bristol Baptist College.

The Late E. A. Payne, C.H., M.A., D.D., LL.D.

M. J. Walker, B.D., M.Th.,  
Minister, Beckenham Baptist Church.

N. H. Keeble, B.A., D.Phil.,  
Lecturer in English Literature, University of Stirling.