

The Baptist Quarterly.



The Aims of "The Baptist Quarterly."

THE issue of *The Baptist Quarterly*, in place of the *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, is to be regarded as a natural development of the past, not as a break with it. The work done by the Society during the last fourteen years, to which so large a contribution has been made by the historical learning and unstinted labour of the Honorary Secretary, needs no present commendation; the gratitude of at least future generations of students is ensured. But the Society does need a broader basis, if it is to continue its most useful labours. The cost of printing is much more than it was, and the issue of the Society's publications is no longer possible on the former terms. It was seen that the number of members would have to be considerably increased if the Society were to continue in existence. Further, there is always the need for a new relay of students of our denominational origins and history to replace those who fall out. Even to-day much valuable material is in danger of being lost for ever, because the objects for which the Society has existed are not more widely known. In addition to this, there seemed to be the opening, in spite of the difficulties in the way of any new publication at the present time, for a magazine that should express contemporary Baptist aims and interests, before they pass into the domain of the historical student. On these lines *The Baptist Quarterly* makes its present appeal to all who cherish Baptist convictions, and are prepared to love the past for the sake of the present, as well as to those who love the past for its own sake. As Paul Sabatier has said, in the introduction to his life of Francis of Assisi, "We love our ancestors . . . and we mingle with this love much feeling and gratitude. So, if one can hope all things from a son who

loves his parents, we must not despair of an age that loves history." But a real interest in the past is always awakened by an *intelligent* grasp of the life of to-day.

There is no incongruity in mingling the study of the past with the interests of the present, as we propose to do; indeed, in A. J. Butler's words, the right scent of a subject is "the essence of its relation to life," or as the most distinguished student of history in the last generation said, when commending the study of modern history, "it is a narrative told of ourselves, the record of a life which is our own, of efforts not yet abandoned to repose, of problems that still entangle the feet and vex the hearts of men." The value of Baptist history is not measured simply by the interests of the archaeologist, to whom it is always fascinating to reconstruct the past from a few fragments of information. From the seventeenth century onwards we find exhibited the same devotion to evangelical truth, loyalty to the Scriptures, passion for religious and social liberty, which we like to think are ours still. Doubtless, there have been many changes in the expression and application of these ideals; not the least useful effect of the study of our Baptist past would be to give us a wider present sympathy with varying ways of expressing the same thing, differing types of a common loyalty to Christ, sympathy that is the child of intelligence and charity. But deeper down than our denominational kinship with these men and women of former days, there is the common human nature that underlies all history, and is the final justification for its study.

There is lying on my desk the Minute Book of a historic London Church now extinct. Now Minutes can be very dreary, and a Committee often gives an audible sigh of relief when they are "taken as read." The names and formal proceedings of the past have no more interest than the album of somebody else's family portraits—until we discover our own kinship with them. But as I turn over the leaves of this solid volume, to which, with the permission of the Editors, I shall hope to return in the future pages of *The Baptist Quarterly*, I see a whole world of living and moving interests. Here are given, through the amply recorded cases of discipline, glimpses of the seventeenth-century relation of master and

servant, neighbour and neighbour, husband and wife. Here is the ignorant woman who resorts to the conjuror, the idle apprentice who plays draughts in a coffee-house, the voluble young man who cannot pay his debts because his time is taken up in preaching. Here is the man excommunicated for heresy, and loyally followed into outer darkness by his wife. Here is the man who ruffles it "like a rude Hector," and the woman who gives a love-potion. Chief in human interest is the sorrowful story of a gifted evangelist, well known in the records of northern Baptists, who dishonours his calling and his Master's name by shameful immorality. Years before, when he was twenty-two, he had preached and published a sermon on "Samson a type of Christ," suggested by a tapestry in the house where he was staying. David Crosley would have done better to consider the resemblance between Samson and himself.

I can imagine some who would turn, with a sneer at religion, from these stories of human nature as the arena of the struggle between sin and grace. We shall not do that, as we read such things; we shall rather magnify the grace that set men to struggle, and inspired such condemnations of the sin. I wonder whether we should come off much better in a modern Baptist Church, if the discipline were equally thorough, and the record equally honest?

We seek, then, to issue a magazine which shall appeal to all Baptists who have convictions, and believe they are worth maintaining and applying to the religious and moral, the political and social life of our times. We do not stand for all that our fathers did—who amongst us to-day would condemn the singing of hymns, as this old Church-book does, and partly on the ground that women's voices ought not to be heard in the Church? But we believe that Baptist life to-day is in real continuity of descent from the essential and permanent principles of the Gospel which created the first Baptist Churches in this country. If Baptists will give us their support in an honest and disinterested effort to be of service to them, and through them to the Universal Church of which they are part, we shall succeed; if they do not, we shall at least have tried to do something that was worth doing.

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