

# Baptist Historical Society.

## 1. ANNUAL MEETING AT THE BIBLE HOUSE.

THIS year our Society prefaced its Annual Meeting, held by courtesy of the British and Foreign Bible Society at their Headquarters on Thursday, April 30th, by a tour of Bible House. We were welcomed on behalf of the Bible Society by the Rev. John A. Patten, who in a few happy words prepared us for the pride we were soon to feel in our Baptist contribution to Bible translation. Just as the QUARTERLY has now for many years had its historical and its modern side, so this tour combined the wonder of deeds done long ago with the busy efficient marvels of an up-to-date Publishing House.

Gathering together in the Library, we began, characteristically enough, by glancing at the last pages of the Story we were about to peruse. The Rev. E. W. Smith, who is in charge of what is probably a unique collection of Scriptures, told us that the Library contained 19,200 copies of the Bible or some part of it, written or printed in no less than 980 different languages or dialects. A few of the languages are now dead; and we were soon aware of a curious contrast which should obviously supply a band of many preachers with a moral, though exactly what the moral is I have been unable to decide. Early Missionary enterprise among the American Indians produced copies of the Scriptures in various dialects, some of which we saw, and noted with particular interest one in a language now dead, though comparatively recently the mother tongue of thousands of those Red people. Yet the oldest Scripture we saw, and one of the oldest in the world, a strip of papyrus containing some verses from the Gospel of John, was written in Coptic, a language still in use as the sacred tongue of the ancient Egyptian Church. This tiny fragment of papyrus, dating from the fourth century, had been buried for thirteen hundred years in an Egyptian cemetery. It was a fragile relic, speaking eloquently of great days of the Church, it was written in the century of Athanasius and Arius; when it was the new copy of the Gospel in some Egyptian church or school the Council of Nicaea was a recent event, and men were still arguing the pros and cons of the Arian controversy as the current topic of the day.

In the same case was an interesting example of a Palimpsest MS., Codex Zacynthius containing fragments of St. Luke. Dating from the eighth century, this MS., as a close ally of Codex

Sinaiticus, represents the close of the great work of the School of Alexandria and that most important and influential text of the New Testament which it produced. Codex Zacynthius has many western readings, but I did not hear anyone skilled enough to point one out!

Naturally enough the English Bible is more fully represented in the Library, and after having paused to note the beautiful writing of a Latin Bible, we were reminded of the story of "How we got our Bible." A MS. of Wyclif's Version; a modern copy of the treasure of Bristol College Library, Tyndale's Version; a copy of the first complete printed English Bible by Coverdale and a fine copy of the "Great He Bible," were vivid reminders of the sacrifice and devotion that have gone to the production of the Scriptures in our own tongue. The well-known story was a reminder to us all that in the modern work of the British and Foreign Bible Society and in the translating work of the many British Missionary Societies, we are but paying a small part of the debt we owe to those heroic and scholarly men of by-gone days.

We were shown that Baptists have played a worthy part in this work. As we gathered round the table and listened to the story of their work, illustrated before us, we were humbly glad to stand in such a succession. It was fascinating to have in a few brief minutes a living example of the scholarly search for truth, as we listened to the "pundits" discussing, correcting, supplementing one another over the stories that lay behind those little volumes spread out before us. That truly epoch-making volume, Carey's Bengali New Testament, began the discussion. Published in 1801, three years before the Bible Society was founded, it inspired another Baptist, one Joseph Hughes, of Battersea, who not only helped in the formation of the Society, but became one of its first secretaries. The Rev. S. Pearce Carey waxed justly eloquent on the work of Carey and his colleagues in Bible translation. Did not Carey give God's Word "or, at least, most precious portions thereof, in thirty-four languages," and was not Marshman's Chinese Bible before us? Dr. Whitley then pointed out that up to the year 1800 there were versions of the Scriptures in about thirty-seven different tongues, mostly by then dead languages, and within the next generation Baptists alone had doubled the number. Baptists had not, however, waited until the nineteenth century to show their interest in the work of Bible translation. It was an early feature of our story, and one of our sixteenth century leaders, Henry Jessey, had urged upon the Authorities of the Commonwealth the desirability of revising the Authorised Version. Was he not prepared to help to do it himself? Before we turned from these far-off, but not forgotten

things, it was a treat to hear Modern Historical Scholarship in the person of Dr. Whitley, for once establish an ancient tale as "Gospel Truth," content in the process merely to demolish a modern fairy tale. A question brought from him the story of Chamberlain and the Bible Reading circle at Colchester which went on for twenty years and inspired Thomas Matthew with the desire to translate the Scriptures into English. We heard how the work was done in Holland, and how strangely the proof reader, a Roman Catholic priest named Rogers, was converted by his proof reading, but more strangely has been falsely credited with being the translator of the first version to be licensed to be read in England.

After these excursions into history we were escorted over the business side of the premises, and saw how modern business knowledge and skill have been brought into the work of disseminating the Scriptures. Thus the generations link up with one another in a common love and service, till at length "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

GERALD C. MATTHEWS.

## II. REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1935.

Last year's Baptist Assembly was held at Plymouth, and this presented the Society with the opportunity of arranging an excursion of unique interest. After visiting historic sites in Plymouth, members and their friends, numbering about one hundred, embarked at the Mayflower Stone for Drake's Island. Here a service in memory of Abraham Cheare, of George Street, who was imprisoned and died on the Island, was conducted by Dr. T. Wilkinson Riddle, the present minister of George Street. Dr. Riddle rightly declared that "the occasion was distinctly a historic one, for ever since Abraham Cheare lay in the gloomy dungeons of the Island, no service under Baptist auspices had been held there." Dr. Whitley also took part in the celebration, telling of Cheare's love of verse-making, and characteristically suggesting that there was some good in imprisonment because "if John Bunyan had not been in prison he would have been just a local evangelist and never been heard of."

Leaving the Island, our modern pilgrims went by motor launch to Saltash, where the local church generously entertained the Society to tea. At the Annual Meeting the members regretfully received the resignation, on health grounds, of Dr. Whitley, who for the long period of twenty-seven years had given honoured and honourable service as the Society's Secretary. Dr.

Whitley and the Baptist Historical Society have been synonymous terms. The seven volumes of the TRANSACTIONS, and the seven volumes of the QUARTERLY, contain contributions from his pen which will be of permanent value; he has written the Standard History of British Baptists and other works; he has been ever ready to place his knowledge at the disposal of the Society's members and to inspire and guide younger students. Very gladly the members elected him Vice-President. Later in the year the Committee regretfully received his request to be relieved of the joint-editorship of the QUARTERLY, to which, however, he hoped to continue as a contributor. Mr. Price, who at the Annual Meeting retired from the Vice-Presidency and was elected Secretary, has been appointed sole editor of the QUARTERLY. Dr. Lord continues his supervision of the Reviews.

The reprint of Thomas Helwys' *Mystery of Iniquity* has been circulated to our honorary members and sold to the public. Letters of appreciation of the Society's enterprise in making this rare book available have been received from librarians and others, at home and abroad.

In addition to articles on modern problems, the BAPTIST QUARTERLY has been enriched by reprints of letters, minute books and other records. Of particular interest were the Glasshouse Yard Minute Book, 1682/1740, and the letters which passed between Andrew Fuller and James Deakin.

Enquiries from churches and individuals have been received, and in all cases the information needed has been supplied. The Society's officers are glad to help those engaged in research, and they would welcome correspondence not only from students in our Theological Colleges, but also from Baptist students in other Schools and Universities. One such student, who was making a study of Baptist History in connection with a History course, was helped.

The year has seen a welcome increase in membership. The officers invite the members to co-operate with them in securing a large addition during the current year, so that the activities of the Society may be extended and its publications increased.

SEYMOUR J. PRICE.

## III. FINANCIAL STATEMENT.

(For the year ended 31st December, 1935.)

INCOME							
Balance from 1934	...	...	...	...	29	16	9
— do. — for Subscriptions paid in advance					3	5	0
Subscriptions received	...	...	...	...	82	18	6
Sales of Publications	...	...	...	...	2	19	3
” ” “Mystery of Iniquity”	...	...	...	...	30	13	4
Bank Balance re Life Members	...	...	...	...	20	15	8
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					£170	8	6
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EXPENDITURE							
Printing and Publishing							
Baptist Quarterly	...	...			76	11	0
Friend's Historical Society—							
Subscription	...	...				10	0
Printing, Insurance and Expenses					1	17	8
Photo and Block of former Secretary					1	4	3
“Mystery of Iniquity”—Helwys:							
Circulars and Advertising	...		11	13	8		
On account of Printing	...		63	2	0		
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					74	15	8
Balance to 1936	...	...	...	...	12	6	11
do. Subscriptions paid							
in advance	...		3	3	0		
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					15	9	11
					<hr/>		
					£170	8	6
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Balance of printing account outstanding—£52 : 13 : 6.

A. H. CALDER, *Treasurer.*

30th April, 1936.