

Editorial Notes.

SINCE 1942 there has been a series of conversations of a semi-official character, between five representatives of the Baptist Union and five representatives of the Churches of Christ. Their aim has been to explore the possibility of closer association and co-operation between the two bodies. Those taking part on behalf of the Baptists have been Dr. Gilbert Laws, Dr. P. W. Evans, Mr. C. T. LeQuesne, K.C., Mr. R. Wilson Black, J.P., and Dr. Henry Townsend, the last named in succession to the late Dr. H. Wheeler Robinson. By a recent vote of the Baptist Union Council, the conversations have entered on a new phase, and have been given a more official status. The General Purposes Committee of the Council has been authorised to enter on negotiations for some kind of concordat between the two bodies. The Baptists and the Churches of Christ have, it is believed, already much in common and would derive mutual benefit from closer collaboration, whether or not this leads later on to actual union.

There are in this country 141 Churches of Christ with a membership of 10,628, together with 102 Sunday Schools with 8,392 scholars. In other parts of the world, and in particular in the United States, the Churches of Christ are a far larger body. They are engaged in conversations with Baptists in several other lands, including the United States, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. Many important issues are involved, some theological and some practical. It is also to be noted that there are differences of emphasis and *ethos* within the various Churches of Christ, as there are among Baptists.

One fruit of the conversations in Britain has taken the form of a pamphlet entitled *Infant Baptism Today* (Carey Kingsgate Press and Berean Press, 6d. net). To this, Principal William Robinson, of Overdale College, contributes a valuable catena of quotations showing the judgement of leading scholars regarding the New Testament evidence about Baptism and the uneasiness regarding present-day practice in many different Churches. Dr. Evans discusses some of the doctrinal issues involved and Dr. Townsend writes on baptism and the Christian ethic. The pamphlet as a whole is an able and effective piece of propaganda. A copy has already been sent to all the Anglican bishops and further wide-spread distribution is planned. It should also prove

very valuable for discussion in ministers' fraternals and with groups of young people.

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The discussions with the Churches of Christ are not the only ones in which Baptists are at present involved. There are in this country the conversations between the Church of England and the Free Churches, begun again after the sermon of the Archbishop of Canterbury before Cambridge University in November, 1946. No details have yet been given as to the course of these conversations, which are certain to be influenced by the report of the Lambeth Conference and the recommendations of the Anglican bishops.

More immediately important are the negotiations in Ceylon, where a detailed scheme of Church Union has been drawn up by representatives of the Church of Ceylon (Anglican), the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Church and the Jaffna Council of the South India United Church (Congregationalist). The Lambeth Conference described the Ceylon scheme as "in many respects among the most promising of the various schemes of its type". It builds upon, but modifies in important respects, the South India scheme. What is envisaged is an immediate unification of ministries under a constitutionally appointed episcopate by a service of "reception into the presbyterate of the United Church of those already ordained to the ministry of the uniting Churches". It is laid down that "no particular interpretation of episcopacy shall be demanded from any minister or member of the United Church", but the link with the historic episcopate is secured. Both the baptism of infants and believer's baptism will be the practice of the United Church, if the present scheme is adopted. The two groups resulting will be "unified as full members of the Church through receiving confirmation, which shall be administered by bishops," "for the sake of uniformity of practice".

The deep sense of spiritual urgency and eagerness inspiring the Ceylon leaders in all the negotiating churches is clear to all who have been in touch with them. Any guidance the West may wish to give must be given with sympathy and a desire to help, not hinder, for the Christian Churches of Ceylon have a difficult task in the face of a resurgent Buddhism. Over one hundred years of Baptist missionary effort have resulted in only 1,500 members of Baptist churches.

The General Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society has made clear that the Baptist churches of Ceylon must make their own decision on this scheme, but has drawn their attention to a number of points which would cause difficulty were similar proposals put forward in this country.

It is hoped that the United Church would be able to retain full recognition from and communion with those Churches with which the uniting Churches are now in communion. To the issues involved at this point Baptists as well as others will need to give much thought and prayer.

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We extend a warm welcome to the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (Oliver & Boyd, Ltd., Edinburgh. Single copies 3s. 6d., Annual subscription 15s. 6d.). This new quarterly, under the editorship of Dr. T. F. Torrance and the Rev. J. K. S. Reid, bears the marks of Barthian influence, but it is clear that this is combined with the fine tradition of scholarship associated with the Church of Scotland. The two numbers that have so far appeared contain important articles and reviews, and suggest that the *Journal* will soon establish itself as one of the most important publications of its kind. The gap between the *Journal of Theological Studies* and the *Expository Times* has been all too apparent of recent years, while *Theology* and the *Church Quarterly Review* are ready, only occasionally, to admit contributions from non-Anglicans.

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At the end of last year, Mr. W. H. Ball, M.B.E., retired from the service of the Baptist Union. There thus came to an end an association remarkable in duration and in quality. When it began, in 1892, the Union was still housed in the Baptist Mission House in Furnival Street. Samuel Harris Booth was secretary. A new chapter in Baptist history began with the arrival of J. H. Shakespeare in 1898 and the building of the Baptist Church House a few years later. Mr. Ball became Dr. Shakespeare's right-hand man, and throughout Mr. Aubrey's secretaryship has continued an indispensable figure in the growing work of the Union. To the revolutionary changes in Baptist polity and organisation during the past half century he has made his own distinctive contribution. By his efficiency, his integrity, his modesty and his friendliness, he has won not only the respect and regard of his colleagues and the members of the Baptist Union Council, young as well as old, but also the confidence and gratitude of the denomination as a whole. His services to the United Board during two wars won him official recognition. It is as difficult to think of the work of the Baptist Union without him as it must be for him to contemplate life without his daily journey to Southampton Row. All Baptists will join in thanking Mr. Ball for his outstanding services and in wishing him many more years of health and happiness.