



incorporating the Transactions of the
BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDITORIAL

SUCCESS came to the Baptist World Congress of 1955 in more ways than one. Closing of the accounts revealed a handsome balance of receipts over expenditure. These profits are at the disposal of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, which would have had to bear the loss had the Congress not paid its way. We have pleasure in announcing that at its November meeting the Baptist Union Council approved a grant from the Congress surplus to the Baptist Historical Society of £250. Echoing the gratitude which was expressed on the Society's behalf at the time by Mr. Seymour J. Price, we here record our deep appreciation of the Council's action and sincere thanks for a generous gift which will considerably ease the strain on the finances of the Society.

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For nearly a century it has been popularly believed that the hymn *Rock of Ages* was written in Burrington Coombe while its author, Rev. A. M. Toplady, was sheltering from a thunderstorm in a cleft of the rock there. More recently a story has been added to the effect that the hymn was written on the back of a playing-card, now preserved in America. A life-long student of hymnology, Mr. E. J. Fasham, a Baptist formerly of Birmingham and now of Budleigh Salterton, wrote an article in the *Baptist Quarterly* of April, 1940 (p. 94) proving this fanciful account to be without foundation. Further researches on his part have confirmed him in his opinion. At Burrington Coombe itself Mr. Fasham has found it would be impossible for anyone to shelter in the cleft and that, in

any case, it did not exist in Toplady's time. In the U.S.A. he has ascertained that the existence of the playing-card is quite unknown and the American Hymn Society has told him: "The whole story is apocryphal, if not fantastic." As Mr. Fasham showed in 1940 and in a further article recently contributed to the *Bulletin* of the Hymn Society in this country, the origin of the famous hymn is almost certainly in some words written by Daniel Brevint (Dean of Durham, 1661-1673) which inspired Toplady to compose *Rock of Ages* in the summer of 1775. Mr. Fasham has also established that the hymn was first published in the *Gospel Magazine*, October, 1775.

By his activities in another direction Mr. Fasham has also proved most of the books wrong in connection with the death and burial-place of Matthew Bridges, writer of the hymn *Crown Him with Many Crowns*. Hitherto all the evidence had pointed to Bridges having died and been interred in Quebec. But the discovery of an obituary in *The Times* of 6th October, 1894, sent Mr. Fasham to Sidmouth where, after persistent and extensive inquiries, he eventually traced the grave of the hymn-writer to the garden burial-ground in the Convent of the Assumption. The inscription on the grave-stone reads *Orate pro anima Matthaei Bridges qui annos natus xciv plenus dierum in Christo obdormivit. Die vi Octobris MDCCCXCIV. R.I.P.* Evidently Mr. and Mrs. Bridges were paying guests during the eighteen-nineties in a villa which is now part of the Convent buildings. There, in 1894, Bridges died, and was laid to rest in the Convent's own private cemetery where the graves are mostly those of the Sisters of Mercy. How and where Bridges spent the closing years of his life have been until now a mystery. Thanks to the interest and activity of Mr. Fasham the mystery has at last been solved. We congratulate him on his work in the field of hymnology and hope to hear of other discoveries to which his indefatigable efforts have led him.

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A new quarterly, the *Journal of Semitic Studies*, published by the Manchester University Press with the support of the Isaac Wolfson Foundation, makes its appearance this month. Of special interest to Baptists is the fact that one of the two editors is Dr. H. H. Rowley, Professor of Hebrew Language and Literature in the University of Manchester. The field of study with which the journal will be concerned is a broad one, and the editors hope to have in its pages articles of linguistic, literary, historical, archaeological and cultural interest. A number of outstanding scholars have promised articles for the early issues. The annual subscription is 32s. or \$4.50.

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From the Second Baptist Church, Detroit, Mich., we recently received a copy of the 48-paged, illustrated special number of its quarterly magazine, *Second Baptist Advocate*, issued to mark the

119th anniversary of the church and the eighth of its pastor, Dr. A. A. Banks. Founded in 1836 by thirteen former slaves, the church—which is associated with the National Baptist Convention, Inc., one of the large Negro Baptist bodies in the U.S.A.—has grown to a membership of 4,800 and, during the last eight years has added an average of 340 new members per annum, while its income in 1954 totalled \$92,928. Led by its able and enterprising Pastor and his gifted wife, the church continues to exercise a considerable influence on the life of the city of Detroit. We notice that among its numerous activities the church has a "Credit Union" which enables its members to take out insurances of various kinds and to obtain monetary advances on loan for the purpose of house-purchase, education, travel and new motor cars. Among other items which caught our eye was the phrase "Audited membership, 4,800" and "Courtesy Committee"; we know of churches which would benefit from a Courtesy Committee and whose membership and attendance statistics would show up very differently if they were audited. To this great, influential and thriving Negro Baptist community we send good wishes for a future as flourishing as the past has obviously been.

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The Annual Meeting of the Baptist Historical Society will be held, as usual, on the opening day of the Baptist Union Assembly, i.e. Monday, 30th April, 1956. An address will be given by the Rev. M. E. Aubrey, C.H., M.A., D.C.L., LL.D.

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