THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

incorporating the Transactions of the BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDITORIAL

THE article on P. T. Thomson contributed to this issue by Dr. Aubrey was given as an address to the Annual Meeting of the Baptist Historical Society at the Baptist Church House, London, on 30th April. We are glad to give permanent form to a talk that was greatly appreciated by those fortunate enough to hear it. Voicing the thanks of the audience, Dr. F. Townley Lord and Dr. John MacBeath contributed brief recollections of their own of the personality and work of P. T. Thomson.

After tea a short business session was held under the chairmanship of the President, Mr. Seymour J. Price. Included in the secretarial report were references to the jubilee of the Society which will fall in 1958 and the need of marking in some special way this important milestone in the Society's history. The co-operation of this Society with other similar Free Church bodies in the task of preparing for the commemoration in 1962 of the Great Ejection was also referred to. Gratitude was expressed by the treasurer for the welcome grant of £250 from the B.W.A. Congress surplus. Thanks were also due to those who made special donations during the year. Ordinary income, however, still does not meet the Society's expenses and, therefore, the need for new members is continuing and urgent. Gifts to its funds will always be gratefully received. Another method of contributing to its support, by the way, is by means of legacies.

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The commemoration of 1662 by "a great act of reunion" was called for at the Free Church Congress in March by the new Moderator, Rev. K. L. Parry. By this he appeared to mean the formation of a national Church of England embracing the Anglican and Free Churches, "acknowledging no authority over its life and worship but the authority of Christ." To envisage not only the disestablishing of the Anglican Church but also the casting down of the barriers which separate the various Free Churches and those which divide the Free Churches from the Anglicans, and all in the brief space of six years, seems an extraordinary exercise in pipe-dreaming to be indulged in from the Moderatorial chair. We speak for ourselves, of course, but we are highly suspicious of the idea of a "National Church," even free of State control. Nor do we see the Baptists accepting the suggestion, which emanated from the Congress, that there should be freedom of transfer of all in full membership from one Free Church to another. Closed membership churches are far too numerous in our denomination for this to enjoy any prospect of being accepted; a fact which in itself contradicts the Moderator's statement that the only difference between the Free Churches today is one of organization.

What were the provisions in the Act of Uniformity which, above all else, led to the Ejectment of 1662? They were episcopal ordination, "unfeigned assent and consent" to the Prayer Book as in every way agreeable to the Word of God and, basically, the fact that the purpose of the Act was to impose religious uniformity upon the land. We do not consider that the sacrificial rejection of these requirements by our forefathers was either error or sin. Principal Gordon Robinson, of the Lancashire Independent College, was right to say at this year's English Presbyterian Assembly that we should not best celebrate 1662 "by crawling and apologising for it." It would be uncharitable to mark the anniversary of the foundation of Nonconformity by reviving ancient controversies or by stirring up afresh denominational ill-feeling. But when 1962 comes along many will salute the memory of our fathers who, at fearful cost, refused to disown the validity of their own ordination, declined to subordinate the Word of God to a book of ceremonies drawn up by fallible men and withstood the attempt to submerge the diversity of the Spirit beneath the uniformity which the "five-stringed whip" of the Cavalier Parliament attempted to impose upon them. Far from being out of date, the issues raised by the Act of Uniformity are live ones today. While co-operation among the denominations and, in particular, a much closer fellowship among the Free Churches cannot be regarded as anything but highly desirable, a great many more Baptists than the Baptist Revival Fellowship appears to imagine have not the slightest intention of celebrating 1662 by swallowing episcopal re-ordination, the contents of the Book of

Common Prayer or religious uniformity either in 1962 or at any other time.

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More realistic than some statements we have read is the recognition by Dr. E. K. H. Jordan in his welcome and timely volume, *Free Church Unity* (Lutterworth Press, 12s. 6d.) that in the matter of reunion stalemate has been reached and is likely to continue for some time and his warning that "We must not set our target too far beyond practical possibilities." Dr. Jordan is Minister of the Baptist Church at Malvern and his book is based upon a thesis embodying the results of his researches into the history of the Free Church Council which gained him in 1953 the D.Phil. degree of Oxford University. Baptists will be glad and proud that this volume has come from one of their own younger scholars. To those who have not yet obtained their copy we gladly commend it as a clear and scholarly account—which meets a real need—of the Free Church Council movement, in which members of our own communion have played so prominent a part. The complicated story of how the Free Church Council became the popular if unofficial voice of British Nonconformity and the successive, challenging issues which confronted the Free Churches from 1896 onward is here narrated with clarity and care while the evangelistic, co-operative, social, educational, political and moral aims of the movement are competently expounded. The author believes that the Federal Council should now, as the next step on the road beaten out during the past sixty years, boldly give a lead in the cause of Free Church Federation. Meanwhile, Baptists in common with other Free Churchmen should read and ponder Dr. Jordan's book.

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Referring in his column in the *Spectator* some weeks ago to an early eighteenth-century Welsh Unitarian chapel, Mr. John Betjeman added: "There is just such another chapel in England at Winslow, Bucks. It belongs to the Strict Baptists and is hardly ever used. Nothing has been disturbed since the eighteenth century in this little hidden place down an alley. If there are any Strict Baptist readers of this column, I hope they will help to preserve it, for it is in a sad state of decay." This, we understand, is the old meeting-house, said to have been erected in 1625, where ministered Benjamin Keach, the General Baptist pioneer of hymn-singing. One of the oldest Nonconformist places of worship in the country, this simple but historic little building—photographs of which appeared in the *Baptist Quarterly*, April, 1940—should be preserved, and we are glad to hear that something is now being done locally to rescue it from decay. There are a number of old Baptist buildings up and down the country—we recently saw one at Brassey Green, Tar-

porley, Cheshire—for whose preservation the denomination should make itself responsible.

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It is good to hear from time to time of Baptists co-operating in local historical exhibitions. At Chelmsford an exhibition, "The Church in Essex, 600 A.D. to 1800 A.D." has been arranged. A list of available Baptist items suitable for display has been offered to the organisers, while Miss Doris Witard, of Braintree, author of *The History of Braintree Baptist Church*, has contributed an outline of the progress of the Baptist witness in the county prior to 1800.

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Spurgeon's College is to be congratulated upon attaining its centenary. That the celebrations should include widespread evangelistic campaigns is fitting for it was out of Spurgeon's evangelistic passion that, in 1856, the College came into being when the great preacher himself was only 22 years old. During the century of its existence "Spurgeon's" men have made a distinctive and valuable contribution to Baptist life and witness not only in Britain but throughout the world. Many of them have risen to positions of leadership and fame. The whole denomination in this country, joined by a great number overseas, will wish for the College continued prosperity, usefulness and blessing as its high work of sending out to the world well-trained preachers and pastors of evangelistic spirit is carried forward into its second century.

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