



incorporating the Transactions of the
BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDITORIAL

With our next issue we shall distribute as a loose inset the Index to VOLUME XVI, which closes with this present number.

OF the numerical strength of Baptists in the United States we have been told time and again. But what of their contribution to the building up of the American republic; in what ways have the principles of this vast and vigorous company influenced and helped to mould the essential character of their nation? Of these things we have hitherto been told very little. Now, however, enlightenment has come in the form of a significant volume from the pen of Dr. J. M. Dawson, widely known as a well-informed writer, denominational leader and the first executive director of the Baptist Joint Conference Committee on Public Relations. Sponsored by the Historical Commission of the Southern Convention, and the fruit of extensive research, it is entitled *Baptists and the American Republic*.*

Dr. Dawson set himself a number of questions: what pattern for America did Roger Williams give? what debt did James Madison owe to Baptists in securing a guaranteed separation of Church and State, with full religious liberty for all? how did Baptists influence Thomas Jefferson, "Architect of the Republic"? what creative Baptist leaders helped to shape the essential character of America and what Baptists have most acceptably interpreted their principles regarding Church-State relations? Answering such questions as

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these Dr. Dawson indicates the Baptist contribution to the Bill of Rights, the separation of Church and State, national unity and social responsibility and the influence of Baptists upon the thought and actions of Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Henry through the efforts of men of the calibre of Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland, Luther Rice and Walter Rauschenbusch. By further biographical studies, culminating in the story of George W. Truett, he illustrates the continuing Baptist witness to the ideals first enunciated by Roger Williams, whose greatness is becoming increasingly recognised.

Typical of the Baptist contribution as portrayed in this well-documented volume, is the fact that Thomas Jefferson shows in the Declaration of Independence, of which he was the author, a striking similarity of ideas with those proclaimed earlier by Roger Williams, that he was a student of Baptist literature (including, by the way, the sermons of Robert Hall, wrongly described on p. 28 as "of London"), that he worked with and was considerably indebted to the Baptists of Virginia, notably the able John Leland. Dr. Dawson shows that, contrary to what has been popularly supposed, the shaping of the American republic owes less to deism than to evangelical Calvinism. To Baptists in Britain and elsewhere few of the heroes of this book, apart from Roger Williams, will be well known. They should read these pages, therefore, if only to learn something of the great men who have moulded the American Baptist tradition and, to a considerable degree, as Dr. Dawson's work displays, the character of America itself. Here, then, is a welcome and timely volume which adds to our knowledge both of Baptist and American history, showing how the distinctive ideas of the Baptists have been, as it were, inscribed upon the American flag; ideas which, the author believes, account for the fact that whereas the church organised in Roger Williams' home numbered 13 members, when the Baptist World Alliance met in Atlanta exactly 300 years later Baptists in the U.S.A. totalled 13 millions.

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In 1935 the cost to the Baptist Historical Society of printing and publishing this journal was £74, but by 1955 it had risen to the region of £200. In spite of this, and increasing financial difficulties, membership subscriptions have remained unaltered. Some changes are now, however, forced upon us. Henceforth the annual subscription will be 21/- (\$3.50), but for ministers resident in the United Kingdom it will be 10/6d. The Society asks not only for the continued loyalty of present members but also for an increase in membership and will always gratefully receive donations to its funds and, of course, legacies. Ways and means of commemorating the Jubilee of the Society in 1958 were considered, along with other matters, at a recent meeting of its officers.