



incorporating the Transactions of the
BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDITORIAL

(The index to Volume XVII will be distributed with the next issue.)

IN the field of Reformation studies, there is probably no subject attracting more attention than that of the Anabaptists. New material is for ever being discovered about them and we hear a rumour of a vast number of letters relating to the early days of the movement having been found recently in a Hutterite Community on the other side of the Atlantic. It is now clear that the Anabaptists were an important and considerable group in Reformation times and that serious Reformation scholarship can no longer ignore them. The Anabaptist movement is of particular interest to Baptists, for within it there occurred in the Reformation the re-discovery of the conception of the Church as a fellowship of believers separated from the state and the natural consequence of such a conception, namely, entry through believers' baptism. We include in this issue a study of five recent publications on the Anabaptists prepared for us by Walter Klaassen, a graduate of McMaster University and at present engaged on Anabaptist research in Oxford.

In the present state of active research there is the inevitable difficulty of providing an up-to-date general account of the Anabaptist movement intelligible to the interested Baptist. There is a great need for a new book on the lines of R. J. Smithson's *The Anabaptists* (London, 1935), which, whilst still very useful, is becoming out of date. We are indebted to Dr. E. A. Payne that he has begun to meet this need in the recently published volume of

The New Cambridge Modern History (Vol. II, *The Reformation*, 1520-59) edited by G. R. Elton. Within the space of a few thousand words Dr. Payne has given a succinct account of the Anabaptists from their origin which he would place in Zürich in 1525 to the collecting together of its scattered remnants by Menno Simons after the severe persecution of the 1530s and 1540s. Dr. Payne succeeds in describing not only the events, but also something of the thoughts of the leaders. This summary cannot be too highly commended. Yet it is only a summary. The enthusiasm, faith, struggles and sufferings of so vast and varied a company of people need fuller statement. It is greatly to be hoped that before long a more detailed history of the movement will be forthcoming.

A further problem facing any student of Anabaptism is that it was not a coherent whole but rather a movement with many strains of thought. The matter is further complicated by the indiscriminate use of the term "Anabaptist" to describe most deviationists from the accepted Reformation party lines. It is therefore very necessary to attempt to separate out the various strands. Ernst Troeltsch classified the ecclesiastical types of the Reformation as Church type, Sect type and Spiritualists. Representatives of the latter two groups were, in the Reformation, and subsequently, classified as Anabaptists, but it would appear that the name "Anabaptist" more accurately belongs only to the Sect type. The most recent attempt at the classification and characterisation of Anabaptism has been made by G. H. Williams in his Introduction to Volume XXV in the Library of Christian Classics, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. G. H. Williams and A. H. Mergal. Dr. Williams in discussing the Anabaptists and the Spiritualists suggests that each group should be sub-divided into three. The former are made up of the Revolutionary Anabaptists representative of whom is the group who tried to set up a theocracy in Münster; the Contemplative Anabaptists such as Hans Denck who stood very close to the Spiritualists, and the Evangelical Anabaptists such as Balthasar Hubmaier, Conrad Grebel and the Swiss Brethren. The Spiritualists fall into similar categories. These are: Revolutionary Spiritualism of the type of Thomas Müntzer, Rational Spiritualism of which Sebastian Franck is a representative, and Evangelical Spiritualism shown in the thought of Caspar Schwenckfeld. For a concise summary of the various groups within the Left Wing of the Reformation one can certainly do no better than to read Dr. Williams's Introduction. Naturally to impose such a classification carries with it the risk of trying to label thinkers who may, in the last resort, defy classification and Dr. Williams will not expect everyone to agree with his conclusions. It is open to question, for example, whether Carlstadt would really be at home amongst the Revolutionary Spiritualists. Such possible points of disagreement do not detract from the great value of the Introduction. Our debt to Dr. Williams does not end

here, however, for he is responsible for the selecting and editing of thirteen documents either written by, or dealing with, Anabaptists and Spiritualists, each document complete with a brief introductory note. It is safe to say that this selection is the most representative collection of documents in English dealing with the Anabaptist groups. The section on the Anabaptists in this volume closes with a "Bibliography of Material in English Translation written by Representatives of the Radical Reformation." In the editorial last July we called attention to the first part of the bibliographical survey, "Studies in the Radical Reformation" by Dr. Williams, published in *Church History*. He has now completed this study in the June number of the same periodical. It is a remarkable survey and provides an excellent starting point for research students.

Yet when the history of the left wing groups of the Reformation has been written and when the various groups have been classified, there remains the still more difficult task of evaluating their thought. We are only at the beginning of this section of modern Anabaptist studies. Some indication of the complexity and intense interest of Anabaptist theology may be gained from the volume of essays, *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, edited by Guy F. Hershberger (Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania) and presented as a Sixtieth Anniversary tribute to Harold S. Bender, the Mennonite Scholar and mainspring of so much of the modern Anabaptist research. The book contains twenty-four essays, three on Anabaptist research and interpretation, three on the rise of Anabaptism and eighteen on the thought of Anabaptism. The essays follow the story of Anabaptist thinking from martyrdom and disrepute to rediscovery and present-day interpretation. They include an essay by Dr. E. A. Payne on "The Anabaptist Impact on Western Christendom," and one by Professor Fritz Blanke on "Anabaptism and the Reformation." These two essays, together with H. S. Bender's own classic, "The Anabaptist Vision" and F. H. Littell's "The Anabaptist Concept of the Church," are most likely to be of the greatest general interest.

Perhaps the most relevant question raised in the book is in a footnote (No. 21, p. 125) in Dr. Littell's essay. It is, in brief, whether you can have a concept of the Church separated from the state when the state is no longer autocratic but democratic—at least in theory. To translate this into the English context is to ask how far the Baptists, for example, having come into being as separatist group under a governmental system somewhat different from today can and ought to remain "separate." Certainly this raises the issue as to *how* different are the political systems of then and now. Yet the answer to the main question is, so far as Baptists in England are concerned, that they are no longer wholly "separate" from the state. But this is a very complex question, all too rarely considered, and one to which we must return on another occasion!