

# The BAPTIST QUARTERLY

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The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held in the Institute Hall, Westminster Chapel, on April 27th. A welcome, if somewhat novel, feature of the Treasurer's Report was the news that the Society had finished its year with a small balance in hand. The decision taken a year or so ago to put the subscription at a more realistic figure has evidently justified itself. Some book sales also helped and in addition there was one particularly noteworthy item of income. The Rev. Prof. F. G. Healey very kindly gave the royalties on his book, *Rooted in Faith*, to be distributed equally between the Baptist, Congregational and Presbyterian Historical Societies. We are deeply grateful to Prof. Healey for this generous assistance. It was also reported at the meeting that most of our theological colleges had responded in a sympathetic and practical way to our request for financial assistance with the publication of a cumulative Index. The work on this has already commenced and is in the hands of the Rev. D. Sparkes, B.D., of New Malden. Our guest speaker at the meeting, Mr. H. G. Tibbutt, F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S., served us well with a paper illustrating the evidence for social history which is to be found in Nonconformist church books.

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Differences of emphasis among British Baptists are reflected in the booklet *Liberty in the Lord* which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. Such exchanges of viewpoint are necessary to understanding and can therefore be fruitful of great good. But these discussions

impose on all concerned the need for a scrupulous sense of proportion in the use of words, not least in passing what we believe is justifiable criticism on other viewpoints.

The section of *Liberty in the Lord* which touches on our history will naturally interest readers of this journal. It is a survey which raises important questions and it is to the writer's credit that in limited space he attempts to get to the source materials. But would he not feel, seeing his contribution in cold print, that he will create among some of his readers an impression less than just to some whose viewpoints he criticizes? For example, he says that, "In order to prove that interdependency existed, Dr. Payne [in *The Fellowship of Believers*] uses evidence from both Particular and General Baptist sources without discriminating between their very different attitudes in the matter . . ." (p 29). These "very different attitudes" are illustrated on p. 22 from the General Baptist Confession of 1678 and the Particular Baptist Confession of 1677. Yet when we turn to the discussion of these Confessions in *The Fellowship of Believers* we find that, in fact, attention is explicitly drawn to the very point of difference which *Liberty in the Lord* is keen to emphasize. Conclusions of an assembly "cannot be imposed upon the particular churches, or their officers. An Assembly had not for the Particular Baptists what is called 'church-power'. The acceptance of decisions must be voluntary." (*The Fellowship of Believers*, 1944, p. 27).

In another place the writer comments on a statement in which Dr. L. G. Champion had pointed out gaps in the 1677 Confession. "It could be implied from this," says the writer, "that the Baptist doctrine of the gathered church is theologically inadequate. If this is so we face not only the task of rediscovering the original tradition, but of meeting the challenge as to its inadequacy. Not only is the superstructure under fire, so also are the foundations!" (*Liberty in the Lord*, p. 26.) Anyone who stops to ponder that last sentence may guess what kind of an image of the President of the Union it would create in the minds of some readers of this booklet. Something more sinister, no doubt, than the writer intended to convey but people have a way of taking words at their face value.

The scholars among us are bound to have an important role in the current debate and by the care and temperateness of their exchanges they can contribute something quite as important as their scholarship.