

EDWARDIANS, ANABAPTISTS AND THE PROBLEM OF BAPTIST ORIGINS

"Anabaptism is not dead; it slumbers in the heart of the Poor Man and will assuredly rise again. For the voice that proclaimed liberty of conscience in Christendom to which therefore we owe all that results therefrom - liberty of thought, liberty of worship, free speech and a free press - the voice that proclaimed the Common Life to be of far higher importance than the individual life, the true Community to be the divine unit rather than the individual, the family or the nation - that voice cannot be hushed in any tomb, or kept silent under the heavy stone of conventional religion. For that voice is not in one man only, but in all. It is the eternal conscience of the universe, the Light which lighteth every man, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. It cries for justice from all to all. It knows no favourites, makes no distinctions. But all who will share the joy hidden in its sorrow must be willing to endure its conflicts and humiliations, to hang upon its cross and enter its tomb, and so to arrive at the Land where Justice and Love reign victorious. For there is no real crown in the universe but a crown of thorns. The only head that will for ever remain royal is the head of the Sufferer".¹

However startling the exegesis this is a fair summary of the Anabaptist teaching on salvation through suffering. It occurs in a little book entitled *Anabaptism*, published in 1895 and written by Richard Heath who in a series of articles contributed to the *Contemporary Review* in 1891, 1896, and 1897 not only revived in Britain serious historical study of the Anabaptists but emphasised particularly John Bunyan's personal indebtedness to this tradition. What is really significant, however, is that Heath's *Anabaptism* was one of a series of booklets, published under the auspices of the Baptist Union under the editorship of George P. Gould.

Baptist historians and apologists had never doubted the historical linkage of their churches to the Anabaptist movement, though not many enthused about it with quite as much abandon as in the 1890s. Crosby in Volume One of his *History* and in his subsequent controversy with the Rev. John Lewis, an Anglican, had not denied the linkage - merely posited an *English Anabaptism* antecedent to the Baptist movement proper, which in its turn was rooted in Lollardy. He was at pains only to distinguish English Baptists from "those mad and heretical people at Munster in Germany".² Crosby's lead was followed first by Rippon and then by Ivimey (though in the latter case with a heavier emphasis on the Lollards and on spiritual rather than institutional succession) and, with few exceptions, by most nineteenth century Baptists who cared to discuss the matter.

Thus we find Mr. John Sheppard, one of the first English Baptists actually to visit the homelands of continental Anabaptism in 1816, referring on the one hand to their "sobriety

and civil obedience" (especially after their reorganisation by Menno Simons) and on the other to the unfortunate "mad fanaticism" of Munster which disgraced the whole movement.³

As the century progressed and Baptists grew in numbers and confidence even this apologetic note was often subdued or suppressed altogether. E. B. Underhill, editing his *Confessions of Faith for the Hanserd Knollys Society* in 1854 drew no distinction between Anabaptists and Baptists and appeared to throw down the gauntlet to an (anonymous) historian who had gone around ransacking the records of the German Anabaptists to discover "an armoury of crimes by which to assail them".⁴ The linkage was affirmed by the American Baptist historians D. Benedict, R. B. Cook and T. Armitage, writing in 1848, 1884 and 1889 respectively, by our own Benjamin Evans and by the Canadian A. H. Newman, an acknowledged authority on the Anabaptists.⁵ By the time H. C. Vedder wrote his *Short History of the Baptists* in 1897, Baptists were reacting with manifest pride to their Anabaptist forebears: "the time is rapidly approaching when the Anabaptists will be as abundantly honoured as in the past four centuries they have been unjustly condemned". The very name Anabaptist which once English Baptists would have repudiated with alarm they were now using as interchangeable with Baptist, perhaps even adopting it with more than a touch of pride, as Arthur S. Langley appears to do in an article contributed to the penultimate volume of the *Baptist Magazine* in 1904.⁶

But in this regard the Rev. E. C. Pike's little volume on *The Anabaptists*, contributed to the Eras of Nonconformity series edited by Silvester Horne and published at the behest of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches, is particularly revealing. Writing in 1904 Pike is determined to "shake off" once and for all the "timorousness" which had led Baptists in the past to disown their Anabaptist heritage because of the men of Munster. "We are not blind to the sins of the fanatics", he wrote - "because we reserve a larger share of moral indignation for the higher criminals who alike provoked and punished the revolution".⁷ Deeply stirred by the Passive Resistance movement, then at its height, Pike represents English Nonconformists as now able all the more readily to identify with the Anabaptists of old. Zwingli after all "adopted a system of state churchism such as now the members of the various Nonconformist bodies in this country agree in regarding as inconsistent with the teaching of the New Testament". The Zurich Anabaptists no doubt disturbed the city magnates: "albeit the clergyman of some rural parish in England may have been similarly disturbed". Even more fancifully Pike has a Basel Anabaptist being thrown, trussed, into a lake with "words of testimony for voluntaryism and the Free Church principle upon his lips".

Written on the eve of militant Nonconformity's greatest triumph, the General Election of 1906, penned in haste and with obvious emotion, Pike's book is prone to inconsistencies: it would be a "sickening task" to describe all the methods devised for torturing and killing the Anabaptists - yet the

author spends most of his time doing precisely that: the Lollard gravestones at Hill Cliffe, Warrington, are admittedly not authentic - yet a photograph of them appears as the frontispiece to the book! *The Anabaptists* remains nonetheless like a faded snapshot, taken at a climactic moment, of a radical Nonconformity as confident of its past as it was assured of its future - and unaware of tribulations to come.⁸

Within less than ten years Baptist apologists with few exceptions were as anxious to repudiate the Anabaptist heritage as those of the 1890s and early 1900s had been keen to avow it. This amounts to a revolution not just in Baptist historiography but in their whole attitude to their past. What factors lay behind this change of mood, astonishing in its abruptness and virtual unanimity?

The most obvious answer would be that the wider historical climate was changing rapidly and Baptists like others were caught up in the process. It may be that the methods of historical criticism which had for a generation been establishing themselves in the field of biblical scholarship were now being applied to church history. (This at least was the contention of Champlin Burrage)⁹. Equally likely however is that the generation of secular (and particularly constitutional) historians, Round, Stubbs, Pollard, Tanner and the rest, who first seriously took account of the methods of Ranke and the documentary approach, was bound to affect the church historians. These could no longer ignore the disconcerting testimony of the archives when it conflicted with what they increasingly suspected were the propagandist myths of their nineteenth century predecessors. Among the secular historians also, though the great liberal Catholic Lord Acton had written sympathetically of the Anabaptists (as radical post-Vatican II Catholics have done in their turn), it is possible to discern in the opening decades of the twentieth century an altogether harsher and more disapproving assessment.

J. P. Whitney who contributed the Reformation volume to Rivington's influential Church Universal series represents this trend. "The Anabaptists", he writes, "attempted to set up a kingdom of God with community of goods and licence of life". "It would be unjust to put down to all the Anabaptists the views of the extreme men but historically and politically the movement was led by them". Whitney moreover blames the Anabaptists for pushing the Christian humanists into the papal camp (a very serious charge indeed, could it be substantiated). He concludes with satisfaction: "the well-deserved catastrophe of that movement at Munster discredited and on the whole suppressed it".¹⁰ Baptists could not remain unmoved by hostile critiques such as this.

A second explanation for the repudiation of the Anabaptist heritage among English Baptists would focus attention on certain events in the United States which had considerable impact on the British scene. In the USA the Baptist/Anabaptist linkage, often but not invariably associated with what is called successionism, i.e. the unbroken link of testimony to believers'

baptism from John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles through the early Church and into the middle ages,¹¹ began as a handy polemical argument for use in controversy with paedobaptists. As formulated by James G. Graves in the 1850s however it hardened into an intolerant orthodoxy sometimes known as Landmarkism which bold spirits challenged at their peril. Landmarkism could take unlovely and curious forms such as the "Baptist tree" illustrated in W. A. Jarrell's *Baptist Church Perpetuity* (Dallas, 1894), with its roots firmly in the apostolic age, its topmost branches in the nineteenth century and part of its sturdy trunk labelled Anabaptist.¹²

Two Baptist scholars who dared to challenge this interpretation were Henry Sweester Burrage (1837-1926) and William Heth Whitsitt (1841-1911). Both men were scholarly and broad-minded, equable and urbane, both had studied at German universities and both had fought in the Civil War, though on opposite sides. Burrage, whose native state was Maine, edited the influential *Zion's Advocate* from 1873 to 1905 through which periodical he communicated his historical discoveries to northern Baptists. Whitsitt was professor of Church History at the Southern Baptist seminary from 1872 to 1895, and President from 1895 to 1899. In Maine the challenge to Landmarkism was perhaps more easily made than in Louisville, Kentucky.

Burrage retained his post. Whitsitt, after both casting doubt on the Anabaptist/Baptist link and averring in a pamphlet of 1897¹³ that the English Baptists only began to practise total immersion as late as 1641, resigned his office in the interests of denominational unity in 1899, and spent his last years in Vancouver. It should be noticed that Burrage's son by his second wife (née Champlin) shared his father's historical interests and convictions. Champlin Burrage (1874-1951) after studies at the Universities of Berlin and Marburg came to England to research for an Oxford B.Litt. in 1906. Already however he had made his own contribution to the Whitsitt controversy in an article he contributed to the *Baptist Review and Expositor* for October 1905 which was interestingly enough followed by a complementary article by W. T. Whitley in the same journal for January 1906.¹⁴

By this date another influential figure had emerged on the American scene, again with strong convictions concerning the Anabaptists. Walter Rauschenbusch, the prophet of the social gospel, held the chair of Church History at the Rochester Baptist seminary. The historical basis of his ethical teaching cannot be ignored. A visit to Germany with his father had first aroused his interest in the Anabaptists, about whom he contributed an article to the *American Journal of Theology* for 1905, and another entitled "Historical Studies' Influence on Theology" in 1907, the same year as his famous *Christianity and The Social Order* was published. The extent of Rauschenbusch's indebtedness to his historical studies in general and the Anabaptists in particular has been highlighted by a Mennonite scholar, Don E. Smucker.¹⁵

At the very time therefore that mainstream American Baptist scholars were repudiating the Anabaptist heritage (including Augustus Strong, Rauschenbusch's colleague at Rochester), an advanced liberal was rediscovering it (a formidable challenge this to the ultra-conservative Landmarkists). Once again there is an interesting connexion with the English scene, for a notorious English Baptist who shared Rauschenbusch's radical insights, Charles F. Aked of Liverpool, shared also his liking for the Anabaptists. (The two collaborated when Aked emigrated to America in 1905). Almost single-handed, Rauschenbusch had guaranteed that for a generation only Baptists of the theological and political left would care to appropriate the Anabaptists as their spiritual forebears - which again has its parallels in England. Here it was the radical Gwilym O. Griffith who was the last prominent champion of the Anabaptist heritage theory¹⁶ - and who ended his career in a Unitarian pulpit.

A third explanation for the Baptists' jettisoning the Anabaptist tradition is that it was precisely during this Edwardian period that three scholars representing three other and very different groupings wrote powerfully to claim the Anabaptists for themselves. These were a Marxian socialist, a Unitarian and a Quaker.

Belfort Bax's *The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists* was published in 1903. Bax is a conundrum for Socialists, which is presumably why he has been omitted from the *Dictionary of Labour Biography* and why so little is really known about him. A "gifted armchair philosopher" according to Dona Torr,¹⁷ admired by Marx, yet detested along with William Morris by Engels,¹⁸ Bax with his fine house in Hampstead and his villa in Nice seems to be the prototype of the wealthy middle class Socialist of extreme and often eccentric, half Marxist, half anarchistic leanings. And yet of all his left wing contemporaries, Bax was probably more suited than most to appreciate the Anabaptists. His own background was nonconformist, he was more deeply indebted to Comte and Hegel than to Marx and believed that while Marxian arguments were true in respect of the economic side of life, a metaphysical explanation was necessary to account for the rest of human development. Above all he taught that the truly socialist state would have to be undergirded by a collective morality, a "super-organic consciousness", which would be attained only by the self-sacrifice of martyrs - for martyrdom was the highest goal of socialist endeavour. Salvation through suffering thus became the keynote of Bax's historical writings.

There were two additional eccentricities which again disturbed his socialist colleagues. Bax was, like Robert Owen whom in some ways he resembles, not really very keen on the class war or even on "class instinct" which he rather distrusted and regarded as a hindrance to the attainment of the "socialist ethic". This may explain why he never analyses the social composition of the Munster Anabaptists. "Guileless people", "simple folk" just will not do as descriptions of a highly complex movement which seems in the light of recent

research to have drawn to itself the rootless and discontented of all classes.¹⁹

There was also Bax's pronounced anti-feminism (odd in one who preached the virtues of free love). He was a member of the Men's Anti-Suffrage League,²⁰ and found a scapegoat for the excesses of Munster in the activities of "female fanatics". It was women who were responsible for the mass hypnosis and loss of mental balance in the last days of the siege!

Bax, along with Karl Kautsky who performed a similar work on the continent of Europe, claimed the Anabaptists firmly for the Marxian tradition, and in Marxist hagiography especially in East Germany they still have their honoured place. The manner in which he did this was however curious and misleading. The movement began, wrote Bax, as "purely religious", but took on an increasingly "political colour"²¹ and though the "non-political" tendencies continued in certain regions, for example Moravia, the "new and more aggressive spirit" seized "what may henceforth be described as the main movement". In this way Munster was promoted from a sideshow to a prime site. As for what happened later Menno revived "the purely theological interests", and though the Anabaptist tradition undoubtedly fertilised the later Baptist communities, the latter were merely "frugal, sober and industrious, small middle-class persons", not to be distinguished from other Protestant pietistic sects.²² As for the Munster excesses Bax as a propagandist leaned over backwards to palliate and excuse. The "democratic" elections were undoubtedly rigged, but for this "deception" there was "considerable excuse". Executions there undoubtedly were, but by methods which were "exclusively those sanctioned by the conscience of the nineteenth century".²³

There is an abundance of both nonsense and dangerousness in Bax: there is also one element of strength. Again and again he insists on the mediaeval character of Anabaptist communism, a communism of the economic product, not of the means of production (a very shrewd observation). He writes of the Anabaptists as "the culminating effort of mediaeval Christian Communism", their aim being to recreate "the economic conditions of the old village community". The "fore-runners of modern socialism" they may have been, yet they were "historically retrograde" in form, ends and means - a judgement which later research has served to substantiate.

If Bax's book were not enough to frighten the Baptist heirs of those "small middle class persons" to whom he scornfully referred, the Rev. W. H. Burgess' cumbrously titled *Smith the Se-Baptist, And The Pilgrim Fathers, Helwys and Baptist Origins* (1911) was calculated to complete their discomfiture. Burgess was the founder and till 1934 President of the Unitarian Historical Society. He bore the honoured name of a family long connected with the General Baptist wing of the Unitarian movement which had suffered much from the disapproval of the more aristocratic Martineau faction which had stressed the exclusively Presbyterian origins of the denomination.²⁴ With Martineau now dead Burgess and the more radical

element obviously felt an historical reassessment to be long overdue.

Smith the Se-Baptist was designed to be precisely that. Burgess was no mean scholar and his book is carefully researched; it is long and meticulously detailed; it accepts the conclusions of Whitsitt on the late adoption of immersion by English Baptists, though on details Burgess is not averse to arguing with that other American revisionist historian, Champlin Burrage.

The author is particularly interested in the development of Smith's (Smyth's) thought, his relationship with Helwys, and the earliest Baptist confessions. He has no doubt that the origins of the first Baptists lie inextricably rooted in Anabaptism, that the teachings of Smith had a "prepotency"²⁵ over those of Helwys whose lack of culture, contempt for learning and the humanities tragically narrowed his vision and his usefulness.²⁶ It was Smith's ideas nevertheless which underlay later covenant theology in England and America, the wording of the 1611 confession, the witness of Robinson and Roger Williams and the distinctive General Baptist practices of later days such as anointing with oil, footwashing and the prohibition against eating blood. And above all it was the wider vision of the "despised Anabaptists" to which political liberty on both sides of the Atlantic owes its all, and the movement for social equality likewise. "The Anabaptist visionary pointed to a better social order for the common man. The task of giving actuality to that vision in these days absorbs the religious energies of many of the finest minds amongst us".²⁷

The Unitarian thrust of the whole book is conspicuous, including the very language in which it is written. With Smith comes "the freer step, the fuller breath, something of the wide horizon's grander view". His covenant was not doctrinal but practical, with "an immediate bearing upon life, and a hopeful forward look for further light from God". If Anti-Trinitarianism in England is looking for its roots it will find them in Hoffmanite Christology, and if the churches pine for "a clear and serener air ... a truly spiritual apprehension of Christian faith and gospel", it is among the Anabaptists, English and continental, that such will be found.²⁸ In this way the Anabaptist movement was subsumed into the birth pangs of Liberal Dissent which is presumably where Professor G. H. Williams' exhaustive work would still leave it.²⁹

The Quaker contribution to the Anabaptist debate came from the pen of Rufus M. Jones, the over-prolific American historian whose books were very popular on this side of the Atlantic. In *Studies In Mystical Religion*, published in 1909, Jones was concerned to claim the Anabaptist movement as one of the progenitors of Quakerism. "One of the most momentous and significant undertakings in man's eventful religious struggle after the truth", Anabaptism "gathered up the gains of earlier movements", and marks an important step on the road to the emergence

of "the inward, free, untrammelled type of religion"³⁰ Though Anabaptism according to Jones had its "flotsam and jetsam", its quota of "psychopaths with unstable nervous systems", it produced in men like Hubmaier and Denck leaders who were "thoroughly sane" and in Menno a restorer of the movement from "follies and fanaticisms" and a leader not unlike George Fox himself.³¹ The early English Baptists in respect of their attitudes to the secular power, their individualism, lay emphasis and quest for spiritual freedom, were with the Familists and Seekers likewise forerunners of Fox who however presented the truth with clearer insight than they as he undertook his mission to "enlarge the spiritual horizon of England".³²

Rufus Jones, it is not unkind to say, was a pronounced individualist anxious to make the world safe for cultured scholars such as himself.³³ When he came to write his next book, *Spiritual Reformers of The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, published in 1914, his attitude to the Anabaptists, influenced by what he had read in the interim, had hardened perceptibly. He is now intent on isolating the Spiritual Reformers, with their appreciation of "personality as the highest thing in earth or heaven" from the general ruck. The latter is distasteful. Anabaptism is like "a banyan tree", a name of such latitude and looseness that it has become worthless. Most of its practitioners were unable to detach themselves from formalism and the visible church idea. Jones apologises for having numbered the saintly Denck among the Anabaptists in his previous work: in reality he taught another type of Christianity altogether from them. Franck, Schwenkfeld and Coornhert are similarly hurried away from this morbid company where "unbridled licence" now prevails. Anabaptism is now seen as a thing of the "masses" who always gravitate towards the "spectacular" to provide themselves with "emotional thrills".

In England Jones forgets about the Anabaptists altogether: perhaps they are subsumed into the Ranters and other Civil War sects who "exhibit in their loose and unmoralised freedom the inherent dangers which attach to the proclamation of spiritual liberty". As the title of chapter fourteen of his book makes plain Jones sees the Spiritual Reformers' influence continuing in England as "Spiritual Religion in High Places", and dwells affectionately on men such as John Everard, Francis Rous, Sir Henry Vane and the Cambridge Platonists. Even Fox is now suspect, and Jones hurries on to the far more sympathetic figures of Robert Barclay and William Penn, the latter of whom had once described the Anabaptists as "tumultuous, bloodthirsty, covenant-breaking and soul-destroying".³⁴

Despite his obvious disapproval of the radical reformers, Jones established clearly in the minds of a generation of scholars that it was here that the origins of Quakerism should be sought. Albert Peel for example in his *Week Among The Friends* (1917) found in them "an inchoate Quakerism", while I. B. Horst has no doubt that "the purest expression of the anabaptist spirit was found in Quakerism".³⁵ Perhaps we could go further: from Jones there also seems to stem a certain hostility to Anabaptism based more on social prejudice than any-

thing else, found especially among transatlantic scholars and which is reflected in a work as recent as Murray Tolmie's *Triumph of the Saints* (1977).³⁶

This consideration leads on directly to the fourth and final reason for the Edwardian Baptists' change of mind over their Anabaptist roots, though here our argument may well be contentious. Sociologists of religion have pointed out that denominations at a certain stage of their evolution seem to compensate for a loosening of theological bonds by a tightening up everywhere else: bureaucratic control of the churches is intensified, professionalism is at a premium, there is a search for academic and social respectability, not least in respect of origins and history. For Baptists this was after all the age of Shakespeare.

More precise stimuli towards a quest for denominational distinctives, for accepted, "orthodox" views of denominational beginnings, were not lacking. The formation of the Baptist World Alliance and the closer association of British and American Baptists quickened the movement for agreed formulae. Closer collaboration with Congregationalists in local and national endeavours tended in the same direction, for Congregationalists were by now in possession of a received text concerning their own origins: H. M. Dexter in his *Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years* (New York, 1879) had turned his back on those older denominational historians like Waddington who spent seven hundred pages on the Track of the Hidden Church before he actually came to the reign of Elizabeth. Dexter had refused to predate: attention would henceforth focus on the Jacob church as the starting point of modern Congregationalism.³⁷

Dexter was one of the few historians for whom Champlin Burrage in his *Early English Dissenters*, published in 1912, had a good word. Burrage's book was the catalyst in the Baptist about-turn over the question of their own origins. Rarely can a B.Litt. thesis have had such far-reaching effects. *Early English Dissenters* was a *tour de force*, despite the author's rather boyish, iconoclastic delight in overthrowing all his predecessors' work. Ivimey and Burgess especially were rebutted for having perpetuated "the errors of tradition".³⁸ Many others too were brought before "the bar of the German critical temper" and severely reprimanded, though for older historians like Stinton, George Gould or Benjamin Evans who had transcribed or collected documents the author has kinder things to say. As far as the Baptists are concerned Burrage is intent on proving a number of points. One is the isolation and relative unimportance of Smyth and his congregation, another is the late (1641 or perhaps 1635) adoption of the practice of immersion, but the most heavily stressed theme is the total irrelevance of the Anabaptists in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.

The evidence for an indigenous Anabaptist tradition is examined and found wanting: there were no Anabaptist congregations, "merely nonconformists of a rather peculiar type", and though a

few English people were doubtless "favourably impressed" by Anabaptist teachings, the latter were generally "unknown in this country". Burrage can scarcely conceal his distaste for these obscure people and his anxiety to be rid of them. "A few individual Anabaptists had been found in England but they seem to have been chiefly or only foreigners and these were soon banished from the country or burned to death".³⁹

Yet the full extent of Burrage's determination to ostracise the Anabaptists only becomes clear in the later pages of his first volume. The Jacob congregation, the fountain head of English Independency and of the Particular Baptists, is carefully distinguished from the earlier Separatists, and they in turn from the Anabaptists. The latter are thus divorced at two removes, not one, from English Baptist origins⁴⁰

A few months before the publication of Burrage's work there had appeared Henry W. Clark's influential *History of English Nonconformity*. This too is strongly anti-Anabaptist. It is clear that Clark had been reading both Bax and Burgess, from whom he quotes, and had come away disillusioned. The Anabaptists, he writes with reference to Bax, were more social radicals than religious reformers. Their baptismal views were insignificant amid the welter of heretical and anarchical ideas they entertained. In Europe they brought about social chaos. In England such Anabaptist congregations as existed "speedily degenerated into mere faddists and eccentrics, often immoral, only occasionally dangerous, and by the close of the sixteenth century they have passed from sight". They were not the forerunners of the Baptists but of the Socinians.⁴¹

Where others led the leading Baptist historian of the day followed. As Dr E. A. Payne pointed out,⁴² W. T. Whitley in his preface to the *Minutes of the General Baptist Assembly* (1908) had claimed that the Generals were an outgrowth of the continental Anabaptists acting upon the Lollards. A few years later he was writing in a very different strain: "Baptists are to be sharply distinguished from the Anabaptists of the Continent". Indeed so strong became Whitley's repudiations that they even drew a mild rebuke from Albert Peel on modern Baptists being "unduly anxious to disown" the Anabaptists.⁴³

George P. Gould, the then President of the Baptist Historical Society, aligned himself with Whitley. Gould has even Smyth regarding the Anabaptists with "unmixed aversion" and begins the Baptist story precisely in 1611 with Helwys' return from Holland. He greeted with approval the main theses of Burrage's book.⁴⁴

J. H. Shakespeare was an earlier convert to the new theory. In his *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers* (1906) he wrote disparagingly of the Anabaptists, both for their political excesses and heretical beliefs. Relying, unusually for a Baptist, on the support of an Anglican bishop, Mandell Creighton, who had been generous enough to dissociate the English

Baptists from the "fanatics" who "infected" Germany in the sixteenth century, Shakespeare concluded that it was "unhistorical and misleading" to confound the two movements. "The Anabaptists in England were almost entirely a foreign importation, an alien element, and the rise of the Baptist churches was wholly independent of them".

H. Wheeler Robinson too adopted this standpoint - though at a rather later date. Writing in 1925 he spoke warmly of the Anabaptist movement as the inheritor of the evangelical tradition of the middle ages and a seminal influence on the General Baptists. Two years later he wrote of "possible" points of contact between Baptists and Anabaptism "in its more moderate form". Twelve years later he gave "a definite negative" to the suggestion of such a link.⁴⁵ Alone among the prominent leaders of the denomination John Clifford with his radical General Baptist background and J. H. Rushbrooke with his deep acquaintance with the European Baptist scene were still prepared to speak favourably of the Anabaptist heritage.

The transformation in outlook described in the foregoing pages had some unlooked-for results. One was undoubtedly the increased professionalisation of Baptist historical studies. Historical convictions in the nineteenth century tended to be shared by scholars, pastors and people alike, and underpinned their attitudes to their distinctive witness and to the wider world. Pike's book is a last reminder of this phase. Now history joined Scripture as an affair for *cognoscenti* acquainted with original sources and a wide gulf began to appear between the expert and the uninformed.

Again, conceived as was this historical argument in a rather charged atmosphere, it was perhaps inevitable that controversy between Mennonite apologists and the representatives of mainstream Protestantism, particularly in the inter-war period of Neo-Orthodoxy and the Luther renaissance, should become embittered and occasionally virulent. The Troeltsch/Holl controversy of the 1920s was succeeded by the Hillerbrand/Bender debates of later years, the echoes of which still linger.

Historical orthodoxies such as the one championed by Burage and Whitley are rarely destined to last for more than a few decades, and there is now evidence that this one is no longer so universally accepted as was once the case. A sign of this is that Anabaptist research is now being conducted in a far calmer atmosphere than before. Biographical and theological studies accompany attempts to classify the various Anabaptist strands, to explore the movement's real relationship to the Protestant Reformation, and above all its indebtedness to mediaevalism. And if modern Anabaptist research carries some scholars into the ascetic, mystical and sectarian worlds of the Middle Ages, it is not surprising that others should look forward to explore the repercussions and continuities down the succeeding centuries.⁴⁶

Another pointer was the debate of the later 1950s, conducted on the one side by E. A. Payne and J. D. Mosteller, and on the other by Professor Hudson, H. Wamble and E. D. Kliever.⁴⁷ In this controversy there appeared on both sides more than a just concern for historical accuracy. The anti-Anabaptists were convinced that if the Whitsitt/Burrage orthodoxy were disputed, "the origins of the Baptists are distorted, the quest for theological foundations is destroyed, and the ecumenical thrust imperilled".⁴⁸ On the other side, so we are informed, there was a well-grounded conviction that in a rapidly changing world scene where the great cultural certainties and formal ecclesiastical systems of the past were in process of revolutionary change the Anabaptist vision was bound sooner rather than later to find its vindication. Whatever else the controversy did, it presented scholars with a range of new insights and new materials for a continuing debate.

A little later Robert Torbet boldly and eruditely argued in his comprehensive *History*⁴⁹ that the Baptists are the spiritual descendants of *some* (the italics are his) of the Anabaptists. This was followed by the appearance of Dr. B. R. White's definitive *English Separatist Tradition* (1971). Dr. White, as is well known, disclaims Anabaptist influence on Baptist origins (or rather holds that "it is impossible to measure the impact of Anabaptist ideas", "even if it were considerable"). What his book does do, however, is to narrow significantly the gap which Burrage opened between the Elizabethan Separatists and the later Congregationalists and Baptists of the Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey period and beyond.

If Dr. White has filled in one of Burrage's gulfs, the reviewers of Irvin B. Horst's *The Radical Brethren* (1972) were generally agreed that this particular scholar had not filled in the other. Here however it may well be the case that phraseology and interpretative novelty may have been more open to question than historical content. Dr. Horst applies to the British scene the idea of "non-separating Anabaptism" which Yoder, Walton, Haas, Stayer and others have found a useful concept in unravelling the relationships between Zwingli and the Swiss Brethren. This however may not be so helpful an approach to our native experience. Again Horst is deeply influenced by the teaching of the American religious sociologist Joachim Wach who argued that in studying groups like the Anabaptists religious experience and outlook are the vital criteria, an intensive study of historical origins being important but insufficient to establish a proper empathy and appreciation.⁵⁰ This is a fundamental challenge to what some would regard as the tyranny of Burrage's documentary approach, possibly too fundamental for scholars steeped in that tradition. But that Horst's book has made its mark is clear from the inclusion of an important section on the radical Anabaptist background at the start of what is now established as the definitive account of early English Nonconformity.⁵¹

Perhaps in the end it is on a skilful choice of terminology that future research on Baptist/Anabaptist relationships will depend. Possibly we have reached a stage where the startling metaphor may shed more light than the learned treatise. And here the invaluable essay by Patrick Collinson, "Towards a Broader Understanding of The Early Dissenting Tradition",⁵² is of major significance. With obvious reference to Burrage and also to Albert Peel and the scholars who in the magnificent series of Early Nonconformist Texts tried to establish the complete and definitive canon of early Separatist literature, Collinson makes the point that "denominational history is engaged history, never more passionately engaged than in this ecumenical age". "The nineteenth century is assumed in the seventeenth" in all those recent works which explore the "linear" rather than the "lateral or horizontal" progress of early Dissent. "The Separatist Tradition" in the end becomes a pipeline or tunnel which shuts out any expansive views on either side - a point previously made in this journal by Christopher Hill.⁵³ And the sort of expansive views which Dr. Collinson has in mind are no doubt the kind of geographic, social and economic assessments of the early Dissenting background such as Alan Everitt and Margaret Spufford have recently given us, and in the particular context of Baptist history the family name evidence such as that employed in an important article by A. H. J. Baines.⁵⁴ If early Dissent is to be studied for its own sake and not for its value for denominational posterity it is this wider perspective which must increasingly take up the researcher's energies.

NOTES

- 1 R. Heath, *Anabaptism*, (London, 1895), p.193.
- 2 Crosby, *History*, I, (London, 1738), p.lvii. Even with this qualification some considered Crosby too bold: the mere mention of the term "anabaptist" might invite persecution again.
- 3 J. Sheppard, *Letters Descriptive of a Tour Through Some Parts of France and Italy, Switzerland and Germany in 1816*, (Edinburgh, 1817), p.242. For Sheppard, see *Baptist Quarterly*, 18, (Oct.1960), p.340.
- 4 E. B. Underhill, *op.cit.*, p.vii.
- 5 *A History of Anti-Paedobaptism*, (Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society, 1897).
- 6 *Baptist Magazine*, 96 (1904), p.258 f.
- 7 E. C. Pike, *The Story of the Anabaptists*, (London, 1904), pp.12,14.
- 8 Pike, *op.cit.*, pp.32, 37, 49, 87.
- 9 C. Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, (Cambridge, 1912), pp.I, 14.
- 10 J. P. Whitney, *The Reformation*, (London, 1907), pp.49-52, 74. Present day historians of authoritarian bent, G. R. Elton for example, still write of the Anabaptists in this way.

- 11 See W. M. Patterson, *Baptist Successionism, A Critical View*, (Judson Press, 1969).
- 12 The Baptist tree was shown alongside an unhealthy-looking "Roman tree" on the opposite page.
- 13 His conviction had first been voiced in an article in Johnson's *Universal Encyclopaedia*, (New York, 1896).
- 14 Burrage published his *Early English Dissenters*, the substance of his thesis in 1912. Then after a spell as librarian at Manchester College, Oxford, he returned to the United States in 1915, spending the rest of his life in the study of Cretan archaeology.
- 15 D. R. Sharpe, *Walter Rauschenbusch*, (New York, 1942), pp.178 f.; D. E. Smucker, *Walter Rauschenbusch and Anabaptist Historiography in The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, (1957), and "Multiple Motifs in the Thought of Rauschenbusch" in *Encounter*, 19, (1958).
- 16 *A Pocket History of the Baptist Movement*, (London, n.d. but c.1932), pp.35-36.
- 17 *Tom Mann and His Times*, Vol.1, (London, 1956), p.268.
- 18 J. W. Hulse, *Revolutionists in London*, (OUP, 1970), p.92. A good account of Bax is that by S. Pierson in *Journal of British Studies*, XII, (1972).
- 19 J. B. Bax, *Rise and Fall*, p.164. In this respect Anabaptism resembles other apocalyptic revivalist movements, not least the early Salvation Army.
- 20 C. Tsuzuki, *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism*, (OUP, 1961), p.189.
- 21 Bax, *op.cit.*, p.27.
- 22 *Ibidem*, 94, p.388.
- 23 *Ibidem*, p.244.
- 24 See the present writer's "The Old General Baptists" in *Baptist Quarterly*, 24, (1970-71).
- 25 Burgess, *Smith the Se-Baptist*, p.320.
- 26 Burgess, *op.cit.*, p.208. Burgess tries nevertheless to be very fair to Helwys.
- 27 Burgess, *op.cit.*, pp.291, 359.
- 28 *Ibidem*, pp.87, 175, 178.
- 29 Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, (London, 1962) would, like Troeltsch, have Protestant Pietism also rooted in the Anabaptist movement. He imposes on the latter an elaborate typology: revolutionary, contemplative and evangelical communities correspond to three psychological types: the suffering servants, the militant heralds and the watchful

brooders. In an earlier essay prefaced to his *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (London, 1957) Williams had said that "roots and branches, parent stock and offshoots are difficult to distinguish". The typology was designed to sort out this confusion.

- 30 *Studies*, pp.369, xxxvii.
- 31 *Ibidem*, pp.377, 395.
- 32 *Ibidem*, pp.448 f.
- 33 A modern Quaker, C. J. Holdsworth, considers Jones' work "very much the product of his age and upbringing": *Friends Historical Society Journal*, 53, No.1 (1972), p.30.
- 34 *Spiritual Reformers*, pp.33, 80, 112, 320, 343.
- 35 I. B Horst, *The Radical Brethren*, (Nieuwkoop, 1972), p.180.
- 36 Tolmie is anxious to rescue early Dissent from the imputations of Hill, Morton, Capp and others of its being the "lunatic fringe" of Puritanism. "Respectable nonconformity" is ignored by these historians - Tolmie, *op.cit.*, p.x. Champlin Burrage was intent in his generation on a similar rescue operation.
- 37 Dexter may well through his work on John Smyth published in 1881 have propelled Baptist studies in a similar direction.
- 38 Burrage, *op.cit.*, I, p.20. Burgess' one strength according to Burrage was his unravelling the genealogy of the Smyth family: *ibidem*, p.xi.
- 39 Burrage, *op.cit.*, pp.40, 60, 64.
- 40 *Ibidem*, p.281. Burrage's second volume which consists entirely of documents underlined the thoroughness with which the author had gone through his source materials.
- 41 H. W. Clark, *History of English Nonconformity*, I (London, 1911), pp.128-130.
- 42 *Baptist Quarterly*, 22, No.8 (1968).
- 43 Whitley's most elaborate treatment may be read in *Baptist Quarterly*, 2, (1924-25), pp.24 f. Peel's comment appears in Peake and Parsons' *The Outline of Christianity*, Volume Three, (London, 1927), p.209. Whitley however who always chose his words very carefully never finally closed the door on possible Anabaptist influence. A comment such as that in many towns in America there may be found both an Anabaptist and a Baptist church, "as distinct as Methodists and Anglicans" (*Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, xiii, (1937-9), p.166), begs a fairly big question.
- 44 *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, ii (1910-11); iii (1912-13), p.62.
- 45 *Baptist Principles*, (London, 1925), p.62; *Life and Faith of the Baptists*, (London, 1927), p.3; *Baptists in Britain*, (London, 1937), p.2.

- 46 See in particular H. Hillerbrand, "Anabaptism and the Reformation, Another Look" in *Church History*, 29, (1960); W. Klassen, "Modern Anabaptist Research" in *Baptist Quarterly*, 18, (1959-60), and most importantly, "The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins" in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 49, (1975).
- 47 E. A. Payne in *Baptist Quarterly*, 16, (1955-56) and *Foundations*, 4, (1961); Mosteller in *The Chronicle*, 20, (1957); Hudson in *Baptist Quarterly*, 16, (1955-56), *The Chronicle*, 16, (1953) and 17, (1954) and *The Review and Expositor*, 55, (1958); Wamble in *The Review and Expositor*, 54, (1957); Kliever in *Mennonite Quarterly*, 36, (1962).
- 48 Quoted from G. H. Stassen in *Mennonite Quarterly*, 36, (1962), p.325.
- 49 *A History of the Baptists*, (Judson Press, 1966), p.29.
- 50 J. Wach, *The Sociology of Religion*, (London, 1944), pp.47, 163.
- 51 M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, (Oxford, 1978), pp.7 f. Dr. Watts considers Horst's evidence "circumstantial" rather than "concrete" but convincing nonetheless.
- 52 In C. R. Cole and M. E. Moody ed., *The Dissenting Tradition*, (Ohio U.P., 1975).
- 53 C. Hill, "History and Denominational History" in *Baptist Quarterly*, 22, No.2 (1967).
- 54 "The Signatories of the Baptist Confession of 1679" in *Baptist Quarterly*, 17, (1957).

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