

REVIEWS

Grace E. Woods (ed.), *Life in China: from the letters of Dr Nancy Bywaters*, Braunton: Merlin Books Ltd, 1992, pp.243. ISBN 0-86303-584-1, £12-95.

This book falls into two sections. The first prints the weekly letters written to her family between 1946 and 1951 by Dr Nancy Bywaters, a BMS medical missionary in China. The second is her account of a visit to China in 1977 as part of a delegation from the Medical Women's Federation of Great Britain. Readers of the *Quarterly* will be interested primarily in the perspective which the first section provides on the closing years of the missionary era in China. Like most missionaries, Bywaters hoped initially that the Communist successes would prove only temporary and that the Nationalist cause would triumph. Yet by March 1951, with the Communist regime in place and its economic achievements becoming evident, she could write with admiration of 'these days of progress' and the 'spirit of service' apparent in the New China.

As the niece of Cecil Robertson, BMS doctor in Shaanxi province who died of typhus in 1913, Bywaters had set her heart on following her uncle to Xian city. The threatened Communist take-over of Shaanxi delayed the fulfilment of her ambition, and from December 1948 to July 1950 she worked in the English Presbyterian mission hospital at Swatow. A letter written from Swatow in October 1949 comments appositely on the dilemmas facing the missions. Political wisdom seemed to dictate an immediate hand-over of all mission institutions to the Chinese church, yet what would happen to the mission hospitals if this were done? Bywaters reflected wryly that one could scarcely expect the deacons of her home church at Cemetery Road, Sheffield, to make a success of running the City General Hospital! In July 1950 Bywaters was finally able to commence work in Xian. Her letters from Xian portray the delicate relationships between church and mission in Shaanxi during the days of the 'accusation meetings' directed against all imperialist influence in the churches.

Also of interest in this book is the introduction, which contains full transcripts of the addresses given at Cemetery Road on the occasion of Bywaters' valedictory service in September 1946. The charge to the church by Dr W. S. Flowers, representing the BMS, is of note for its reflections on the missionary response to nationalism, and the almost total absence of any reference to the Christian objectives of the work that Bywaters was being sent to do.

BRIAN STANLEY *Trinity College, Bristol*

Michael Rowe, *Russian Resurrection: Strength in Suffering - a History of Russia's Evangelical Church*, Marshall Pickering, 1994, 264pp, pb £8-99.

The remarkable reversal in Soviet attitudes towards religion which took place from 1986 onwards under Mikhail Gorbachev and the collapse of the USSR in 1991 make this last decade of the twentieth century an appropriate time for re-examining the history of Russia's Evangelical Christians-Baptists. *Russian Resurrection* is not a denominational history nor is it exclusively about Russians. In historical and geographical terms the book is about the Russian Empire, the USSR and the Successor States. In terms of religion the book is evangelically inclusive. The witness of Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox believers is recorded, as well as that of Stundists, Molokans, Baptists, Mennonites, Pentecostals, Evangelical Christians, Adventists and Temperance Christians.

Rowe has written with the general reader in mind. The story is divided into three parts: I Holy Russia, II Seventy Years of Communism, III Perestroika and After. Headline-style chapter headings, such as 'The Fire of Revolution', 'The Carrot and the Stick', and 'Evangelical Explosion', have been chosen to engage the reader. However, the sombre details of persecution are delivered in a measured and unsensationalized way. A veritable flood of factual detail from scattered sources has been channelled into a well-integrated account. The sources are listed in a bibliography, but the text is without footnotes and unfortunately there is no index.

At a time when the need for greater understanding and tolerance between Evangelicals and the Orthodox is widely acknowledged, the ecumenical approach is to be welcomed. Rowe has successfully woven into his story Orthodox experience and practice which can be described as 'evangelical', in a broad sense, without underestimating the legacy of imprisonment and exile which was the lot of thousands of Stundists, Baptists and Molokans in late Imperial ('Holy') Russia. Thus we learn how Orthodox scholars produced the first complete translation of the Bible in Russian and how the Orthodox Church bore the brunt of the assault on religion in the first decade after the Revolution. Examples of Orthodox believers like Fr Gleb Yakunin, the human rights campaigner who from the 1960s consistently supported persecuted believers of whatever denomination, and Fr Alexander Men, the writer and priest, who up to and beyond his brutal murder in 1990, inspired many to a new piety and a new openness to Christians of other denominations, serve to illustrate the vital witness of the Orthodox Church in more recent times.

Before leaving the impression that this book is more about the Russian Orthodox church than the Evangelical Church of its title, it should be noted that Rowe presents a clear exposition of the classic description of the birth of the evangelical movement in Russia, i.e. the confluence of three streams of evangelical witness beginning independently of each other in the Ukraine, the Caucasus and St Petersburg in the second half of the nineteenth century. *Russian Revolution*, however, differs appreciably from an official account such as that found in *Istoriya Yevangeliskikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR* (History of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the

USSR), Moscow, 1989, in its treatment of the schism of the 1960s and its consequences. Although the latter work is encyclopedic in its proportions and a product of the glasnost years, few details are given of the trials and tribulations of the unregistered Baptists. This chapter in Russian Baptist history is given the attention it deserves in *Russian Resurrection*. The author has an intimate acquaintance with these facts from his research work at Keston College from 1978 to 1991.

New pressures and problems arising from the vacuum left by the collapse of communism receive judicial attention in the final pages of the book. Coming to terms with the past is a significant part of these problems and *Russian Resurrection*, which it would be most valuable to have in Russian translation for Russian readers, can only help in this process.

MALCOLM WALKER *Keston College*

Readers of the *Baptist Quarterly* may also be interested in the novel, *Schism in High Society: Lord Radstock and his Followers*, by Nikolai Leskov, translated by James Muckle, Nottingham: Bramcote Press, 1995, pp.128, hb £18.95, pb £8.95. Discount prices, hb £14, pb £6.50 inc. for direct orders from individuals, cash with order, from Bramcote Press, 27 Seven Oaks Crescent, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FW.

Lord Radstock was an English Christian evangelist who caused a stir in Russian society in the 1870s; this was the St Petersburg stream of evangelical witness mentioned in the review above. Influential people joining his movement alarmed conservatives in the Russian Orthodox Church and in government; their servants also joining aroused fears of egalitarianism and revolutionary sentiment. Leskov (1831-95) was a novelist, rated by many Russians today above Tolstoy and Dostoevsky but little translated into English. This study, informative, balanced and entertaining, depicts the social and religious context and shows the clash between the different cultures of Russian Orthodoxy and English Evangelical Protestantism: a context which still has relevance to the Russian scene today. It has never previously been translated. James Muckle was Senior Lecturer at the University of Nottingham and has written a monograph on Leskov.

Bryan W. Ball, *The Seventh-Day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600-1800*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp.xi, 356. £40-00.

This book has been ten years in the making. Dr Ball is a worthy chronicler of those earnest women and men who chose to interpret literally the Fourth Commandment. The narrative is easily followed. The author considers forerunners, looks at the theological rationale and deals with congregations by region, each with a map. Congregations that lived beyond the period are followed through to their demise, the last ending in the 1960s. The study reveals a greater incidence of Sabbatarians over a wider area than had previously been recognized. The reader meets familiar characters: Bampffield, Tillam, Cornthwaite and generations of Stennetts. Henry Jessey's presence may raise the odd eyebrow and John Wesley would probably be surprised to find himself mentioned in passing. John Traske and Theophilus Brabourne (neither Baptists) were seminal apologists. All the time Dr Ball invites the reader to realize that the Seventh-Day believers were not a quaint sect but heirs of the reformed tradition. Protestant, Puritan and thoroughly biblical, they saw themselves not as innovators but as restorers.

The Seventh-Day message struck several chords. The change from Saturday to Sunday was traced to the early Roman church and swelled anti-Catholic rhetoric. Interpreting the significance of the change tapped into eschatological hopes and prophecies. In insisting on strict observance of the fourth commandment, the importance of the moral code was highlighted. Perhaps only Francis Bampffield developed a sabbatarian apologetic with genuine Christological and soteriological dimensions.

Not all Seventh-Day Men were Baptists nor were all Fifth Monarchists yet in their scrupulous adherence to scripture these groupings overlapped. There was no apparent pattern or programme to the way congregations sprang up all around the country. They did not create any co-ordinating structures. Some Seventh-Day churches met only on Saturday, some individuals joined with First-Day worshippers and some ministers served both sorts of churches. This blurring of identity boded ill, but also makes the subject more elusive. The strength of Dr Ball's study lies in the pursuit of detail, painstakingly reconstructing the evidence.

The response to Seventh-Day churches was generally negative, even among other Baptists whose early historians were wary of claiming kinship. Too easily they could be caricatured as Judaisers, and sometimes were. After the Restoration, the spirituality and language of apocalyptic could be flatly interpreted as revolutionary threat, as John James discovered. To a society gradually absorbing the impact of Enlightenment reasoning, the Seventh-Day churches seemed archaic.

In pre-revival England and Wales, Sabbatarian Baptists declined, as did the other branches of Dissent. Numerically never very strong, they drifted towards insignificance. Several possible causes are suggested: less prescriptive views of the Bible, poor provision of adequately paid ministers, often the lack of own property

for worship (a feature shared with the General Baptists) *inter alia*. No network had evolved that linked the scattered causes and congregational divisions made small groups smaller. Some rural churches became the preserve of one or two families. Introspective or indistinct, they failed to pass the faith from one generation to the next and so faded away.

The impact of this work is cumulatively persuasive. Fragmentary evidence is teased out without overstating the case or making unsubstantiated claims. An occasional reference to the 'Baptist Church' is disconcerting, but the list of manuscript sources (including an unpublished piece by Whitley) and bibliography of controversial works is a valuable addition. We are indebted to Dr Ball for his patient recovery of Seventh-Day women and men from the margins. The author's stated hope is to stimulate regional studies, yet it is without doubt that this will be the standard reference book on Seventh-Day Baptists in England and Wales for many years to come.

STEPHEN COPSON

CHAPEL HISTORIES

Alan Crisp, *A History of Orpington Baptist Church 1848-1991*, foreword by Revd B. R. White, 1992, pp.iv + 66, pb £5-60 inc. p&p, from Orpington Baptist Church, Station Road, Orpington, Kent BR6 0RZ.

Kenneth W. H. Howard, *Bethersden Baptist Beginnings: A Contribution towards the History of a Kentish Village*, 1990, pp.iv + 159, cb, £20 + p&p, from Mrs Margaret E. Howard, 58 Eckling Grange, Dereham, Norfolk, NR20 3BB.

Sid Marfleet and Stan James, *TBC 125 1868-1993: One Hundred and Twenty Five Years of Tonbridge Baptist Church*, foreword by Revd Derek Hills, 1993, pp.ii + 40, pb, £3 inc. p&p, from Tonbridge Baptist Church, Darenth Avenue, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 3HZ.

Alan Crisp has traced the history of Orpington Baptist Church from its founding as a Particular Baptist Church in 1848 until the call of the present minister to the pastorate in 1991. Unfortunately, the author does not refer to Ralph F. Chambers, *The Strict Baptist Chapels of England, Volume III The Chapels of Kent*, so we do not know whether Chambers is correct in his assertion that the Strict Baptists in Orpington met first in a room under the leadership of their first pastor, Mr J. (*sic*, actually Thomas) Willoughby and then secured in 1853 a chapel, which had been vacated by the Independents the previous year. This chapel was presumably the pair of converted cottages known as Bethesda Chapel which Crisp claims was used by the Orpington Baptists from the earlier date of 1848 until the church moved to the High Street in 1883. The church moved to its present site in 1977.

Thomas Willoughby was succeeded by Joseph Hamblin in 1862 and he served until his death, the date of which is not recorded in the church records so is not given by Crisp but Chambers says his pastorate ended in 1867. The pulpit was then supplied by a number of visiting Strict Baptist ministers, including Mr J. Chipchase, who used to walk from London and back to conduct services. Chambers is not, however, correct in describing him as pastor in 1869. After Hamblin's death the church did not have another pastor until 1880 when it called a member, Edwin White to the pastorate. By then the church had ceased to be Strict Baptist. White was a working man who at first carried on his ordinary occupation while acting as pastor. He became a student at Pastors' College and the church prospered under his leadership and moved to the High Street. Sadly, on completing his training he concluded that the members had insufficient concern for his welfare and moved to another church.

In the Foreword, Dr White points out that the story includes 'references to matters of significance for wider Baptist history - not least George Fearn's twenty year wait (!) for the acceptance of infant dedication services'. C. H. Spurgeon's part in the call of a successor to Edwin White is also of interest: one wonders whether Spurgeon's role in ministerial settlements has been adequately investigated.

Kenneth Howard has described the beginning of the Union Chapel, Bethersden, from its beginning until the centenary of the formation of the church in 1909. The chapel's name is derived from that of the West Kent Union of Independents and Baptists for village preaching. In the early days at Bethersden there was hesitation as to whether the work would become an Independent or a Baptist cause. The matter was finally resolved in 1809 with the formation of the church and subsequent adoption of a typical Particular Baptist doctrinal basis. The author points out that the entry on Bethersden in Chambers' volume is 'unreliable and abounds in errors of fact' (p.106). The author, the pastor from 1980 until 1989, describes his book as 'an exercise in local history, neither less nor more'. It is a fitting memorial to his meticulous scholarship and his love of Baptist history. As one who left the Baptist Union ministry in 1968 when he became minister of Rugby Evangelical Free Church, his comments on the resignation in 1844 of Abraham Shilling, the first pastor of the Union Chapel, are thought-provoking: 'Sadly, the whole affair belongs to that category of insinuation and inuendo to which every pastor under the independent system of Church government is exposed; from which so many have suffered both before and since, longing only for the protective advantage of the presbyterial order' (p.93).

In *TBC 125* we have a popular history of Tonbridge Baptist Church from its foundation as a 'Baptist Congregational Church' when a number of members of Tonbridge Independent Church left over the issue of baptism. The authors point out that the earliest written record of Baptist worship is in 1819 when a dwelling house in the parish was registered for worship by Baptists. No direct link has, however,

been established between this fellowship and the founders of Tonbridge Baptist Church. Chambers (*op.cit.* p.76) also gives information about the formation of a Strict Baptist cause formed when some worshippers left the Independent Chapel in 1838. The story of the church is illustrated with numerous photographs. However, the authors have depended solely on written sources and no attempt was made to record oral history. This means that, although tribute is paid to Mr Bernard Potter, who served as a deacon for more than forty years (p.17), significant contributions to the life and the witness of the church by others is ignored. There are still some who were in leadership positions in the church in the early 1860s and their reminiscences ought to be recorded. The importance of oral history needs to be more widely recognized than it is at present. The story of Tonbridge Baptist Church is that of ordinary people whom God used for building his church.

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