

“A White Life.”

THERE are certain books which ought to find their way into every Baptist home: to the number of these we must now add Sir James Marchant's *Life of Dr. Clifford*. This biography has the conspicuous merit of relying on the actual sources, letters and diaries, and in this is clearly in line with the practice of Dr. Clifford himself. We remember how he amassed sheaves of information on every conceivable subject, ammunition for that spiritual warfare which he was ever conducting. “Be sure of your facts,” he used to say, and in the spirit of that remark he displayed a never-failing interest in the work of the Baptist Historical Society. When the Baptist Union meetings were held in Leicester in 1922, he entered with youthful gaiety into the Society's excursion to the neighbouring Baptist churches of historic interest, and the present writer will never forget how, at place after place, Dr. Clifford drew upon his own first-hand knowledge of the Baptist movement. And because the best way to secure a clear knowledge of Baptist principles is by becoming familiar with Baptist history, we can confidently recommend this book to all who believe in freedom of expression and spiritual conviction.

Dr. Clifford lived through a very exciting and formative period of Baptist life. Most of us who form the younger battalions of the Baptist regiment began with the Baptist Church House as an acknowledged fact: to us, the Down grade controversy was a remote historic event: denominational organization as revealed in blessings like the Sustentation Fund was a welcome fact. And it is not easy for us to realize the spirit of the times, and the vigour of the men, who preceded our own day. Here, in Marchant's work, we have the story of the growth of our Baptist work. Dr. Clifford incorporated into himself those great nineteenth-century movements which have revolutionized our English life. The passion for social reform, the extension of the rights of the individual citizen, the progress of Biblical scholarship, the consolidation of our scattered forces; these, and many others, he represented, and it would be difficult for a Baptist to gain a better introduction to the period than is found in the study of Clifford's life. We venture to recom-

mend this use of Marchant's book. We believe that if such a book were to become the basis for study circles among our young people the effect would be most pronounced in a stronger emphasis on Baptist principles and in a full-voiced evangelicism.

We have not space here to consider the numerous points of value which arise in the study of such a life, but reference may be made to one or two which appear to have a real bearing on life in our churches to-day. May we mention, to begin with, the dedication of the volume. “Dedicated to Westbourne Park Church, his first love and his last.” The days of long ministries seem to be no longer with us. There are still in our denomination men whose work has been a life work, but, for the most part, the long pastorate seems to be the exception nowadays. Our age is more restless, we have caught the spirit of the Athenians of Paul's day, the spirit that is ever on the look-out for something new. The crudescence of old cults, seen in our modern examples of spiritism and theosophy and Christian Science, is very significant, and indicates a certain temper which many of our congregations, and many of our ministers, have not escaped. On account of the changed conditions of modern life, we cannot lay down the old rule in regard to long pastorates: but we may at least point out the methods which made a long pastorate possible in Clifford's case. When Clifford commenced his ministry, he did not pitch his books into a corner, nor did he have the conscientious objection to examinations that we sometimes find to-day. He set out with the intention of keeping his armour bright, and he did not make the mistake of wearing a polished breastplate and leaving his *head* uncovered. Once more, long spells in the study did not keep Dr. Clifford out of the homes of his people. His people he knew by their names, children as well, and that is one reason, so his people say, why respect for “the Doctor” was combined with love. We might do far worse than ponder over this. In our denomination we have erected many altars called Committees, and many are the things that are sacrificed thereon.

There is, again, the vexed question of politics. This appears to be a matter that divides our ministers to-day. “Follow out the social implications of the Gospel wherever they lead,” say some. “Avoid the parties,” say others. Dr. Clifford always took his stand on high principles, and did not hesitate to declare his adherence to that party which, in his view, most completely expressed those principles. The question is a thorny one, and, say what we may, men will continue to mark out their course according to their predilec-

tions. But it is very significant that towards the end of his days Dr. Clifford set out upon the campaign of Personal Evangelism. He did not see, we may feel sure, any inherent conflict between such a campaign and what is commonly referred to as "the preaching of the social Gospel." But after a long life, spent for the most part in the heat and dust of the conflict, he was convinced that personal work, by the whole church, was the greatest need of all. There are some of us who regard this as his most valuable word to ourselves. There is, doubtless, a glamour about the ringing battles of the platform: there is a thrill about the fight in the open arena of politics; but for the work of the ministry, let us have the quiet personal work among the people whom we meet. For this, we have the highest precedent of all, that of Christ Himself.

It is not surprising that this note should be the last that Dr. Clifford sounded. Spirituality abounded in his ministry from first to last, and Sir James Marchant has made this clear: witness this extract from the diary: "Seventy years ago to-day I was baptized. This is one of the great days of my life. Every time it comes round my heart is filled with gratitude for the grace that led me to the act of dedication. It was a day when I accepted, definitely a high ideal—the highest possible—that of a white life. How abundant the mercy of God to me in upholding me in that ideal through all these years! How overflowing is His love! How full His pardons! How comforting the assurance of His presence to the end!"

"A white life." That was his ideal, and those who knew him best know how far the ideal was made actual. If Sir James Marchant had called his great work *The Book of a White Life* he would have summed up his subject without exaggeration. It is this that makes the book so suitable for our young men, both ministers and laymen. It is a work that is well done, excellently printed right down to its exhaustive index, and we hope that for many years to come young people may find in it a great inspiration. The next best thing to knowing Dr. Clifford is to read about him in this book.

PUBLIC PRAYER was the theme of an article in our pages by Mr. William Olney. It has been reprinted by Mr. Alexander McCay of Claremont Villa, Northland Road, Londonderry. Those who wish for a copy should send him twopence.