

A HISTORY OF BRITISH BAPTISTS, by W. T. Whitley,
M.A., LL.D., F.R.Hist.S. Published by C. Griffin & Co., Ltd.
365 pages, with notes, tables, index. Price 10/6.

THE publication of this work removes a grave reproach from our Denomination. It is now over a hundred years since Ivimey wrote his *History of English Baptists*. Since then much research work has been done, and it has long been known that new facts were waiting to be recovered from our archives—facts which would modify old conclusions and compel new ones. A modern history, written in the modern style, and springing out of the now well-established critical method was a crying need. We required it for our own health as a denomination; we needed it also to establish our position in the scholastic world, for as a footnote in this volume reminds us, even so catholic and well-informed a scholar as the late editor of the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* did not think Baptists of sufficient importance to deserve an article to themselves! To-day we can rejoice that this crying need has been met.

And met in a way which will give universal satisfaction. Without qualification we can say that no one in the denomination was better qualified to undertake the task than Dr. Whitley. For twenty years he has made our records his special study, bringing to bear upon them a trained mind and enthusiastic spirit, while his wide experience and extensive travels have given him a rare opportunity of seeing and estimating present-day Baptist life. The result is a book which splendidly achieves. It is both scholarly and living, and at once will take its place as the standard history of British Baptists, while from all who are interested in our past it will draw deep gratitude to its author. To say that it is worthy of the story it tells is high but just praise.

Nor is it the least merit of the book that the story is told. Everyone knows how difficult it is amid such a wealth of detail to keep a right perspective, and so present the material that the story marches from page to page—especially so where the subject is a movement, embracing many men of different types and varied ability, and at times dependent almost wholly on such as have scarcely left a name behind. With admirable skill Dr. Whitley has succeeded here. He sums up the first period with the sentence, "It was the apostolic age again, without a Paul," and after reading his account one feels the appositeness of the remark. It is this virtue which makes the book one for the average reader as well as for the historian. It has the quality of being absorbingly interesting.

Justice is done to the great leaders, men like Smyth, Carey, Fuller, Spurgeon; but Dr. Whitley very wisely does not allow his readers to lose sight of the great host of average men and women who, in their time and areas, were the bearers of the torch. We see here the force of ideas as they are held tenaciously by the average mind. We witness the propagating power amongst the people of truth and faith and love. A mind is enlightened, and a movement begins; a soul is set on fire, and behold! a revival breaks out. The whole history is a great encouragement to the faithful soul, and a fine vindication of our Baptist position of looking to God and then following His light "without tarrying for any." Wherever it is read, it will stimulate individual loyalty to principle.

Very interesting also is the way in which the author is able to show that active evangelization has always been one of the clearest marks of our Church. The motto for the volume, printed on the title page, is the word out of the declaration of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, which enforces upon every adherent the duty of propagating the Faith. It is a fitting motto. Again and again we are shown that the Baptists have displayed a genius for organization, and always the organization has been with a view to growth. The passion to advance, to evangelize, has informed our institutions, toned our thought, and guided our life; so that Carey, far from appearing an anomaly, a sort of strange outgrowth on our tree, is seen to be the natural product of our inherent life. We are missionary by the very nature of the faith we hold.

Also—and this will come as strange to some—we are *brotherly* for the same reason. One of the valuable parts of the history is that wherein the Baptists are distinguished from the Independents. From the beginning it seems Baptist Churches have sought fellowship and communion with each other. Our people have had the consciousness of belonging to each other—one Church, though consisting of many communities. Here the General Baptists with their Annual Assembly come in for their meed of praise, while the Particulars develop the distinctive idea of Associations. Evidently modern movements toward consolidation have derived some of their strength from the blood that is in Baptist veins, and interesting it is to notice how in the centuries the great aspirations which emerged in the beginning rise up again to claim still firmer allegiance.

On three points Dr. Whitley has brought to light much new material. The position of Baptists in Cromwell's army was a very important factor, having decided consequences in the national life both of England and Ireland. This was a part of our story that needed telling, and we may congratulate ourselves that we

have in the past operated so forcibly in shaping political institutions. The constitution of modern democratic states is not unconnected, it seems, with our Baptist genius for organization, and both England and the United States, not to mention some other countries, owe a debt to nameless soldiers of the Commonwealth.

The other points on which new light is shed are the pioneer work of Baptists in starting and developing Sunday schools; and also in introducing hymns, other than metrical psalms, in congregational worship.

While the book is a history of British Baptists, Dr. Whitley has not refrained from sketching in outline the movements in the Empire to which the Baptist witness has given rise. He also has kept an eye open towards the West. Indeed, throughout he has seen the movement in its world-setting both geographically and historically, so that we are able to view the denomination as a part of the wider life of mankind during these eventful centuries. Weaknesses have been faithfully pointed out where necessary, and controversies, even those in living memory, dealt with dispassionately and judiciously. It is an historian's work from beginning to end—yet well and interestingly written.

At page 360 Baptist publishers are referred to, and the Foreword reveals that Francis J. Blight, head of Charles Griffin & Co., Ltd., has taken keen personal interest in the production of this book. He is the esteemed Hon. Treasurer of the Baptist Historical Society. The format of the book is excellent—good paper, clearly printed, and strongly bound. It is wonderful value for 10s. 6d. We learn that several hundred copies have been ordered for America.

We congratulate Dr. Whitley on a fine achievement, the Angus Trustees on their foresight in making this one of their series, and ourselves on having at last an accurate and worthy history of our denomination.

ARTHUR DAKIN.