

Editorial

A FIRST and congenial task of the new editor is to pay tribute to his predecessor. This is no formality. Readers of *The Baptist Quarterly* know that they owe a great debt to Miss Rosemary Taylor for continuing that standard which has marked the periodical down the fifty-eight years of its life: a standard which seeks to combine integrity of scholarship with the special interests of a particular denominational tradition. Contributors (not to mention would-be contributors!) will be even more aware of the care she has devoted to the editorial task. No paper has appeared in the journal under her charge without the benefit of her thoughtful judgment, and meticulous eye for detail. Her successor is grateful for the privilege of being entrusted with a publication wearing such a reputation, and he is equally aware of the demands posed by the maintenance of that reputation.

There should be no need to argue yet again what has so often been stated in this journal regarding the importance of denominational historical study. A community unaware of its past would be in as sad a plight as a man who had lost his memory. Happily, there is no lack of research into Baptist history and related subjects at present. Rich veins are being worked by professional and amateur historians alike. Nor do we suffer from any arbitrary limitations as to what kinds of areas of the past should occupy our interest. Obviously, we are concerned with the major figures, organizations and movements of which we are heirs. But we must not forget that churches, like society as a whole, comprise smaller groups and individuals in whose lives and struggles are particularized the features of their age. In this issue, the article by Dr. Cawardine highlights this interest very effectively.

But history is not simply to do with the past. History is "now and England", not to mention Wales, or Scotland, or wherever we happen to be. It is being made now, in that creative tension between remembered past and hoped-for future. From its inception, this journal has combined its concern for historiography with a concern for contemporary issues in the life of the Church and in theology. Indeed, it was specifically in order to cater for a wider concern than the narrowly "historical" that the journal was conceived as successor to the *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* in 1922. In the very first issue, H. Wheeler Robinson, then President of the Baptist Historical Society, stated: "There is no incongruity in mingling the study of the past with the interests of the present, as we propose to do". It is our intention that, at the very least, this concern for reflection on contemporary issues will be maintained. There is a continuing and vital need for a medium in which Baptists can share at a serious level, in the theological explorations of the hour, both those regarding issues which concern them particularly, and those which cut across denominational boundaries.

In his paper "Evangelical Calvinism and the Structures of Baptist Church Life", delivered to the Annual Meeting of our Historical Society in 1979, Dr. Leonard Champion issued a call for a renewal of basic theological thinking among Baptists, in face of the questions put to our structures for mission, in a rapidly changing society. His paper appears in full in this issue. Some, at least, will share his wish that, particularly among our younger theologians (let us not be afraid of the word) new ventures will be made in thought which is both basic—in the sense of tackling again even such fundamental questions as the doctrine of God—yet also rooted in the here-and-now task of mission in a secular society. Perhaps we may note that little attention is paid to this need in the report of the Denominational Enquiry Group *Signs of Hope*, now under discussion in our churches. But if Dr. Champion's argument is sound, drawing as it does upon the example of that most creative phase of Baptist history in the late eighteenth century, then such renewed theological work would indeed be a sign of hope.

Naturally, one issue with which Baptists are always concerned is that of baptism. It is a sign of our ecumenical times that discussion of the theology and practice of baptism means much less of a sectarian or partisan confrontation. Rather, it is a matter of all traditions looking together at their practices in the light of what appears to be a growing consensus on the relationship of baptism to personal faith and Christian community. A most significant event, therefore, was the Faith and Order Consultation on Baptism at Louisville, Kentucky, in the spring of 1979. This was particularly designed to bring together, on terms as equal as possible, representatives of the traditions practising believer's and infant baptism respectively, from the worldwide Christian community. We include in this issue the report of the consultation, prefaced by an article by Dr. Morris West, one of the British Baptist participants. It is hoped to publish a further article in our next issue, by another participant. The report, and this accompanying material, deserve a wide circulation and study among Baptists who wish to be informed of the present stage of the ecumenical discussion.
