

8 The "brief correspondence" reproduced here has now been deposited in the Angus Library.

G. G. NICOL

## REVIEWS

*Ministering Angels: A study of Nineteenth Century Evangelical Writing for Children* by Margaret Nancy Cutt. Five Owls Press. 1979. pp.220 plus plates. £9.50.

Ford K. Brown in his book *Fathers of the Victorians* wrote scathingly of the evangelical tract-tale: whatever merit it had had in the days of Mrs Trimmer and Hannah More, it underwent at the hands of the Rev. Carus Wilson and others in the 1830s a process of morbid introversion and ugly fanaticisation which earned the contempt of educated Victorian opinion. Mrs Cutt who has already made an important and revealing study of Mrs Sherwood, authoress of *Little Henry and his Bearer*, now throws down another challenge to the Brown thesis with an account of four female Victorian tract-tale writers, Maria Charlesworth, writing very much in the Hannah More tradition, Charlotte Tucker, a far more vigorous and lively authoress, Hesba Stretton of "Jessica's First Prayer" fame, and a critic of social injustice, and Mrs Walton ("A Peep Behind the Scenes") who lived on till 1939, yet who reverted in some ways to the original pre-Victorian insights.

Mrs Cutt's vindication of these authors and their work is well-balanced and convincing. She shows how according to the tastes of the day, particularly its guilt complexes, the tract-tale's sentiment and pathos must have had a far greater impact than a modern reader can appreciate, how it was one of the several influences which made mass literacy and the 1870 Education Act possible, how, as "Christ's poor" became "society's poor" and "march of mind" took over from the quest for personal redemption, the tracts were caught up in the general secularising trend, with collective substituted for individual guilt, and an aura of "social purpose" pervading the whole. She shows moreover how gradually in this literature the adult world's concern for the child's salvation succumbs to a totally different perspective: the child as bearer of salvation to a corrupt adult world.

Finally Mrs Cutt rightly emphasises that it was not only Charlotte Yonge and the Tractarians who poured scorn on the "street arab tales" of these lady writers: their frank and disturbing revelations provoked the shocked disapproval of the secular Athenaeum and even inspired a batch of late Victorian writers, Mrs Molesworth et al. to divert the juvenile reader's attention to a more comfortable world of pleasant villages, happy schoolrooms and tranquil homes. Here, and not in the work of the Evangelicals, was a genuine literature of escapism.

IAN SELLERS

*The Diary of Isaac Backus: 1741-1806* edited by W. G. McLoughlin. In three volumes. Brown University Press, Providence, USA. 1979. pp.1780.

"August 17 (1789) Went to Braintree; the 18th, into Boston, where I dined the 19th at Elder (Samuel) Stillman's with Mr Mullet and wife from England, she being a sister to Mr Caleb Evan's, a baptist minister of note in the city of Bristol".

On 10th March, 1761, Backus wrote his first letter to an English Baptist, John Gill. "... having had for several years acquaintance with a few of your writeings and lately with your elaborate Exposition of the Prophets, I have ventured (thro Favour of Mr Freeman, your Corrispondent in Boston) to address you, Sir, with a few lines": He went on to give Gill an account of the "very general revival of religion in New England about 20 years ago", of his own conversion to Baptist principles, and of the growth of Baptist churches since 1740.

Philip Freeman, we discover from the notes, was trained as a glover and breeches-maker, but after coming to Boston was also active as bookbinder, as well as being a leading Baptist in the city in the eighteenth century.

Rippon was in regular correspondence with Backus, though only some of the letters survive. Backus records receiving books from Rippon in 1785, which, with the "freight ... a dollar" cost him almost £10. Under date April 24th, 1797, Backus wrote: "At the request of Dr. Rippon, I got a young man to take a likeness of me to send over to him: he asked three dollors for it". Rippon received it, but eventually decided not to publish it.

These are just some of the many insights which are of interest to English readers of these three superb volumes. The volumes are a brilliant account of eighteenth century Baptist life in America. Backus played a leading role in the separation of Church and State in New England. His diary spans the years between the First and Second Great Awakenings. It reveals his vigorous campaigning for religious liberty, describes his work in consolidating the growing Baptist denomination, and discusses a host of the century's theological controversies in which he played a major part. It also sheds light on his secular interests, particularly his day to day life as a family man, farmer, writer, bookseller and ironmonger.

Backus was born in Norwich, Connecticut, on 9th January, 1723/4, into a family which belonged to the ruling élite. His father, Samuel, managed the family farm, gristmill and sawmill, and founded the Backus family ironworks. When Samuel died aged 47, he left an estate of £7,000. Isaac's mother, Elizabeth, came from an equally influential family; he was her fourth child, the second son in the family.

Backus was brought to conversion in August 1741, and was received into the Standing Church in July 1742. He was dissatisfied because the church admitted to membership some who had no spiritual experience in a personal sense. This produced a conflict with the "newly lighted" converts. Eventually those touched by the Great Awakening, the "New Lights", of which Backus was one, formed their own "separate" church in July 1746.

Backus' call to the ministry was "a Holy Spirit experience" which came to him while he was praying alone in the woods. He was suspicious for some years of a formal college education and ordination. Backus was brought into the system of itinerant revival preachers through whom the Separate movement challenged the established order in New England. The releasing of this vast crowd of unlearned but earnest men, like Backus, was one of the major democratizing forces of the pre-Revolutionary era. After two years of itinerating ministry Backus joined a "New Light" group in Middleborough. He became their "Elder" in December 1747 and remained their pastor for the next fifty-eight years.

By 1754 there were a hundred and twenty-five Separate churches in New England, which presented a serious challenge to the established New England churches. Very soon the Separates were badly divided over infant baptism, and by 1770 most of its adherents, like Backus, adopted a Baptist position, with closed communion.

The New England puritan churches were called "gathered" churches, admitting to membership only those gathered out of the mass of unregenerate converts. True saints on earth were in a covenant with God, to do God's will on earth, and their children were included in the covenant. Infant baptism brought the children of visible saints under the care of the Church. But when such children reached adulthood *without* being converted, they were denied communion and a vote in church affairs, and their children could not be brought within the covenant. In 1662 the infant baptismal rite was allowed to the grandchildren of visible saints: an agreement known as the "Halfway" covenant. At the end of the seventeenth century Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, Mass., admitted anyone who would publicly confess the covenant of the parish. Stoddard believed that the communion was a "means of grace" which God might use to convert people, and thus it should not be restricted to visible saints. Stoddardean churches were thus virtually Church of England, holding a Calvinist view of election, but admitting anyone not scandalous in life or doctrine to full membership in the church. Johnathan Edwards, grandson of Stoddard, rejected the Halfway covenant and with the "New Lights" took New England Congregationalism back to its original practice.

In 1751 Backus was convinced that his own infant baptism was invalid and submitted to baptism by immersion. At first he refused to administer infant baptism himself although he allowed members to have their children baptized by other elders. For the next five years his church was split on the

issue, like many other Separate churches in New England. The Separate Baptists, as Backus' church became, decided upon closed-communication and were eventually known simply as Baptists.

In the Congregational states of Massachusetts and Connecticut, Baptists, Quakers and Anglicans were exempted taxation for the support of established Congregational churches after 1731. It was now a point at law whether Separate Baptists were the same as Old Baptists, or were merely schismatics and tax dodgers. The rapid growth of Separate Baptists meant that in some parishes there would not be enough taxes to support the Standing churches. The authorities therefore refused to grant tax exemption to Separate Baptists. The overthrow of this policy was a major objective of Backus.

The matter was further confused by Backus' conviction that the Old Baptists were in fact not Baptists because they had an Arminian theology. For their part, Old Baptists saw the Separate Baptists as an offshoot of the oppressive Standing churches. Backus, a strict Calvinist, felt he could have no fellowship with the Old Baptists. The authorities decreed that if Separate Baptists were not in fellowship with Old Baptists, then they would not be exempt from taxation for the Standing churches.

Backus began in 1756 to evangelise among the Old Baptists, published many tracts, and itinerated many thousands of miles to convince the Old Baptists of the rightness of "New Light" Calvinism. In New England in 1740 there were only 31 Baptist churches of any kind; by 1777 there were 119 closed-communication, Calvinist Baptist churches; and by 1795 there were 325. The *Diary* describes the colossal amount of time and energy which Backus devoted to the growth of the Baptist denomination in the eighteenth century - he was a veritable Whitfield.

It was from 1760 that Backus received help from the Philadelphia Baptist Association, in founding the Warren Baptist Association in 1767. The Association was to advance the union of Baptists, strengthen Calvinism and the practice of believers' baptism, and to assist Baptists in becoming "important in the eye of the civil power", as James Manning put it.

It was the Grievance Committee of the Warren Association which heard and recorded complaints of persecution by the civil authorities, took court action on behalf of the aggrieved, and petitioned the New England legislature for religious equality. Backus was an influential figure, through this committee, on national affairs.

After 1768 the numbers of Baptists increased, and the State authorities demanded of Baptists a certificate which established they were bona fide Baptists. In 1773 the Warren Association urged ministers not to submit certificates since these breached the rightful separation of church and state: a step which led Baptists to jettison the idea of religious toleration for that of religious liberty. *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty* (1773) was published by Backus and is a key document in the history of the American struggle for religious liberty.

At the First Continental Congress in 1774 Backus was part of a delegation from the Warren Association which appealed for help in the struggle against religious oppression in New England. Baptists and Congregationalists were American nationalists, who feared the political and economic encroachments by Parliament on Colonial self-government. Following the battles at Lexington and Concord in 1775 Backus openly proclaimed the patriotic cause from his pulpit. Both his sons, as most Baptists in America, fought in the Revolution on the nationalist side. Backus was the "elder statesman" when he was elected a delegate to the convention in Boston in 1790 which ratified the United States Constitution.

The text of the *Diary* comprises Backus's major autobiographical manuscripts, supplemented by the records he kept for the Middleborough First Baptist Church. The central manuscripts are the thirteen surviving volumes of Backus's diary books from 1741-1806, of which the volume July 1759-July 1763 is missing.

When Backus made a trip away from home he would leave his diary book at home, and take four to eight sheets of paper folded into a booklet, in which he would detail the events of his journey. Sixty such "travel journals" survive, and being more spontaneous and detailed than his diary summaries, are used in the text.

Another component of the *Diary* is the forty page manuscript describing his activities from December 1747 to May 1748, based on notes made before his first diary book. The fourth source is the records of the Middleborough First Baptist Church from July 1759 to July 1763, which covers the period of the missing diary book.

In addition Backus left a rich accumulation of other materials, including autobiographical writings, letters, memoranda, lists, sermons, notes on meetings and councils, as well as eight hundred items which relate to his History of the New England Baptists. Twenty-six such items appear as indices in the *Diary*.

The reviewer is grateful to the Dr Williams's Library for an extended loan of these three volumes, and they are available at the Library.

ROGER HAYDEN

*McMaster University: Volume 2, The Early Years in Hamilton 1930-1957* by Charles M. Johnston. University of Toronto Press. 1981. pp.330. \$25.00.

The second volume of the history of McMaster University tells the story of the development of a remarkable Baptist enterprise in higher education from the move from Toronto to Hamilton in 1930 until the transfer of control twenty seven years later from the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec to an independent board of governors backed by public funds. It is a textbook case of the evolution of Christian involvement in education at all levels and has much to tell the discerning reader about the future of training for the ministry as well as the place of theology and Christian influence in higher education.

When Senator McMaster bequeathed his considerable fortune for the establishment of a Baptist University in 1887, those who took up the challenge could have had no idea where this would lead. The original idea was to found an institution for the education of Baptist ministers and lay people with a curriculum aimed at the highest academic standards, and the story of its foundation in Toronto and subsequent development was told in the first volume of Professor Johnston's exhaustive study.

When the board of governors under the leadership of Mr Albert Matthews, the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and Chancellor Whidden persuaded the Convention that the time had come to move McMaster from the centre of Toronto, where it was overshadowed by the expansion of a great provincial university, Hamilton was chosen as the most favourable location. It had no university of its own and was the natural centre for the whole of the Niagara peninsula. A splendid campus was available bordering the ravine which forms the eastern end of Lake Ontario, and the first buildings were erected on a wave of great enthusiasm and public support.

There were those who feared that the move to a new city with the expansion that might follow would lead to a diminution of Baptist influence and compromising the intentions of the founding fathers. The way in which these fears were realised, though to the ultimate benefit of a great university, is the story which Professor Johnston unfolds in this second volume. It culminates in the delicate and skillful negotiations conducted by Dr George Gilmour, appointed Howard Whidden's successor in 1941, to transfer control to an independent board capable of securing public funds for developing the wide range of disciplines necessary to a modern university. It had earlier become apparent that teaching and research in the natural sciences could not be sustained from denominational funds, and this had led to the founding of Hamilton College on the campus as an affiliated institution after the war. Now the inevitable break had to come, and even the most caustic critic of "the peculiar people called Baptists" would have to admit the statesmanship and far-sighted generosity of those who were so imaginatively represented by George Gilmour and those remarkable laymen like Carey Fox and C. P. Fell who were associated with him. It is a chapter in Canadian educational history of which Baptists may justly be proud.

What was to happen to the old Divinity School and the concern of the original founders, shared no less by George Gilmour and his friends, for the preservation of a Christian institution of higher learning? The answer was found in transferring part of the university assets to a new board responsible to the Convention for building and maintaining a divinity college at the centre of the campus. In addition, the teaching staff was to become the core of a faculty of theology for the university responsible not only for the training of Baptist ministers, but pursuing theological research which would permeate and influence the whole life of the campus. Gilmour foresaw the possibility of the faculty becoming the centre of a federation of theological colleges, much after the pattern obtaining at McGill and Toronto.

This did not work out as Gilmour had thought. The splendid new Divinity College was built, but it was not joined by other institutions of a similar kind. Instead in 1959 I was invited "to move across the corridor" and start a department of religion in the faculty of Arts and Science which rapidly expanded and ultimately by the mid-seventies had twenty six teaching members, including five full professors with a substantial graduate programme. But that is part of the next chapter in the story which it is hoped Professor Johnston will write.

However, the events which form the climax of the present volume and their immediate aftermath do raise questions about the desirability of a denominational theological college in the future training of the ministry, about the place of Christian theology in relation to the study of religion in a modern university, and about the way in which Christian influence is made to permeate the whole of academic life. They are the sort of questions which George Gilmour would have been prepared to ask if he had lived to do so. He is the central figure in the story, the brilliant and imaginative heir to the founding fathers. He and they were always ready to venture into a new and unpredictable future. For that they will take an honoured place in Baptist history.

PAUL ROWNTREE CLIFFORD

### T. H. ROBINSON (1881-1964)

This year sees the centenary of the birth of the distinguished Baptist Old Testament scholar Theodore Henry Robinson, 9th August 1881. We hope to publish in the next issue an appreciation and assessment of Robinson's work and continuing influence, by Professor T. Pierce Matheny.