

# The BAPTIST QUARTERLY

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## CONTENTS

EDITORIAL . . . . .	49
SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF SERVICE . . . . . Thornton Elwyn	52
VICTORIAN SUNDAY SCHOOLS IN BIRMINGHAM . . . Christopher James	57
THE WORK OF THE HERTFORDSHIRE BAPTIST UNION . . . David Watts	67
GOD AND HISTORY . . . . . Paul S. Fiddes	74
IN THE STUDY . . . . . Neville Clark	91
NEW PUBLICATIONS . . . . .	51,66
ARCHIVES . . . . .	90,98
REVIEW . . . . .	99

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## EDITORIAL

This year the Baptist Historical Society celebrates its seventy-fifth anniversary. It might seem to be the ultimate in introspection for a body devoted to historical study to be concerned with its own history. But it would not be proper for the occasion to pass without some note being taken, and to recognize the debt we owe today to the many members and officers of the Society who have given so much of their ability, time and energy over the years. In this issue, therefore, our present Treasurer, Thornton Elwyn, provides us with a very useful and interesting summary article on the membership, finances and activities of the Society up till now. It is safe to conclude that the Society today reflects a healthy and flourishing interest by Baptists in their history, both in the United Kingdom and overseas. Of course the most appropriate way in which each of us could celebrate the anniversary, would be to commend membership of the Society to others, both from

the point of view of the benefits which it brings in terms of one's own historical education, and from the point of view of supporting the service to the denomination which the Society provides.

Other articles in this issue show that the long-standing concerns of the Society's journal are being maintained in the contemporary context. The *Quarterly* has always aimed to be catholic in a number of ways, not least in being open to contributors who have a serious interest in Baptist history and related fields, whether or not they regard themselves as professional historians. So David Watts, by profession a town-planner, has drawn together much useful and highly thought-provoking material on the Hertfordshire Baptists' attempts at rural mission over the past century. The article by Christopher James on Victorian Sunday Schools in Birmingham is illustrative of what in recent years has been an increasingly important source of material for the *Quarterly* - the post-graduate thesis. Nonconformist history is now regarded as a very rich seam to mine at this level and the *Quarterly* is seen as a natural outlet for such research into the wider world. In this, we are not simply serving the interests of academic attainment. We are reaping the harvest sown in earlier years by those who laboured to make our stream of church history - including local history - a subject of serious attention, and who would rejoice to see that it is now of such recognized academic standing.

It was a matter of considered wisdom by our forbears in the Society when they decided in 1922 to replace the *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* by the *Baptist Quarterly*. This was not a change in name only. In the first editorial of the new journal, H. Wheeler Robinson asserted that the Society needed a broader basis than the purely historical, if it was to continue its most useful labours. A real interest in the past was to be combined with an intelligent grasp of the life of today. Speaking of the continuing need to study the record of our denominational tradition, he nevertheless continued: "But deeper down than our denominational kinship with these men and women of former days, there is the common human nature that underlies all history, and is the final justification for its study". The *Quarterly* has therefore always sought to be an organ of informed theological comment amongst Baptists, both on perennial themes and more immediate contemporary issues.

In this issue, as well as Neville Clark's regular review article, the theological contribution is a major article by Dr Paul Fiddes, "God and History". Not only is the theme obviously appropriate alongside articles which are themselves historical, but the theme is one which, more than any other, has been at the crux of modern theological debate. It is interesting to note how the perspective has shifted over the past thirty years or so, however. In the immediate post-war period, German existentialist interpretation joined in on what had already been a British discussion on the relation between "fact" and "interpretation". The weight of discussion

centred on how a particular past event could be said to be an "act of God" for us. Locked into such questions was the matter of how God "acts" at all in the world, apart from the present experience of faith. Today, the concept of God's activity in the world has taken on a new lease of life, partly because newer metaphysics have arrived on the scene (such as process thought), partly because there has been a recovery of such theological themes as promise and fulfilment, and partly also because for many people the contemporary demand to be involved in the causes of peace and justice requires an understanding of God's present activity.

Quite inadvertently but wholly appropriately, the seventy-fifth anniversary also sees this month the appearance of three important publications, for two of which the Society is directly responsible, and closely concerned with the third. In the first place, there is the first volume in the new history of English Baptists, by Dr Barrie White, dealing with the seventeenth century. Second, there is the volume of essays, "Baptists in the Twentieth Century", consisting of the papers given at the society's summer school last year. Thirdly, this month also sees the publication of the biography of Dr Ernest Payne, by Dr Morris West. Notes on these publications will be found elsewhere in this issue, and it is most heartening to be able to report on these latest developments of Baptist historiography. Full reviews of these works will, of course, appear in the *Quarterly* before long.

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### BIOGRAPHY OF DR ERNEST PAYNE

This month sees the publication by Lutterworth Press of *To be a Pilgrim: a memoir of Ernest A. Payne*, by Dr W. M. S. West, Vice-President of the Baptist Historical Society and Principal of Bristol Baptist College. The price is £4-95.

Members of the Society will not need any persuading of the interest and significance of the book. The publishers state: "A shy man who was always surrounded by people. A true Baptist whose greatest contribution was in the wider ecumenical movement. A globe-trotter who hated the chores of travelling. An historian who was very much involved in the present and planning for the future. An academic who worked as an ecclesiastical politician. Perhaps it was the unusual merging of opposites which made him the special person that he was, and this *Memoir* brings out the many interests that he had and the many facets of his character".