

The Southern Baptist Historical Society.

ONE of the encouraging features of Baptist life during the past generation has been the growth throughout the world of interest in our history. To this the existence of the Baptist World Alliance has contributed in no small degree. Articles which it has collected and circulated have appeared in various languages and in many lands. Several have found their way into the *Baptist Quarterly*, and collections have been issued in book form in Canada and elsewhere. The Alliance continually seeks to foster interest in historical questions, and at the Atlanta Congress arranged a conference "on the preservation of Baptist history," in which Swedish, German, Polish, American (including Negro), and British Baptist speakers participated, and from which came valuable suggestions for the future action of the Alliance and the Historical Societies. Apart from the American Baptist Historical Society and our own, the widest systematic work yet accomplished has been that of the German and Swedish Baptists, some of whose books will in the future be regarded as classics. I look forward with great hope to the day when, free of the pressure of war conditions, our Baptist ecumenical contacts shall be renewed and continuous co-operation become possible. We need a comprehensive history of the Baptist communion.

My present purpose is especially to call attention to one of the youngest organisations for historical study. It is in the nature of the case certain to become one of the most important, since it is fathered by the largest body of Baptists in the world—the Southern Baptist Convention, with a church membership of approximately five millions. It has also behind it the largest ministerial training institution of any Evangelical communion—the Seminary at Louisville, Kentucky.

The Southern Baptist Historical Society was founded in May, 1938, as an agency for stimulating interest in and facilitating the study of Baptist history. It "seeks to locate, assemble, preserve, classify, catalogue, make available, publish, and otherwise utilise the facts and materials of Baptist history, especially as these relate to the churches and denomination in the South." Its materials are preserved and made accessible in the remarkable fire-proof library of the Southern Baptist Seminary, as a separate collection.

I quote (with some abbreviation) a statement issued by Dr. J. E. Dillard expounding the reasons for the founding of the new society :

1. "Baptists have a history; our people ought to know it. Baptists have not always been and are not now history-conscious. They have been more interested in making history than in recording it. Baptists have made some very definite contributions to Christian civilisation; our people ought to know them, proclaim them, and perpetuate them.

Dr. E. Y. Mullins listed five major contributions :

- i. Baptists have been the only adequate interpreters of the Reformation. ii. Baptists have furnished to American civilisation the most spiritual interpretation of Christianity the world has seen. iii. Baptists have exhibited to American civilisation the most striking example of denominational unity. iv. Baptists gave to America the complete idea of liberty. v. Baptists have furnished the spiritual analogues of our entire political system.
2. Southern Baptists are making history now, and the records ought to be assembled and preserved. We have Baptist heroes and heroines, Baptist churches and institutions, Baptist programmes and plans, Baptist efforts and victories that should enhearten and challenge.
3. Southern Baptists expect to celebrate one hundred years of organised Christian service in 1945, the Centennial of the organisation of the Convention. There should be a great Baptist history ready by that time."

The President is Professor W. O. Carver, of the Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, and the Secretary, Dr. H. I. Hester, of Liberty, Missouri.

J. H. RUSHBROOKE.