THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

incorporating the Transactions of the BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDITORIAL

THE oldest Christian hymn-book in continuous use is the *Ausbund*. This is used by the Old Amish Mennonites in the U.S.A., who still retain the German language and lead a life of strict simplicity. First printed in America in 1742, it is a book of 895 pages, containing 140 hymns, the Confession of Faith of Thomas von Imbroich (executed in Cologne in 1558), an account of Anabaptist sufferings in Zürich between 1635 and 1645, and an appendix of six further songs. The story of this remarkable hymnal has been told by Dr. Ernest A. Payne in a lecture delivered to the Congregational Historical Society and published in its *Transactions*, an off-print of which we have received by the kindness of the author.

About fifty hymns composed by Hans Betz and Michael Schneider and used by a group of Anabaptists imprisoned in Passeau Castle toward the middle of the sixteenth century form the nucleus of this book. Somehow smuggled out of the castle and then distributed among widely dispersed Anabaptist groups, these hymns were later supplemented by others. The first known printed collection appeared in 1564. Then in 1583 a collection of 130 hymns and songs were printed, and the *Ausbund* of the little Old Amish congregations in America today is substantially this 1583 book. Dr. Payne shows that there is greater variety in the book than might be supposed from T. M. Lindsay's reference to its martyr spirit in his *History of the Reformation*. It contains some metrical psalms and there is a lengthy version of the Apostles' Creed, which is parti-

cularly interesting and significant in view of the accusations of heresy which have sometimes been levelled at the Anabaptists. A hymn on the Lord's Supper goes further than the simple memorialism which has been attributed to them. Hymns for feet-washing rites, weddings and funerals are also to be found, while there is a long narrative poem telling of the journey made from Salonica to Moravia by representatives of Anabaptist groups in Greece. Obviously this hymnal of a persecuted and courageous people who believed that one day their faith would be vindicated merits far greater attention than it has hitherto received.

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While in some respects Baptists have a great tradition in the realm of hymnody we cannot claim as ours more than a very few hymns either of distinction or popularity. It now seems, however, that we may add to the number one hymn which is in its way a classic and which has hitherto, even in our own hymnals, been ascribed elsewhere. We refer to *We sing the praise of Him who died.* In an old biography of Samuel Medley (1738-1799) the writer of these notes recently found a version of this hymn which came from Medley's pen and was used by his Baptist congregation in Liverpool. In all the hymn-books, however, including the *Revised Baptist Church Hymnal,* this well-known hymn appears over the name of Thomas Kelly (1769-1854). Kelly is known to have adapted and sometimes re-written other men's hymns before including them in his own published collection. This he evidently did with *We sing the praise of Him who died.* There appears to be no doubt that the original version of this was composed by Medley and, unless clear evidence to the contrary turns up, the compilers of the forthcoming new Baptist hymnal should, therefore, claim this hymn for Medley and the Baptists.

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At a meeting in London in October the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries came formally into existence. Its aims are " to promote the interests of libraries, scholars and librarians " in the fields of theology and philosophy. Its foundation membership ranges from large academic libraries to modest society libraries, as well as a number of individuals, and no doubt its numbers will grow as its usefulness becomes increasingly clear. It hopes to help members by the provision and interchange of information and by undertaking, among other things, projects of bibliographical value. A bulletin will be issued three times a year, and will be sent free to all members of the Association. Non-members will be able to subscribe to it. The officers are : Chairman : Rev. Roger Thomas (Dr. Williams's Library); Hon. Sec.-Treas. : Miss J. Ferrier (c/o Church Missionary Society Library, 6, Salisbury Square, London, E.C.4).