THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

Seymour James Price

"... let him be the servant of all."

By the sudden death on May 29th, 1959, of Mr. Seymour J. Price, of Eastbourne, the Baptist Historical Society loses one who had been an enthusiastic and prominent supporter of its work for more than thirty years and its President since 1948. Mr. Price became a member of the Society in 1922. In 1928, following the publication of his *Popular History of the Baptist Building Fund*, he was elected Vice-President, Dr. H. Wheeler Robinson being then President and Dr. W. T. Whitley, Secretary. Seven years later, Mr. Price succeeded Dr. Whitley as Secretary and as editor of the *Baptist Quarterly*. In 1946, after the death of Dr. Robinson, a number of changes took place in the direction of the Society and Mr. Price, on giving up the secretaryship, was again appointed Vice-President. In 1948, on the death of Dr. Whitley, he was made President.

Such a recital of the bare facts regarding his official connection with the Historical Society gives little indication of the extent or nature of his services either to it or to the Baptist denomination, nor of the qualities of the man himself. Mr. Price became one of the best known Baptist laymen of his generation, one of the ablest, one of the most devoted, one of the most trusted. By an unusual combination of gifts and a readiness to concern himself with many unspectacular but necessary tasks, he made a unique place for

himself and was for two decades a key figure for the smooth administration of a score of denominational enterprises.

Born at Cirencester in Gloucestershire on August 31st, 1886, Seymour Price was brought to London as a boy. His parents' first association was with the Baptist church in Newton Avenue, Acton. He used frequently to recall how, as a youth of eighteen, he acted as a steward at the meetings in the Exeter Hall at which the Baptist World Alliance was concerned. Shortly afterwards, he joined the Church Road Baptist Church, drawn there by the preaching of the Rev. W. A. Davis, minister from 1885-1912. At the relatively early age of twenty-three, Mr. Price was elected to the diaconate at Church Road. The ministries of Dr. E. J. Tongue (1913-1920) and Dr. F. Townley Lord (1920-26) proved of decisive importance in the encouragement and development of his interests and powers. With Dr. Lord in particular, he formed a close and lasting friendship, which helped to introduce him to denominational service in the London Baptist Association, the Historical Society and the committee of Regent's Park College. In these circles he met and found inspiriation through acquaintance with leaders like the Rev. John Bradford and Dr. J. W. Ewing, with laymen of the calibre of Arthur Newton, Francis Blight and Ernest Wood, and with scholars like Dr. Wheeler Robinson and Dr. Whitley. To this varied and stimulating company the younger man was soon making his own distinctive contribution.

His business as an insurance broker prospered. The help given him in this business by one of his sisters enabled him to spend considerable time on his church and denominational activities. The study and presentation of Baptist history became one of his major concerns. His earliest contribution to the *Baptist Quarterly* was an article in 1925 on "The Office of Church Secretary." It was followed by a series on the Building Fund (later expanded into his book on the subject). Then came a careful study of the first Minute Book of the Baptist Union, next a number of articles based on the early records of the Gill-Rippon-Spurgeon church. "Laymen and Reunion", which appeared in 1931, was a carefully weighed contribution to the church unity discussions of the period and revealed both his sturdy lay standpoint and the deep respect he felt for the separated ministry. The year he became secretary of the Historical Society, Mr. Price published *Upton, the Story of One Hundred and Fifty Years,* one of the best and most readable of local church histories. He quickly succeeded in enlarging the appeal of the *Quarterly,* and in the years prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, arranged at the time of the Annual Assembly a series of much appreciated historical excursions.

By then Mr. Price's work for the L.B.A. and the London Property Board had made him the right-hand man of the London

Superintendents, S. G. Morris and Henry Cook. He took an important part in the vital decisions involved in moving Regent's Park College from London to Oxford. He added to his responsibilities the treasurership of the Particular Baptist Fund, a post which gave him special satisfaction and for which his historical knowledge and business ability well fitted him.

But his motto might well have been 'Nihil baptisticum alienum mihi puto". Elected to the General Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1939, he was soon appointed treasurer of its ter-jubilee fund and chairman of the General Committee (1941-42). He had earlier undertaken a mission to Jamaica of special difficulty with the Rev. Thomas Powell as his companion. There were many who hoped that Mr. Price might have become Home Secretary of the Society in succession to the Rev. B. Grey Griffith. Instead, he was persuaded to withdraw from his own business and become General Manager of the Baptist Insurance Company, a post he held until his retirement in 1957. During the last year of the war (1944-45) he served as President of the Baptist Union, and in 1946 succeeded the Rev. P. T. Thomson as chairman of the Ministerial Recognition Committee, a task demanding a rare combination of administrative skill, impartiality and personal sympathy and one to which he gave close attention to the end of his life.

His business standing and acumen had gained him a place among the directors of the Temperance Permanent Building Society and this in turn led to two further important volumes, which will remain his literary monument: *From Queen to Queen,* 1854-1954, the centenary story of the Temperance Building Society, and *Building Societies: Their Origin and History,* 1958, to which the Duke of Devonshire contributed an appreciative preface. Much detailed research in unfamiliar places lay behind both these books.

To these many and varied activities and responsibilities, Mr. Price added the chairmanship of the Creed Trust, the Dr. John Ward Trust and the Joseph Davis Charity. To whatever he undertook he brought the same clear mind, sound judgment, mastery of detail and unfailing conscientousness. His carefully prepared reports, his neat handwriting and clearly formed figures, were indicative of the man. His wide knowledge of men and affairs and his judicious approach to complicated issues quickly inspired confidence. The high standards he expected of others he applied to himself. His devotion to duty led him to deliver his Presidential Address to the Baptist Union only a day or so after the death of his wife. When, on his re-marriage, he moved to Eastbourne, his long and deep attachment to Church Road, Acton, made it difficult for him to settle elsewhere.

The secretary and business man, the deacon and church officer, the historian and denominational leader were singularly blended

in one who was ever loyal to the heroes of his youth, to his colleagues and to many younger than himself. The Baptist denomination will long have reason to remember with gratitude the name of Seymour Price. To some he may have appeared reserved, his very efficiency and meticulousness carrying with them a touch of severity. But others can tell of his love of the Swiss mountains, of cricket and of music. He left himself relatively little time for relaxation, however, choosing to live his life at full stretch, not unmindful of the fact that the end might come, as it had to his father and his sister, suddenly. The ideal that inspired him is set forth in his earliest article in the *Baptist Quarterly*.

"The secretary's office is one that brings with it many trials and difficulties, but the joys and privileges of service far outweigh them. The conscientious secretary will be well aware of the danger that, amid all the details of organisation, his own inner life and spirit may not be preserved, but he will seek never to lose the vision of the One who inspires all his service and who said 'He that would be great among you, let him be the servant of all'."

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The above tribute was written for us by Dr. Payne who shared with Mr. Price in so much of the work of the Historical Society.

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Mr. Price's final service to the Historical Society was to chair the Annual Meeting held on Monday, 27th April. This was well attended, and although again limited in time by the length of the afternoon session of the Assembly, it gave an opportunity for a useful discussion of the Society's future. We shall hope to write more of this in the next issue, by which time we anticipate that the Officers will have met to discuss, not only matters arising from the Annual Meeting, but also the position resulting from the death of Mr. Price.

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We should perhaps draw the attention of our readers to the review in this current issue of the new book *Christian Baptism*, edited by A. Gilmore. This is an attempt, from the Baptist standpoint, to make a scholarly contribution to the present discussion on baptism. In view of the importance of the book to Baptists we give rather more space than usual to the review. The fact that both the Editor and the Review Editor have contributed to the book in question is purely coincidental!