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incorporating the Transactions of the
BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EDITORIAL

IN these days of ter-centenaries and ter-jubilees it is perhaps somewhat odd to refer to a twenty-first anniversary, particularly in the Editorial of a journal of an Historical Society. But the importance of something cannot be judged solely on how old it is, nor indeed is history but the remembrance of people and societies of bygone days. It is possible to see that certain events of recent days are going to the making of Baptist history and the fuller development of Baptist denominational life.

There have now been twenty-one meetings of the College Principals' Conference. To this conference come not only the Principals of our Baptist Colleges but also the tutors and, when possible, representatives of the Baptist Union and of the Baptist Missionary Society. Before we go on to comment on the significance of this event it may be as well to set down the outlines of the development of this important conference since its inception in 1942.

There was, at that time, a denominational body known as the United Collegiate Board which was concerned with College affairs. Its meetings were, however, infrequent and not well-attended and in view of a number of new problems regarding Ministerial training which were arising as a result of the war, and also of a recently-issued Report of a Polity Commission, the then secretary of the

Baptist Union, Rev. M. E. Aubrey, thought it would be useful if the Principals of the British Baptist Colleges could meet and discuss matters together. The suggestion was welcomed and the first meeting was held on January 7-8th, 1943. The Principals of the eight Colleges in England, Scotland and Wales all attended. By the wish of the Conference the Revs. M. E. Aubrey and P. T. Thomson (Chairman of the Ministerial Recognition Committee) were also present together with Dr. Sidney Cave (Principal of New College, London), who attended for a short time for consultation in connection with an inter-denominational plan for giving religious instruction to men in the Forces.

At a further meeting later the same year at Regent's Park College, Oxford, Mr. Aubrey was asked to canvass the possibility of convening a Conference of the Principals of the Free Church Theological Colleges. Such a Conference took place at Oxford in July, 1945, and it led to one or two others of a similar kind later on. But, after a short time, these meetings were abandoned for lack of support. The Conference of the Baptist College Principals, on the other hand, showed an encouraging vitality, and at its fifth meeting was enlarged by the inclusion of the members of the tutorial staffs of the various Colleges. On that occasion, the Conference was asked by a committee of the United Collegiate Board to consider the functions of the Board. The outcome was a recommendation to the effect that a new body should be set up which should be representative of all aspects of Baptist life, and which, by co-ordinating and advising upon the training of Baptist laymen and ministers, would render the continuance of the United Collegiate Board unnecessary. This recommendation was accepted and, in due course, the "Joint Advisory Council for Ministerial and Lay Training" was formed. But the new body proved to be less effective than the one already in existence, and it did not long survive. Meanwhile, the Principal's Conference in its enlarged form continued to demonstrate its usefulness, and has met regularly, usually in the Spring, at Oxford.

This is but a brief outline of the development of the Principal's Conference and much more could be written about its achievements. That it has amply justified its existence there can be no doubt at all. The Principal Emeritus of Regent's Park College, the Rev. R. L. Child (to whom we are indebted for much information on this subject) has, in a communication to the Editor, pin-pointed two substantial achievements. He writes: "The Conference has developed a tradition of frank and friendly discussion between the Staffs of the various colleges which has greatly facilitated their work, especially in dealing with matters of common interest and concern. And the Conference has brought together over the years a fund of information and experience regarding ministerial training

which is now at the service of the Denomination when required, and which is of particular value at the present time when Christian policy in Education of all kinds is being shaped to new ends."

There is one further point. There are many people who think of our Colleges solely as independent units each functioning alone with little reference to the others. The twenty-first meeting of the Principal's Conference reminds us that this is just not so and has not been so for many years. Even before the initiating of the Conference, there was in existence an arrangement by which men of Bristol Baptist College could go on to Regent's Park after completing their course at Bristol. This scheme has, over the years, developed to include students from the other Colleges also. So one could go on. But out of all this comes the inescapable fact that the Colleges are growing closer to each other in understanding and co-operation and that, perhaps just as significant, they are feeling part of the movement together of the different interests in Baptist denominational life within the life of the whole Baptist community. We await, with great interest, future developments of the relationship both of the Colleges to each other and of them all to the denomination.

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We regret the delay in producing the index for Volume XVIII. We hope to include it with the July number.

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