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EDITORIAL

The two historical articles in this issue deal in detail with radical forms of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, and the hostility and persecution which they evoked from the authorities of the time. We have remarked before on the newly flowing tide of interest in the Anabaptists of the continent, and those who were present at the Society's Annual Meeting in April last year were richly rewarded by Dr Alan Kreider's paper on the experience and theology of martyrdom of the Dutch Anabaptists. We have much pleasure now in publishing his paper in full. It is worth reminding readers - as Dr Kreider himself does in his notes - of the paper by Dr Ian Sellars which appeared in this journal in July 1981, "Edwardians, Anabaptists and the Problem of Baptist Origins". There, it was argued that British and American Baptists have responded more positively to the Anabaptists, and have been much less embarrassed by the possibility of some degree of historical relationship with them, when they have seen themselves as more radically "nonconformist" in religious and social matters. Conversely, when they have wished to present themselves as safe and respectable friends of conventional religion and society, any parallel or kinship with the Anabaptists has been eschewed. Today, some observers

may judge our numbers to include both friends and foes of convention. Be that as it may, Dr Kreider's concluding section - which time did not permit him to more than hint at in the lecture itself - issues a challenge to contemporary Christians to face as seriously as did the sixteenth-century radicals the "cross-bearing" nature of discipleship. Dr Kreider argues a very strong case indeed for including the radical forbears of his Mennonite tradition in our contemporary debates concerning the social and political witness of Christianity.

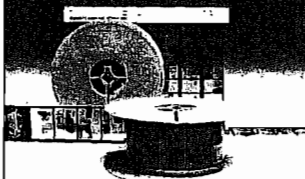
Much less well-known, but more active nearer at home, are the so-called Familists of Elizabethan times, and we are grateful to Dr J. W. Martin for bringing to the surface not just the sect itself, but the nature of the response, generated by fear and suspicion - and not a little ignorance - on the part of the authorities and many contemporaries. This serves as a warning to the historian against overlooking the marked differences between the various separatist groups and sects; it also provides further food for thought on society's response to those who are perceived as aliens in the midst.

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