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The Early Years of the Baptist Union.

III

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Annual Meeting²⁵ of the General Union, held at Eagle Street Meeting June [22nd,] 1815. [at eight a.m.]

Dr. Ryland²⁶ in the Chair. Present the following Pastors.

[The names of forty-five occupy the page. Only the new names are mentioned below.]

| | | |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Russel Broughton | [Thomas] Blundell | North'ton |
| John Kingsford | Batterseafields | John Coles |
| Wm. Anderson | Dunstable | [George] Francis |
| Wm. Weare | Ipswich | [Robert] Humphrey |
| James Hoby | London | [B.] Crowest |
| John Hall | Kettering | Thos. Thompson |
| | | Poplar |
| | | Colchester |
| | | Stokegomer |
| | | [Billericay] |
| | | Newcastle |

[pages 42 and 43 are blank. Apparently Ivimey turned over two pages in error.]

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Ministers²⁷

Opie Smith, Shoveller, Dawson, J. B. Shenston,

Students

Shoveller Junr Caleb Birt.²⁸

Brother Upton engaged in prayer.

²⁵ This meeting was summoned by a letter "To the Churches of the Particular Baptist Denomination in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland" signed by the three Secretaries, and published in the *Baptist Magazine*, March, 1815. The writers express a "pleasing persuasion that the desire for the annual meeting has not diminished, and that the reasons for holding it are annually increasing." They remind the churches that "the expense attending a journey to London, which would be burdensome to an individual, may be easily defrayed by a united Assembly." They also find "it necessary to repeat" the request of the preceding year for a collection for one of the Baptist Societies.

²⁶ Rippon was not present.

²⁷ This designation "Ministers" presumably should be "Messengers." Opie Smith was a Bath layman and benefactor of churches in Cornwall. Shoveller may be the same as the previously mentioned John Shoveller of Newport, Isle of Wight. Dawson must not be confused with Joseph Dawson of Staines, who is already mentioned in the forty-five pastors. In the vicissitudes of his migratory career, J. B. Shenston was now for a time a messenger from Devonshire Square.

²⁸ Birt was a Bristol student. In 1836 he became President of the Union.

It having appeared from the statements of several brethren from the country that the Annual Meetings of the denomination in London have proved highly advantagous, Resolved that these meetings be continued and that in future this Society be designated "The General Meeting of the Particular (or Calvinistic[]) Baptist Denomination to be held annually in London.

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2nd. That it would be highly gratifying to the Country Members of the Society, if our London Brethren would prepare a general account of the state of religion in the Churches in the metropolis, & its vicinity, by the next Meeting.

3rd. That the very cordial thanks of this meeting, be presented to Brethren Hinton & Birt, for their appropriate Sermons preached yesterday in aid of the Missions in India; & that they be requested to furnish a compendium, for the Magazine.

4th. That the most cordial thanks of this meeting be presented to the Trustees & managers of the Chapels, belonging to the late Countess of Huntingdon, for the affectionate & respectful manner, in which they have accommodated the Subscribers & friends to the Baptist Missionary Society, with the use of their commodious Chapels for the Missionary Sermons, & for the facilities granted for making collections, & receiving the names of annual Subscribers; & that this resolution be printed in the *Baptist Magazine*.

5th. That it appears desirable to this meeting that a place of Worship should be procured in London for the use of the denomination, sufficiently large to contain the congregation usually assembling at our annual meetings, & other purposes; & that the place be under the regulation

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of Trustees, two-thirds of whom, shall be selected from the Baptist Churches in London; & that this meeting recommends it to the Brethren in the metropolis, to select a Committee from among their Churches, to take into consideration the propriety of this measure, to arrange the plan, etc. for the erection of the building, & either prosecute the plan, or prepare it for the next meeting, as shall seem to them most proper.

6th. That the thanks of this meeting be presented to the Secretaries for their attention to the concerns of the Society during the past year, & that they be requested to continue their services during the ensuing year.

7th. That the respectful thanks of this meeting be given to the Deacons of the Church in Eagle Street, for the kind accommoda-

tions afforded the society by the use of their place of Worship, &c.²⁹

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General Meeting held at Elim Chapel Fetter Lane—June 20 1816 [at seven-thirty a.m.]

Revnd. Dr. Rippon in the Chair.

The business of the Meeting opened in prayer by Bro. Rogers of Eynesford

[The names and churches of thirty-nine pastors follow. The new names are mentioned below.]

| | | | |
|--------------|-------------|------------------|------------|
| Chas. Millam | Highgate | Mark Wilks | Norwich |
| James Pain | Ipswich | Alexander Wilson | Sunderland |
| Thomas Welsh | Newbury | Benjmn Godwin | Missendin |
| James Clark | Riggleswede | Thomas Morgan | Birmingham |
| | Wm Stephens | Manchester. | |

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Resolved that all the churches belonging to the denomination who can afford assistance, be requested through the medium of the Magazine, to make a collection on some day in the next year, for the purpose of erecting a larger place of worship, for the use of the Annual Meetings, and other purposes; but by no means shall it be used, so as to interfere with the regular services of the settled pastors on the Lord's Day.

That the following persons be a Committee for carrying into effect the above object, and that subscribers from the country be at liberty to attend the meetings of the Committee

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viz Bagster Senr, Burls, Cuzins and Hanson, and that Mr. Napier be the Treasurer.³⁰

| | | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|---|---|---|
| The Rev. Henry Dawson of Princes Risboro' | ... | ... | 1 | 1 | 0 | |
| Mr. Perkins Red Lion St. | ... | ... | ... | 1 | 1 | 0 |

²⁹ The *Baptist Magazine* adds: "The time allotted in the morning for this Meeting, being insufficient to do all the business, the society adjourned till the evening, and concluded it at Dr. Rippon's Vestry." Speaking of all the Anniversaries, the Magazine states: "The meetings, which were numerously attended, exhibited strong proof that a UNION OF HEART was felt by a greater number of our ministers, and persons of our different congregations, both in town and country, than have perhaps met together in London for a hundred and twenty years."

³⁰ William Burls has been referred to earlier. William Cozens and Joseph Hanson were well known in London Baptist life, but their churches have not been traced. William Napier at this time was a deacon at Eagle Street; later he transferred to Keppel Street where also he was a deacon. We know nothing more of this committee or of the expenditure of the two guineas.

The Ministers from differant counties gave very interesting statements of the state of religion in the differant counties of England and some ministers mentioned some things relating to the churches in London.³¹

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Meeting at Dr. Rippon's, Carter Lane, June 25 1817. [at eight a.m.]

Dr. Rippon in the Chair.

After prayer by Bro. Dyer of Reading, the brethren present gave some encouraging accounts of the state of religion in their differant churches in town and Country.

A letter was received recommending that a Loan Fund should be formed to assist in building and repairing of Meeting houses. As it was understood this letter was written by a respectable brother, John Penny Junr.³² the following resolution was adopted.

That the subject recommended in the said letter be referred to the consideration of a Committee consisting of Messrs. Barber, Penny, Napier and

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Marshall³³ with power to add to their number, & to take such steps as they may think proper to forward the object proposed.

Resolutions of thanks to the christian friends for the use of the Chapels of Sion Chapel and the Spa fields were passed. Brother Hutchings concluded in prayer.

The first minute book ends there. Pages 53-60 are missing, and the remaining pages blank. As an active, working organisation the Union ceased, the ideals with which it started were left unattained, and the programme of "objects and advantages" was unrealised. It is true that an annual gathering of ministers and messengers was held in June at Carter Lane and a nominal existence thus maintained, but this gathering was little more

³¹ The minutes are provokingly brief and vague, but we learn from the *Baptist Magazine* that "there had been a very considerable increase of members, that village preaching was flourishing and that a considerable number of Sunday Schools had been formed." It was resolved to obtain full particulars of all the churches for the meeting next year.

³² When the article on Dr. Newman's Loan Fund was published (*Baptist Quarterly*, III. 211) this minute book was not available. In its absence, it was surmised that possibly William Bowser was the writer of the letter. Prior to the publication of *A Popular History of the Baptist Building Fund*, the minute book was discovered, and the author was able to set out the facts of this Loan Fund on pages 88-90 of that volume.

³³ John Marshall was a deacon at Keppel Street.

than a friendly Conference on the state of the churches. The men of that day apparently were just as fond of Conferences which absorb valuable time and lead nowhere, as are some of their successors a century later. A contemporary writer informs us that this "attempt to form a general Union, on a variety of accounts, was found impracticable." Before passing in brief review the remaining years ending with 1832, it may be well to pause and enquire why the attempt was found impracticable. The first answer is that means of transport and correspondence were not only slow and difficult but also expensive. For example, Harrow-on-the-Hill is now a suburb of the City, hardly more than half an hour from the Baptist Church House. But in 1812 when Joseph Ivimey and his friends set out from Eagle Street (the site of the Baptist Church House) for the opening services of the new church, they made their way across the fields to Paddington, where, at seven-thirty in the morning, they embarked on a canal boat to Greenford Green, whence they tramped the two-mile-slope to the church. In those years, whatever the emergency, no one could travel or convey news faster than horses could travel, and the stage coach, while it was picturesque, was a somewhat expensive means of transport. Measured in terms of time and accessibility, therefore, country churches were far distant. Further, correspondence was slow, and so costly that it was a luxury to be indulged in only at long intervals, the average charge on inland letters being nearly ninepence. Napoleon's domination had been broken but recently, and heavy taxation inevitably followed the devastation of war. Small wonder that many of the churches found it beyond their means to have contact with the Union, much less to send their minister or a messenger to the London assembly.

Difficulty of transport and communication does not, however, furnish a complete answer, as, during the same years, the General Baptists of the New Connexion maintained a healthy association life. The Particular Baptists had not a like regard for federation. They held an intensely individualistic doctrine of the church. The local Bethel was a "garden wall'd around," with a keen sense of its own sufficiency and independency. It was "a law unto itself, fearful and resentful of outside interference." This often produced an unhealthy stagnation, in which the church was concerned more with its own sound doctrine than with the soundness of its methods and aims. An extract from J. H. Hinton enables us to appreciate the unfruitful nature of the soil in which Ivimey and the other pioneers sowed the seeds of the Union: "So far from producing kindred societies, or even increasing their own strength, there are in some churches marks of decay, and even a struggle for existence. In conjunc-

tion with this, however, let it be remembered that internal mischiefs have kept pace with the external, and enable us to assign a sufficient cause for them. Sometimes the introduction of false doctrine, Arianism here, and there antinomianism; sometimes the neglect of wholesome and necessary discipline, followed always by a declension of vital godliness, and often by the prevalence of flagrant immoralities; sometimes the disregard of divine ordinances, with the very inefficient occupation of the ministerial or pastoral office; and sometimes a spirit of disunion and mutual estrangement, fostered and embittered by angry debates respecting trifles and absurdities; by these various maladies have our churches been afflicted; and is it surprising that their strength has wasted, and their usefulness been impeded?"³⁴

One other answer may be advanced. It is questionable whether the basic ideal of the Union was big enough; in any case it is clear that the leaders did not realise all the implications of their proposals. The articles of 1811 and 1812 show that very largely their thoughts were back in the 1689 Convention. They failed to make any new application of truth to the special problems of their age, and to devise methods of giving organised expression to such application. Their churches were left in their rigid independency, with no inspiring conception of their common life, of their underlying bond of fellowship, of the challenge of their new day, or of the Union's potential service for the Kingdom. To quote Dr. Whitley: "The Union inherited only the outworn methods of the eighteenth century." In justice to the leaders it must be recognised that various societies, some quite recently formed, were doing much of the work to which the Union would naturally have applied its powers. It was emphatically a time of societies. Enthusiasts seeing a need banded themselves into a society to meet that need; others, likeminded, joined them, and so the organisation grew. It derived its support from the churches but it was independent of them. Thus, at the formation of the Union, the evangelisation of the homeland was the task of the Home Missionary Society, Stepney College trained men for the ministry, financial aid for country buildings was organised by the London Case Committee, poor ministers received grants from the Particular Baptist Fund, and the work of the Missionary Society was making great strides. Surely, facing the Union leaders was a brilliant opportunity to co-ordinate the societies and give increased stimulation to their activities. That, however, would have revolutionised the denominational machinery, and possibly history teaches that the genius of the denomination in the nineteenth century best found

³⁴ *A Review of the Congregational System, in Connection with a Department of its Local History*, by John Howard Hinton, A.M.

its expression through independent societies. Such societies exist to-day, independent both of the churches and the Union, and yet their existence is of vital importance to the churches and the Union. The present is an age of federation, and probably it will be one of the tasks of the statesmanship of this century to contrive that, amid the departmentalising of societies, the vigorous initiative and enthusiasm of the past shall not be lost.

But, meagre as were the results of those early days, the Union did not wholly fail. Ministers and churches were brought closer, problems were discussed and counsel given, and anniversary gatherings of many societies, both denominational and inter-denominational, were made more successful.

To pass to the few years before the reorganisation of 1832, the decision of the Missionary Society in October, 1819, to transfer its headquarters from Northampton to London, and to hold its twenty-eighth annual meeting in the metropolis in June, 1820, presented an opportunity for the better organisation of the Union and the formulation of a policy of advance, but vision was still lacking. The annual conference continued, but not until eleven years had passed was anything decisive done. The meeting on the 21st June, 1831, at Church Street, Blackfriars (now Upton, Lambeth), resolved: "That this meeting is deeply impressed with the necessity of some organised plan by which the state of the churches and the progress of the Gospel in connexion with the Denomination may be ascertained, and it does respectfully, but earnestly, entreat the London ministers to organise such a plan before another anniversary." At a general meeting of the Baptist Board on the 25th October, specially called for the purpose, the London ministers responded to this "respectful but earnest entreaty" by resolving that "it is eminently desirable that a list be yearly prepared by this body, exhibiting in a tabular form the state of our churches throughout the kingdom, with such information and observations as the state of these churches may supply," and they requested Joseph Belcher of the Chelsea Church "to open communications with the secretaries of our country Associations, and with other friends, either ministers or laymen, for the purpose of collecting such information as may be required for this end." Belcher took his task seriously and prepared a valuable report (published in extenso in the *Baptist Magazine*, July 1832) giving a general and detailed view of the denomination, county by county, over a period of forty years, denommencing with 1790. On the 21st June, 1832, this report was presented to the annual meeting, which, again held at Blackfriars, "was more numerously attended than for some years past." The report was well received: Joseph Belcher was requested to prepare another, under the direction of the Baptist

Board, for the annual meeting in 1833; a subscription was commenced to defray the expenses of correspondence; and Belcher was "requested to act as Secretary in all affairs connected with these meetings." From that time printed annual reports were issued, and the foundations of the Union more securely laid. Sixty-five years later, there was called to the Secretariat, John Howard Shakespeare, who, in T. R. Glover's fine words, "taught all Baptists to form larger ideals for their Church, to conceive of it as a great society, where differences of tradition should not outweigh the fact of a common faith, and where women should have their function as well as men; to realise it in its world-wide range and significance; and to live more consciously as members of one another." In doing so, he built on those early foundations the fine and enduring edifice that we know to-day.

SEYMOUR J. PRICE.