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The Down Grade Controversy: a Postscript

THE chapter on the Down Grade controversy of 1887-88 in my history of the Baptist Union (Carey Kingsgate Press, 1959) is based upon a more lengthy account, which I completed in 1954. A copy of this is deposited at the Baptist Church House and may be read on request. The circumstances which led me to the preparation of the earlier account of the most serious crisis in the history of the Union were as follows.

One of those who served on the committee which in 1950 nominated me for the post of General Secretary of the Baptist Union was Dr. P. W. Evans, the Principal of Spurgeon's College. I had known him and valued his friendship for some years. We had been together on the inter-church committee which considered Archbishop Fisher's Cambridge Sermon of 1946 and produced the report *Church Relations in England*. That Dr. Evans was one of those urging me to leave the staff of Regent's Park College and undertake the leadership of the Baptist Union weighed greatly with me. But, as I said to him, I felt I should be at a considerable disadvantage because I had virtually no direct contacts with the various agencies associated with the name of Spurgeon or with the large number of individuals who cherished his memory in an unusually warm and emotional manner. I had grown up in North London in Baptist circles with a different outlook and ethos. Dr. Evans assured me that I need not fear on this account. He and many others in the Spurgeon circle were anxious that I go to the Church House. He would himself be at my side as an ex-President of the Union and always willing to help and advise me. Sadly and unexpectedly, a few weeks before I took office in the spring of 1951, Dr. Evans died.

I decided I must try to understand better what had gone on in 1887-88, because I knew of the strong feelings that had been aroused among both Spurgeon's friends and his critics, and because I realised that I was likely to be involved with some who still had strong opinions about what had occurred sixty or more years earlier. I had witnessed the sharp reactions in 1932, when Dr. T. R. Glover put forward views of the Atonement which failed to satisfy the honoured pastor of Spurgeon's Tabernacle, the Rev. Tydeman Chilvers, and the even sharper reactions when, a little later, in an article in *The Times* Glover made some remarks about Spurgeon that were considered personally disparaging. As soon as I read and compared the accounts of the controversy in the biographies of Spurgeon by W. Y. Fullerton (1920) and J. C. Carlile (1933) and the references in Sir James Marchant's life of Dr. Clifford (1924), I realised that there were gaps and contradictions that needed examination.

When I had completed my account of events, which drew mainly on a careful examination of the religious press and of contemporary minutes, I sent it for criticism and comment to ten surviving ex-Presidents of the Baptist Union. At that time they included not only my predecessor as General Secretary, Dr. M. E. Aubrey (who confessed that he had once contemplated trying to put together the story), but also, of an older generation, Dr. Gilbert Laws, the Revs. Sydney Morris, B. Grey Griffith and Henry Bonser, and Mr. Seymour J. Price, a layman with a keen historical sense and an intimate knowledge of London Baptist life, who had at one time hoped to write a new life of Spurgeon. I sent my typescript also to Dr. H. G. Wood (son of J. R. Wood, of Upper Holloway), who had recently published a life of T. R. Glover, and to Mr. W. H. Ball, whose lengthy service at the Baptist Church House began while Samuel Harris Booth was still Secretary of the Union. The points they raised were singularly few, though one or two of them influenced the somewhat shorter version that forms chapter 7 of the history of the Union. The account I had put together was judged a factual and objective one, as fair as possible to all concerned. Principal R. L. Child commented: "Oddly enough, the reading of your script has altered my own attitude in a way I did not expect . . . hitherto I had been rather inclined to assume that Spurgeon was the more to blame. I am not at all sure I feel like that now."

All this took place twenty-five years ago. Since then a number of individual letters have come into my possession from various sources. Others have been shown to me, and from Mr. Seymour Price I received a number of papers bearing on the controversy, including some notes by Dr. W. T. Whitley. This journal would seem to be the place where I should draw attention to such additional information as has come my way and indicate any changes of emphasis I would now wish to make. What follows should be read in conjunction with the chapter in the history of the Union.

Not all the gaps have been filled nor all the questions answered. Indeed, I think it must now be accepted that certain matters will never be cleared up. Of the week in December 1916 when Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister, Professor Stephen Koss has written: "Despite a veritable outpouring of memoirs, biographies and monographs, discrepancies persist."¹ Of the much more recent Suez crisis of 1956, it is said by Sir Hugh Greene that in 1966 Lord Normanbrook (Secretary of the Cabinet, 1947-62) declared: "Damned good care has been taken to see that the whole truth never does emerge."² Without pressing either of these remarks too far in connection with the Down Grade Controversy, it seems likely that we should now accept the fact that all the details will never be known. At the same time, there were issues involved of a procedural as well as theological kind that give the whole sad episode continuing relevance.

In 1862 Spurgeon was elected to the committee that then directed the affairs of the Baptist Union, but he declined to serve. His exhausting commitments as a famous preacher were increasing; the Metro-

politan College had recently been opened; an orphanage and a colportage association were soon to be started. The business that occupied the committee of what was not then a very large concern can hardly have seemed to have much claim on his time. In 1866, however, his brother J. A. Spurgeon joined the committee, on which he served until his death early in 1899. J. A. Spurgeon played a crucial, if sometimes ambiguous, role in the comings and goings of 1887-88. He had been trained for the Baptist ministry at Regent's Park College under Dr. Joseph Angus and had more regular and close links than his brother with the leading figures in the Union. But in May 1881 C. H. Spurgeon wrote in *The Baptist*: "No one more heartily desires the prosperity of the Union than I do; no one is more satisfied with its designs and plans."³

The 1880s were a time of much intellectual and religious uncertainty and confusion, however. Many Christians in all the Churches were troubled by the development of biblical criticism and by unease regarding the doctrines of election and final judgment, which as currently proclaimed seemed to involve the eternal punishment of sinners and unbelievers in a way contrary to the conception of a merciful God. Spurgeon's health was not too good and he was feeling tired and, in spite of his large following, increasingly isolated. Among the papers of Dr. James Culross, Principal of Bristol Baptist College, there is a letter from Spurgeon, dated 9th January 1882, in reply to what must have been a word of appreciation.

"The Lord reward you for the kindness which made you sit down and write to me . . . I am often weary in brain and heart and these things refresh me. The work grows till the wheels of it threaten to grind me . . . Dear Dr., how I wish you could look in upon me for an hour a day for the next twenty years. I want some over-topping companion to keep me right . . . Ah me, do I forget 'my Master'? No, not quite, but I am dreadfully human, and want company. Yours in growing loneliness, C. H. Spurgeon."

The following spring Spurgeon attended and spoke at the Baptist Union meetings in Liverpool. It proved to be the last occasion. The following year, 1883, in Leicester an unfortunate incident occurred at the mayoral reception. The local Unitarian minister, John Page Hopps, made some semi-jocular remarks, which upset many who heard them. The matter was made worse by the fact that Page Hopps had been trained at the New Connexion College in Leicester at the same time as John Clifford. When Spurgeon learned of what had occurred, he told Samuel Harris Booth, who that year resumed the secretaryship of the Union after a break of two years, that he thought of "withdrawing quietly . . . a seceder from the talk but not the work of the Union." He did not want to be invited in future by either the Baptist Union or the Baptist Missionary Society.

On 8th November 1883 Spurgeon wrote in similar language to his brother-in-law, William Jackson, of Waltham Abbey: "I have fired the first shot, and the battle is beginning—see 'Xtn World' of this

day. We shall see who loves the truth & who is a traitor . . . I think I must personally withdraw from the Baptist Union. I do not care to fight, but can be rid of the responsibility by retiring." There are copies of this and other letters to Jackson in the Baptist Union Library.

There is an unexpected reference to the Leicester incident in the diaries of Lloyd George, who was then twenty years old. In the company of his uncle and brother he defended "the welcome reception given by the Leicester Baptists to Page-Hopps, the Unitarian."

"It was momentous," wrote Lloyd George on 28th December 1883, "as being the first time I ventured or rather had the opportunity of asserting my latitudinarianism and rationalism in the society of my religious friends. They were all taken aback, the old man especially. He at last said, 'Well, dear Davy, I fear that much learning hath made thee mad.' I went so far as to doubt the essentiality or even expediency of stickling for baptism."⁴

Samuel Harris Booth was pastor of the church at Elm Road, Beckenham. When he resumed the secretaryship of the Union on the untimely death of William Sampson, arrangements were made for the appointment of an assistant minister. A promising young man from Regent's Park College was secured—W. E. Blomfield. On page 130 of the history of the Union I briefly recorded what happened at Elm Road in 1884-86. Further details of this extraordinary and revealing episode (most of which came to me from Mr. Seymour Price) make clear how sensitive the theological situation had become. I am now convinced that what occurred played a larger part than I had thought in precipitating subsequent events.

Booth soon became dissatisfied with Blomfield's sermons. He alleged that they contained "not infrequent statements which pointed . . . to Universalism" and that there was "a constant appeal by name to such writers as Maurice, Robertson, George Eliot, Kingsley and other prominent opponents of Evangelical doctrine." Booth was supported in his protests by the Rev. James Smith, a retired missionary, who had served for many years in Delhi. Smith thought that Blomfield did not sufficiently "warn men of the dangers of refusing Christ."⁵ Without consulting the church Booth dismissed Blomfield. The church showed its support of the young man, whereupon Booth resigned the pastorate and withdrew his membership. The church sought the help and guidance of the London Baptist Association, and it was decided that forty-one of Blomfield's sermons be examined by Dr. E. B. Underhill, Dr. J. W. Todd⁶ and the Rev. J. R. Wood. In a report dated November 1885 they exonerated Blomfield from the main charges against him. Elm Road invited him to continue as minister. Four months later, however, he decided to accept a call to Turret Green, Ipswich, in spite of strong pressure to stay. Six months later, in September 1886, as a result of mediating efforts by Charles Williams, of Accrington,⁷ who was President of the Baptist Union at the time, Booth and his wife resumed their membership at Elm Road.

There is in existence a letter from Spurgeon addressed "Dear Friend" and almost certainly to Booth. It appears to be a reply to the suggestion that Spurgeon sympathised with young Blomfield. It is dated 28th October 1885, which was a few days after Booth had resigned his membership at Elm Road.

"Personally I know nothing, for I have not seen the young man's MSS," wrote Spurgeon, "and the Council by refusing a motion to let them come before all ministers on Committee virtually shelved me from having anything to do with the investigation . . . I am deeply grieved abt. the whole affair: it is only part of a whole. I don't think you went to work in the right way, but you did the right thing. I only say this to be frank. But I am altogether with you on the main issue, and whoever said that I thought Bd. to be sound invented a falsehood. What are we to do next? Any-how *we* shall hold together. Yours very heartily, C. H. Spurgeon."

In a letter to me in 1955, Dr. H. G. Wood wrote:

"I have always understood that Booth took the initiative in consulting Spurgeon about his, Booth's, misgivings as to the orthodoxy of some members of the Council and that Spurgeon was precluded from mentioning names and giving details because Booth insisted that the information he had given must be treated as confidential . . . I have very little doubt that Booth did consult Spurgeon, and in view of the Blomfield episode, it is most likely that he did."

Blomfield moved on from Ipswich to Coventry and thence to the principalship of Rawdon College and the presidency of the Baptist Union. In response to an inquiry from Mr. Seymour Price, Dr. S. Pearce Carey wrote in a 1947 letter, now in my possession, that he and Blomfield had entered Regent's Park College together and had shared the same study.

"I had my own problems," he said, "due to challenge of Dr. Angus's lectures on 'Eternal Punishment': challenge which cost me four years of denominational exile. But I kept the faith of my own soul, and 60 years ago 'Yorkshire Street', Burnley was looking for a teacher who would be loyal to his own vision of Christ Jesus, and I'll never forget the joy of being trusted."

On leaving R.P.C. in 1884, Pearce Carey began working for his MA at London University. His intention had been to offer to the BMS for service in India, but it was made clear to him that it would save embarrassment if he did not do so.

It was then customary to hold autumn as well as spring meetings. Those of October 1885 took place in Swansea in the midst of the trouble at Elm Road. A missionary sermon was preached by James Thew, of Belvoir Street, Leicester. In it he deprecated references to the eternal punishment of the heathen. The sermon drew a sharp protest from Spurgeon, though he had not been present. In reply Alfred Henry Baynes, the secretary of the BMS, assured him that so long as he, Baynes, was secretary, Thew would not again be asked to

speak or preach for the BMS. It was perhaps this sermon which had caused Spurgeon to write to Booth on 22nd October 1885:

"The Baptist Union means, I suppose, to drive out the orthodox. What is to be done I know not, I wd. enter my earnest protest against the dubious notes which are continually put forth at its gatherings."

A few months later, on 10th February 1886, he again wrote to Booth: "I must beg you and Mr. Williams to consider me as out of the running in the matter of the Union. You know my intense love and respect for you and Mr. Williams, but the past meetings of the Union have convinced me that it is not for my good to be present at them, nor can I do any good by linking myself with them. I am anxious *not to be* asked, that I may not be obliged to decline."

That a growingly serious situation was developing is shown by a letter from Charles Williams to James Culross, which is now at Bristol College. It is dated 17th January 1886. Williams wrote that Spurgeon had agreed to wait a bit and that he and Booth were attempting "reconciliation". To assist this he begged Culross to stand for the vice-presidency of the Union.

Later that year a spotlight turned on John Clifford, then in the full-tide of his notable ministry at Westbourne Park. Twelve of his sermons appeared in a book entitled *The Dawn of Manhood*. The original (or Clifford's own draft) of the following letter is in my possession. It is dated 7th December 1886.

"My dear Mr. Spurgeon,

I am very sorry to obtrude upon your rest & should not have done so; but your review of my last book has been sent to my publishers & has just reached me.

I hasten to ask your attention to one or two points.

The censure of the *Baptist Weekly* on my doctrinal position I did not reply to. I was told it was the work of a neighbour who has done similar things for me before; but you are my friend,—a friend of many years & a friend beloved; & I therefore feel I may appeal to your justice for a fair hearing.

I. As to what you miss, I enclose two or three citations (1.2.3. 4.5.) I have had copied. It is only a hurried glance I have been able to give. I do not doubt had I time I could prove that the doctrine of "Christ & Him Crucified" occupies a similar proportion in my work to what it does in the writings of James & Jude, Peter & John, Paul & the Evangelists. I have no doubt you miss certain "theological terms". I was taught at College that the place for "theological terms" is the class-room, & the theological *treatise*; but not *sermons*, & all through my ministry I have done my best to avoid them believing that they tend to beget either confusion of thought or the temper of a theological *disputant* & so hinder men coming to Christ. Do not make me an offender for the *absence of a word*. The *fact* is undeniably present.

II. You say I have changed within the last few years. On that may I say (1) the "sermons" reviewed were preached & printed in 1883, & prior to my volume on Daily Strength for Daily Living (against which volume only one voice was raised). But (2) as a matter of fact I hold the doctrine of the *General Baptist Creed* "that He suffered to make a full atonement for all the sins of all men". I held it in 1855 when I entered College. I hold it now. I have held it ever since. I cling to it now with greater tenacity than ever, but I may say to you, my dear friend, what I would not to many, that I have sacrificed hundreds of pounds, my own comfort, & what is far harder, the comfort of my family, solely because I would not accept the pastorate of a Church where my *convictions* would not be in accord with the provisions of the Trust Deed. I am not complaining of the cost of my fidelity to my denomn. & to my convictions. God knows I would pay a thousand times more rather than be consciously disloyal to what He has taught me by His Spirit.

III. One sentence as to my attitude towards the "Modern Sadducee". I enclose citations (6.7.8) & I may also refer you to pages 84, 85, 112, 131, 135, 136, 156—where you will find emphatic denunciations of "modern thought", of "culture" & of agnosticism, of the clamour for the "new", of the exaltation of reason & the like. Forgive me, my dear Mr Spurgeon, if I say I cannot understand how these things have been passed over; & you have been led to charge me with "cowardice & compromise". I have been fighting against compromise for at least twenty years. At this present hour I am suffering in manifold ways for my courage; & if I know my heart at all, it has but one fear, & that is lest I should so present God's Gospel to men that it should hurt and hinder rather than help & save.

May I not then ask you, if you still feel you *must* issue your review, that you will as least permit the *substance* of this letter to appear in the *same number* so that your readers may see *both*.

I do not ask to be sheltered from criticism because I am a friend; far from it. I want nothing more than what is just & fair; & I feel sure you will not hold that from me.

Let me add my sincere wish for your invigorated health.

I am most faithfully yours, J. Clifford.

Rev. C. H. Spurgeon."

This is a deeply interesting and revealing letter from many points of view. Spurgeon's reply was that he had not seen the review. It did not appear in *The Sword and Trowel*, though an earlier book by Clifford had been criticised somewhat severely in its pages.

The political as well as the religious atmosphere was tense. The Liberal Party was divided over Home Rule for Ireland and it was in February 1887 that Joseph Chamberlain chose to send to *The Baptist* an article which wrecked the chances of re-uniting the party.⁸ That same month Robert Shindler published the first of his two notorious

articles under the title "The Down Grade" in *The Sword and Trowel*. W. T. Whitley, then an able young man of twenty-six, who after graduating at Cambridge was at Rawdon College, of which one of his uncles was Principal, links Shindler's articles with a tract by Archibald Brown, of the East London Tabernacle,⁹ entitled *The Devil's Mission of Amusement*, and the growing coolness between Spurgeon and the theatre-going Dr. Joseph Parker, of the City Temple. But the main theme was a wider one: apostasy from evangelical truth would lead to rationalism and disaster. At first Shindler's articles did not attract great attention, but in August, September and October 1887 Spurgeon followed them up with three articles of his own. He seems to have expected that at the autumn meetings of the Union in Sheffield they would receive serious attention. Instead, most of the comments were of a jocular kind. Spurgeon was further wounded when he learned of a speech by E. G. Gange, of Broadmead, Bristol, to a working-men's rally in the Sheffield Albert Hall. The meeting was also addressed by Richard Glover and Arthur Mursell. Gange afterwards declared: "My speech at Sheffield was simply an appeal for liberty"; but Spurgeon interpreted it as an attack on Calvinism. Gange had been one of Spurgeon's first students and had helped him with *The Treasury of David*. The previous spring he had been the special speaker at the public meeting held in connection with the annual College Conference.

On 28th October 1887 Spurgeon wrote to Booth withdrawing from the Baptist Union. There are at Bristol College letters from Alexander McLaren to Culross (11th November) and drafts of letters from Culross to Spurgeon (21st November and 2nd December), which show how distressed and concerned these men were. One of the busiest of the mediators then and throughout the crisis was Charles Williams. In a letter to Culross of 31st March 1888 he suggested that, as Richard Glover was one of those thought to hold liberal views, he and John Clifford should not be "in the front of the battle". Spurgeon had already met a deputation led by Culross, but in a note to Henry Moore, of Philip Street, Bristol (now in the possession of the Rev. W. F. Bacon) written beforehand made clear that he did not expect any good to come from it. Indeed, partly no doubt because of ill-health and partly from disappointment that the step he had taken was not more widely supported, Spurgeon became increasingly forcible in the language he used. To his brother-in-law he wrote on 11th February 1888: "Very *down* today. I could bear the daggers of all but Brutus and my other sons. Those who ate my bread sharpen their knives on me."

In a letter dated 25th February 1888, once in the possession of Dr. W. Y. Fullerton and probably to him, Spurgeon comments on the Declaration which Dr. Joseph Angus had been carefully working at and which with certain alterations—the result of discussions with J. A. Spurgeon—became the one hopefully adopted by the Assembly in April:

"The cause is sold. I don't want to say this, but someone ought to say it very plainly. I do not think the brethren intended this with the exception of one or two who are very longheaded.

*'Confound their politics,
Frustrate etc.'*"¹⁰

To Gange Spurgeon wrote saying that he need not attend the College Conference. When Gange replied that he intended to do so, he was told that attendance was only by personal invitation. Spurgeon then drew up two doctrinal statements, a longer and a shorter, one of which was to be signed by all who wished to be present. That Nicholas Dobson, of Deal, William Townsend, of Canterbury, and Ebenezer Henderson, of Clapham—widely respected Metropolitan College men—refused to do so added to Spurgeon's disappointment. William Cuff, of Shoreditch, declared that he wanted to support "the Guv'nor", but could not make out what he was at.¹¹

The Declaratory Statement in its final form was adopted by the Assembly on the motion of Charles Williams, seconded by J. A. Spurgeon and supported by J. T. Brown, of Northampton. There were only seven dissentients. Within a few weeks plans were made, as Spurgeon wrote to Isaac Near, of Penge, on 16th June 1888, for

"an Association outside the Union, sound in doctrine, and thus the nucleus of a fresh Union should the time come. But there are many more rotten men in the Union than I dreamed of. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint."

A week later to the same correspondent he wrote:

"Keep to the Surrey and Middlesex which I hope to join. It will quit the Union. The more you have to deal with that evil confederacy the worse you will like it. I am glad you have come out. I am not quite alone."

But eighteen months later, when Isaac Near pleaded that some who had not signed one of the doctrinal statements should be admitted to the College Conference, Spurgeon refused.¹²

In 1888, and long afterwards, there was speculation as to who Spurgeon had specially in mind in his criticisms, for it was "the charge against anonymity", which led many ministers and laymen to take a stand against him. There is documentary evidence, supported by the testimony of Sir William Robertson Nicoll, that Spurgeon's attacks were not directed against Clifford. I have in my possession a letter in Clifford's handwriting, which was apparently the draft of a letter sent to F. A. Jones, the Secretary of the London Baptist Association. It was written on 3rd February 1888, after Spurgeon's abortive meeting at the Tabernacle with Culross, Clifford and Booth. McLaren had been pressed to be there, but did not "take to the idea of a deputation", as he wrote to Culross, and excused himself on account of sciatica. Clifford wrote:

"Many thanks for your letter. I could not answer without seeing Dr. Booth. We agree that

(1) Mr. Spurgeon gave no names whatever.

- (2) Mr. Tipple's name was not mentioned by any one.¹³
- (3) Mr. S. did say he was not referring to me or to General Baptists, though he added "as you know we differ but we hold vital evangelical truth in common; still I do not like your last book."
- (4) Mr. S. did not refer to Blomfield. The reference to him arose out of the observation made by Dr. Booth in refutation of the charge that "he had intercepted information from Mr. S. that ought to have gone to the Council." That Dr. B. absolutely denied; & added "but I have not denied that I have talked with you on these matters." Yes added Mr. S. "about Elm Road". But said Dr. B. "Although I paid the heaviest penalty a minister can pay by resigning his position, yet I did not think it right to bring it before the BU or the LBA. Still in justice to W. Blomfield I am bound to say I have recently seen in a printed sermon of his a categorical affirmation of the doctrines I had said he did not *teach* (N.B. not *hold*) when he was at Beckenham."
- (5) We made no compact about inserting words etc. We had no authority."

At this interval of time these personal speculations are of relatively little moment. I have dealt with some of them in my earlier accounts of the controversy. Names that once meant a great deal are now lost in the mists of the past. Of more relevance is the nature and authority of the Declaratory Statement, which the Assembly adopted in April 1888. According to Charles Ray, in a biography of Spurgeon which he published in 1903, at one point in the discussions Spurgeon offered to pay the fee for Counsel's Opinion in order to show that under the Constitution of the Baptist Union no one could be heterodox unless he forswore his baptism! There are at Bristol College two important letters from Booth to Culross, dated 28th March and 14th April 1888. J. A. Spurgeon was still threatening to move an amendment to the Statement at the Assembly. This Booth was sure must be resisted or the Union would be discredited, but he made clear that he was himself against a Declaration of the kind suggested, accepting it only as a matter of expediency. Was it to be regarded as a Historical Declaration without legislative force, he asked, or a Declaration framed as a basis of legislation? This is an important question and shows Booth's perspicacity.

As finally adopted after last minute changes, which satisfied J. A. Spurgeon, the Declaration begins with an important proviso ("While expressly disavowing and disallowing any power to control belief or restrict inquiry") and goes on to state that its object is "to show our agreement with one another and with our fellow Christians on the great truths of the Gospel." It admitted differences of opinion about "The Resurrection; the Judgment at the Last Day".¹⁴

In September 1888 the London Baptist Association met. There were two hundred persons present and they rejected by 113 votes to

85 the suggestion that the Association have a credal basis. Instead it was decided that a Declaration be drawn up. The following month a statement basically similar to that adopted by the Assembly was presented, with a preamble stating that it should not be regarded as a creed. An attempt to delete this preamble was defeated by 101 votes to 77, after which Archibald Brown and twenty-five other ministers resigned. At the LBA meeting Clifford had won support for his statement that "the Word of God is the only authoritative and infallible exposition of evangelical doctrine." The LBA continued to print its Declaratory Statement with the annual report. Since it had failed to draw Spurgeon back into the Union, as had been hoped, the Assembly's Declaration soon came to be regarded as a "Historical Declaration", to use Booth's phrase.

Ten days after the Assembly of 1888, Clifford wrote to Cuff. I have the draft of the letter.

"My dear Cuff. Have no misgiving about me. I am ready to do or suffer anything for the sake of peace & unity. If leaving the *Union* would do it I would go out by the next post. I will sacrifice anything but loyalty to the Lord Jesus my Redeemer for the Union He Himself prayed for. I have stated my mind again & again. I do not object to creeds as statements of belief (*credo*). I gave one when I joined the Church; repeated it, or something like it when I entered College, restated it when I became a pastor; & have printed one over & over & over again, in various books, Church Reports etc., etc. It is not creeds as creeds: it is *coercion* through & by creeds I object to. See Galatians II, 5. Let us *meet*. I will do all I can to be present on Friday; & anywhere & any when I will meet. We differ because we do not meet & talk over these things in the Master's Spirit. Frank & full speech ought to be healing. Ever yours sincerely, J. Clifford."

The wounds caused by the events of 1887-88 healed only slowly. Spurgeon died, a sick and sad man, in January 1892. His brother remained loyal to the Baptist Union and by 1897 thought that a volume of "personal recollections" would "help to fix for future times the personal estimate" in which Spurgeon was held.

"I should like all shades of Xtian thought to be given and so I ask you who knew him well to give your personal recollections amongst others. I know you esteemed him though you differed from him. But it is necessary that your standpoint should be represented, hence my request. I know that to you it is a service of love to express such an opinion as faithfulness demands."

As has already been made clear, Charles Williams was one of those who strove throughout to prevent disaster overtaking the Baptist Union. He did all he could to keep Spurgeon within the fellowship and, later, to make his return possible. I have a letter of his, written to Clifford on 28th August 1888, which well illustrates his frankness and his sense of responsibility. It had been arranged that R. F. Horton, of Lyndhurst Road, Hampstead, a well known Congregationalist, preach

to the Autumn Assembly of 1888. But when during the year a small volume of his addresses appeared under the title *Inspiration and the Bible* and provoked criticism, the Baptist leaders feared that a sermon by him might stir up further controversy in the denomination.

"I have read Mr. Horton's work," wrote Williams. "Of course a man can hold & urge all its contents, & yet be sound in the faith of the gospel, true to the Lord & Master, & worthy of the honour & love of Christians, as Mr. Horton is.

But the book is startling to those who know nothing of the writings of Robertson Smith & others. Most men fail to distinguish between the doctrines of the Bible & the doctrine in the Bible. Those who thus fail must think Mr. Horton a dangerous man. I don't agree with them, but I fear many will accept his premises, & draw other than his conclusions from them. To such he will not be a safe leader.

The feeling at Salendine Nook, & among Strict Baptists, is very strong against Mr. Horton preaching. Nor do I wonder. I could make a string of short extracts from his books which, if read to any meeting of Baptists, in Union session assembled, would shock the majority. If Mr. H. preaches, & a protest be made & enforced by a man who knows how to use his materials, damage will be done alike to Mr. Horton, to Broad-Nonconformity & to the Baptist Union. In the interests of all three I should *let*, not ask, Mr. Horton retire . . .

I could say *yes* to all he says, and, like him, be consciously true to Christ & His gospel. But in many particulars he does not carry me with him. I write however to urge that you let him retire. Would that Professor Goadby could preach!"

What Williams recommended is what happened. His letter is a reminder that ministers and churches were having to adjust themselves to biblical criticism in the 1880s as well as to challenges to the rigidities of Calvinistic doctrine.

Some of the actions of Samuel Harris Booth as recorded in the earlier part of this paper, may seem questionable, but his honest admission about W. E. Blomfield in January 1888 will have been noted, and there is little doubt that he understood the nature as well as the danger of the crisis better than most. In an obituary in the *Baptist Handbook* of 1903, Richard Glover described Booth as having "all the qualities that let him be a healer of breaches and a binder of brotherhoods". C. M. Hardy, who settled at Dagnall Street, St. Albans in 1886—it was his second pastorate—and attended most of the committee meetings during the critical period, said that he could not recall any instance when any hint or accusation of bias was directed against Booth. "A more masterful, or even an abler man, might easily have wrecked or crippled the vessel which, under Dr. Booth's captaincy was at length steered into calmer seas."¹⁵

The seas became calmer and the vessel moved ahead with great rapidity. Had Spurgeon lived, the situation in the last decade of the

nineteenth century might have been more difficult. But however searching and distressing the crisis, it showed clearly that all that was represented by and expressed through the Baptist Union was judged more important than the adherence of one individual, however eminent, and that the older biblical and theological frameworks satisfied the majority of Baptists no more than they did those of other denominations.

NOTES

¹ S. E. Koss, *Asquith* (1976), p. 221.

² *The Times*, 27th June 1978.

³ W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon* (1920), p. 309.

⁴ William George, *My Brother and I* (1958), p. 78.

⁵ The quotations are from a transcript of the minutes of the Elm Road church.

⁶ Dr. E. B. Underhill was Secretary of the BMS 1849-76 and President of the BU 1873. Dr. Todd had been minister of Brown Street, Salisbury, and he and his wife were heads of Tudor Hall School for Girls, Sydenham.

⁷ Williams had had to face criticism in the early days of his ministry. See John H. Lea, "Charles Williams of Accrington, 1827-1907", *Baptist Quarterly*, XXIII, pp. 177ff.

⁸ John Morley, *Life of Gladstone* (1903), III, pp. 367f. and Michael Hurst, *Joseph Chamberlain and Liberal Reunion* (1970), pp. 279-359.

⁹ See George E. Page, *Archibald Geikie Brown* (1944), p. 14.

¹⁰ This letter was given to me by Miss K. B. Savill, to whose mother (baptized by Spurgeon) it had been given by Dr. Fullerton.

¹¹ W. T. Whitley thought that Cuff's refusal to support Spurgeon proved a decisive factor in the final result. See W. Cuff, *Memories and Musings: Fifty years Ministry 1865-1915* (1915), for an attractive self-portrait.

¹² Copies of Spurgeon's letters to Isaac Near were given to me by his daughter. On Spurgeon's attitude to attendance at Conference, see *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), II, p. 458. On 9th September 1889 Spurgeon resigned as a trustee of Penge Tabernacle in a letter witnessed by Joseph Harrald, which is in my possession.

¹³ See S. Pearce Carey & Eric Roberts, "Recollections of S. A. Tipple", *Baptist Quarterly*, VIII, pp. 236ff, 353ff, 431ff.

¹⁴ For the full text see *The Baptist Union: A Short History*, App. VI.

¹⁵ *Baptist Quarterly*, II, p. 244.

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