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Former Secretaries of the Baptist Union.

I

FORMER SECRETARIES OF THE BAPTIST UNION.

- 1811—1819. *THOMAS, Rev. THOMAS, London. Died 1819.
1811—1821. *BUTTON, Rev. WILLIAM, London. Died August 2, 1821.
1811—1834. *IVIMEY, Rev. JOSEPH, London. Died February 8, 1834.
1832—1840. *BELCHER, Rev. JOSEPH, D.D., London. Removed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, December, 1843. Died 1859.
1834—1846. *MURCH, Rev. WILLIAM HARRIS, D.D., London. Died July 12, 1859.
1835—1882. *STEANE, Rev. EDWARD, D.D., London. Died May 8, 1882.
1841—1866. *HINTON, Rev. JOHN HOWARD, A.M., London. Died December 17, 1873.
1863—1877. *MILLARD, Rev. JAMES HENRY, B.A., Huntingdon. Died October 22, 1883.
1877—1879. BOOTH, Rev. SAMUEL HARRIS, London. Died April 7, 1902.
1880—1882. SAMPSON, Rev. WILLIAM, London. Died November 11, 1882.
1883—1898. BOOTH, Rev. SAMUEL HARRIS, D.D., London. Died April 7, 1902.

* Joint Secretaries.

THE *Baptist Hand Book* for the two years 1923 and 1924, in the table as given above, furnishes information as to the former Secretaries of the Baptist Union. Earlier issues, however, go no further back than 1832 and the secretariat of Dr. Belcher. Even Dr. Whitley, to whom we owe the inclusion of the three new names, dismisses the Union in "that day of small things" with the somewhat curt criticism, "It had no practical aim, no permanent officers, no inspiring leader. Not till 1831 did it attain any real importance . . . when it welcomed members from the New Connexion." (If the learned Doctor had belonged to the main stream rather than to the tributary, he might have expressed himself differently.) But as far back as 1863 John Howard Hinton, from the Chair of the Union, delivered as his swan song an address which might be briefly summarized by a not too friendly reviewer;—Among Baptists there was not any union, there never had been, and there never would be; and all the Union there was began in 1834, and had no relation to the annual social gathering of ministers dating from 1812.

In passing judgment, however, on the pioneers, their meagre design, and the early years of the Union's history, one needs to remember that we are dealing with a period when there were no motor cars, no railways, no telegraphs or telephones, when you

had to warn your correspondents that unless they prepaid their letters you could not afford to take them in, and that you yourself could not write unless you had matters of weight to communicate, and when the only possible means of communication between the scattered denominational leaders was the new *Baptist Magazine*, which in 1809 began to be published in Bristol. Further, Waterloo was three years ahead, and the aftermath of war! Happily there was an inspiring leader, and his name was Joseph Ivimey. He was the youngest of the three first Secretaries, being 38 years of age when an article from his pen appeared, in June 1811, in the *Baptist Magazine*, entitled, "Union Essential to Prosperity." He reminded his readers that a remarkable spirit of interdenominational union was abroad. In a few brief years, Bible, Tract, Missionary, Sunday School societies, had been founded,—largely by Baptist initiative,—and were supported by evangelical Christians generally. The intercourse furnished by their direction and control, and by their annual meetings, had fostered the spirit of union. And as for Baptists,—¹ "The Particular Baptist Missionary Society for propagating the Gospel among the heathen had passed like a magnet over our churches, and by powerfully attracting the particles of steel they contain has brought them to a point and united them into one object." The Baptist Assemblies of 1689 to 1693 had died out from want of the wider view, not seeking first the Kingdom. Now the unanimity which had been evoked by the missionary design was not merely a surprise but a heartening call to seek for some organization which should give this unanimity the means of expression, permanence and continual growth. ¹ "The Constitution of our Churches which prevents all external interference, preserving them independent of each other, requires some general bond of union, some mode of general association." The suggested plan was "That an Annual Association be held either in London, or at some of the larger and more central towns in the Country, composed of the ministers and messengers from the neighbouring Churches and of two deputies from every Association in the United Kingdom." The Missionary Society was to have its field day, with a report, and sermons and collections on its behalf; an account of itinerant labours in our own country was to be given by the Secretary of the Baptist Itinerant Society in London, and, amongst "many other things," funds were to be started for the support of our Seminaries, and for the relief of our aged and necessitous ministers. The following year the annual missionary sermons were, for the first time, preached on a week day, instead of a Sunday, making it possible for all the London ministers, as well as country visitors, to attend. The Dutch Church in Austin Friars was filled, Fuller and Ryland being the preachers, and £320 were collected for the Mission.

Fuller who had been doubtful, was overjoyed. The next morning, at 8 o'clock, a meeting was held in Dr. Rippon's Meeting House, Carter Lane, to take into consideration the proposed measure for an Annual General Assembly of the Particular Baptist Churches. Dr. Rippon was in the Chair, and the mere list of subjects he suggested for the consideration of future Assemblies almost takes one's breath away. The Union was formed. The first assembly was to be in London in 1813, on the last Wednesday and Thursday in June. London ministers were to act as a committee; Wm. Button and Joseph Ivimey were appointed Secretaries. The purpose of the Union thus formed was broadly and simply stated to be the promotion of the cause of Christ in general, the interest of the denomination in particular, and the encouragement and support of the Baptist Mission. The Baptist Union was like a stake, newly cut, driven into the hard soil of denominational life, and to which the Baptist Mission, the Itinerant (i.e., the Home) Mission, and the newly formed Irish Mission attached themselves more or less closely as their needs demanded. Like some stakes in my own garden, it was not always certain whether the stake held up the plants or the plants the stake, but as time went on it was discovered that the sap in the stake had induced it to send forth roots of its own, to bud and sprout, and to become at length a living and fruitful tree. Thomas Thomas so far has not been mentioned, and in the Union's story he is somewhat of a shadowy figure. A son of Timothy Thomas of Aberdare, he was born in 1759, and, giving evidence of early piety and usefulness, was baptized by his uncle Zechariah, and at the age of 18 entered Bristol Academy, for three years a fellow student of Robert Hall. His first pastorate was at Pershore, whence he came to London, to the church at Mill Yard, Goodman's Fields. In 1790 the Meeting House was burnt to the ground. During the rebuilding he and his people worshipped with Abraham Booth, and he remained as their pastor until the end of the century, when he removed to Peckham, and supplemented his income by starting a school in Mile End. In October, 1819, after a painful illness, he passed to his rest. He was the first Secretary of Stepney College, an office filled by him contemporaneously with that of the Union, and the College President, Dr. Newman, writes of him as his constant friend and companion, in public preaching excelling most of his brethren, lively but not light, serious and yet not sad, and possessing much more literary wealth than he showed to the world.

William Button was the oldest of the three pioneers; born at Peasemars, near Rye, Sussex, in 1754, his father being a farmer and a Presbyterian minister. When five years old he nearly died from small-pox, only recovering with the loss of the sight of his

right eye. At eight he was sent to John Ryland's school at Northampton, and at thirteen was baptized in the river, and the same day partook of the Lord's Supper, his religious life having been awakened by an Independent minister's sermon on "Suffer little children." Shortly afterwards the death of his mother, and the total destruction of his father's house and property, hastened his mental and religious maturity. He comes to London, joins Unicorn Yard, Southwark, begins to preach and, when he is only nineteen, is sent forth by the church to the public ministry, and preaches his first sermon in Unicorn Yard. An invitation to Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, after three months' probation, is declined in favour of the Separatists from Dr. Gill's Church who were taking up their abode in Dean Street. But during his stay in Hitchin he has been captured by, and captures, the late minister's daughter, who becomes the mother of their nine children. In a few years the growing family and his business capacity take him into the bookselling and publishing business in Paternoster Row, his name appearing as publishing the first volume of Ivimey's history, as well as on some of his own anonymous writings. His portrait shows a man of unusual refinement, with the grace and disposition of some distinguished court physician, but Ivimey, looking back on the good man's life, cannot refrain from saying that his absorption in business had been detrimental to his influence as a minister of the gospel, and probably it was the cause of the troubles which clouded the later years of his Dean Street pastorate and his retirement to Lewes in 1815. That year, when over sixty years of age, he had an operation for cataract which was so completely successful that he could read the smallest print without spectacles. Following upon his retirement, however, he met with serious financial losses, and his friends, rallying to his aid, collected a gift of £500, which brought to him the joy of friendship as well as material relief.

Of quite another make was Button's friend and comrade, Joseph Ivimey. Born in 1773 at Ringwood, Hants., he started in life with a meagre education, and a parental influence on the father's side which was definitely irreligious. Coming, however, under the direct influence of a godly aunt before he was eighteen, he was led to think earnestly and to good purpose on the verities of the gospel. Elisha Coles' *Practical Treatise on the Sovereignty of God* seems to have cleared his mind from the perplexities of hyper-Calvinism, and enabled him "to attain to that measure of purity of doctrine and steadfastness of belief, for which both in his private intercourse and as a Christian minister he was distinguished to the end of life." He was baptized and joined the church at Wimborne, nine miles from his home. In the following year he moved to Lyminster, where he worked at his trade as a

journeyman tailor, his open Bible at his side as he sat cross-legged on his board. He used his leisure to earn money beyond his usually meagre wage in order "to distribute to the necessities of the saints." He leads to vital godliness the man in whose house he is residing. His fervour in prayer, and the shrinking but clear expression of his mind on the meaning of some passage of Scripture, lead others to see him as one marked out for the office of the Christian ministry. A severe attack of smallpox, induced by inoculation, brought him to death's door. A visit of a few months to London made him resolve never to see the place again. Removing to Portsea in his twenty-third year, he married, and, starting a business of his own, for eight years he prospered and bore an unblemished reputation. His success gave him the leisure for an itinerant ministry, which culminated at the end of his thirtieth year in the church to whose communion he was united conferring upon him the public recognition of a Christian minister. His first staid charge was at Wallingford, where, after disposing of his business, he became the coadjutor of the Rev. Mr. Lovegrove. But he was not destined to hide his light in village work. Within a year he has removed with his family to London, and is preaching for two months at Eagle Street Chapel, London, as a probationer, and with a view to his being chosen pastor of the church. Thus began a ministry of quite unusual force and fruitfulness, which lasted until his death in 1834. In twenty-nine years he added to the membership of Eagle Street Church 800 members, and was instrumental in sending into the ministry 20 young men. From what we see of him in early life, fully consecrated as his powers were to his divine Lord, no less was to be expected. Of medium height, broadly built, athletic, with exhaustless energy, with a great voice, a clear, logical mind, a love of nature, a dash of poetry in his making, a compassion that overflowed conventional barriers,—he was just the man to stir the mind and heart of his hearers and to build out of the youth of old London a strong and active church. What is really surprising is the amount of literary and secretarial work which he was able to accomplish side by side with such faithful pastoral labours. The truth is that the time that many pastors spend running all over the country, preaching anniversary sermons, Ivimey spent among his books and at his desk. He was only thirty-three when the first volume of his *Baptist History* was in the press, the first of four quarto volumes bringing the story down to his own day, and occupying much of his leisure for twenty more years. He was a frequent contributor to the *Baptist Magazine*, and one of its editors for nearly twenty years. He crossed swords with Robert Hall and F. A. Cox, in letters and lectures, over the subject of open or close Communion at the

Lord's Table. He wrote an excellent life of John Milton. He edited and annotated Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and later wrote a third part in continuation of the story, with Christiana's children as the heroes. And these are but a small part of his literary labours. In addition to the Secretariat of the National Assembly, he was Joint Secretary with Wm. Button of the ministers' weekly meeting for intercourse and conference, and he was founder and secretary for nearly twenty years of the Irish Baptist Mission. We have referred to his father. It was Ivimey's joy quite late in their life to witness the baptism of his father and his mother, who had long been a humble follower of Jesus. Eighteen months before Ivimey's death, Joseph Belcher had been appointed to act with him as Secretary; and two years later William Harris Murch, and the following year Edward Steane, were added to the staff. Mr. Belcher occupied the pastorate at Chelsea at the time of his appointment, and later at Greenwich. He was somewhat of an author, and published biographies of Carey and Whitfield. His later years were spent in America.

Murch was born at Honiton in 1784. He was "a boy preacher," and as such was admitted to the academy at Wymondley as a ministerial student. Fuller's *Life of Samuel Pearce* was the means of bringing him into the evangelical faith, and in 1802 Dr. Rippon baptized him at Carter Lane. Leaving college two years later, he declined various invitations to the ministry on account of his youth, but finally yielded to one from Frome, and became, first, John Foster's assistant and then his successor. After twenty years of labour in that quiet town, he was called to be the President and Theological Tutor of Stepney College, and Brown University, U.S.A., granted him the diploma of Doctor of Divinity. Failing health led to his resignation of the anxious and arduous duties of the college, and of the Baptist Board, and a little later of the Baptist Union. But he did seven years' further service in the pastorate at Rickmansworth, and a few years after his retirement in 1851 he proceeded to Bath, where he assisted in the formation of the church known as Kensington, of which Dr. O. Winslow was the pastor.

Edward Steane, born in Oxford in 1798, where his father was a Baptist deacon, was a student under Dr. Ryland for a couple of years, and then proceeded to Edinburgh for a similar period. There he soon made the acquaintance of Christopher Anderson who, when absent or unwell, relied on young Steane to take his pulpit. Many invitations to settle came his way, but he was finally drawn to what was a new sphere in Camberwell, where Joseph Gutteridge had bought a little meeting-house as the site of the prospective building. There, pastor to a church of twenty and preacher to a congregation of thirty, he began his life's work,

and at Midsummer, 1825, the fine new chapel was opened. ¹ "The full story of spiritual life and service begun that day is only written in heaven. The burning moments, the surprises, the keen pangs and pleasures of young and fervent ministerial life; what intensities of prayer and preaching have been felt in this place; how many hard hearts have been broken, and broken hearts have been healed; and how many have been the transactions here, causing joy in the presence of angels, are mysteries only known to the Master of Assemblies." Frequent illness and the death of Mrs. Steane in 1862 sent him to live at New Park House, between Watford and Chipperfield. His life was prolonged, thanks mainly to the tender care of the second Mrs. Steane, and his position as Secretary to the Union was nominally retained until his death in 1882. Four years after his first election as Secretary, the Bible Society reversed its earlier policy, and withdrew its support to the Bengali and other versions of the Scriptures produced by Baptist missionaries. The writing of the remonstrance was committed to Mr. Steane, and those who were best able to judge its worth, described it as courteous, scrupulously fair, scholarly, vigorous, convincing, unanswered, and unanswerable. The Baptist Translation Society was formed, and he became its first Secretary. In 1845 he took a major part in the formation of the Evangelical Alliance, and was for years its leading spirit, editing its organ and annual reports, framing its resolutions, and placing his administrative and diplomatic abilities at its service in its delicate negotiations with foreign governments.

* C. Stamford, colleague from 1858.

C. M. HARDY.

(To be continued.)