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## THE YOUNG MR AUBREY

Three Baptist Union Secretaries spanned virtually the first seventy years of this century: John Howard Shakespeare from 1898-1924, Melbourn Evans Aubrey from 1925-1951, and Ernest Alexander Payne from 1951-1967. Shakespeare expressly forbade any biography being written of him - though certain articles have appeared in print which reveal the calibre of the man. Ernest Payne left behind no such veto and, as some of you may know, an account of his life has been published.<sup>1</sup> But of Melbourn Evans Aubrey there exists, apart from obituary notices, so far as I know, scarcely a word. This is not entirely surprising. Throughout the years of his office, he was somewhat overshadowed by the recollection of his predecessor. J. H. Shakespeare was a superbly gifted man, deeply committed to Baptist leadership and to church relations, who had the misfortune - if misfortune it be - to have been born an ecumenical Baptist at least a generation before his time. Aubrey lived only six years after his retirement. His successor, Ernest Payne, was an ecclesiastical leader of considerable stature, whose influence can be gauged by the remarkable attendance at his memorial service in Westminster Abbey.<sup>2</sup> This lecture is a preliminary attempt to call Aubrey out of the shadows into the light of Baptist history where deservedly he belongs. Not simply Aubrey as a potential leader, but Aubrey as a warm, engaging man who was called constantly by others into a limelight which he would preferably have shunned.

### I

When Aubrey retired, his son Peter suggested that his father should set down for his family some account of his life. Aubrey apparently agreed. After his death, the exercise book containing the memoir was discovered. It begins thus:

Your father was born in a public house and I have no need to apologize for it. For one thing it wasn't my fault. For another, it was a very good sin.<sup>3</sup>

These are as good an opening three sentences as will be found in any journal. Unfortunately for the historian, they are also the last three sentences! He wrote no more, the rest is silence - just blank pages.<sup>4</sup> When one compares M. E. Aubrey's three sentence memoir with the nearly twenty exercise books left by Ernest Payne, the problem of research on the former is clearly revealed. But it illustrates one aspect of his personality, namely, that Aubrey was a very private man who was required by his vocation and circumstances, particularly as Secretary of the Baptist Union, to live an immensely public life. I do not think that he loved every minute of it.

Aubrey's father, Edwin Aubrey, was a Baptist minister born in Wales and trained at Haverfordwest.<sup>5</sup> Melbourn Evans Aubrey was born on 21st April 1885 during his father's ministry at Zion, Pentre. Unfortunately the birth certificate is very vague about the exact location of the birth. His father is recorded as living at Ton Ystradyfodwg, but of the name of Aubrey's natal public house there is no clue! But it is a search which I intend, not surprisingly, to pursue! Aubrey was given the name Evans as the maiden name of his mother. He was called Melbourn because, so the Aubrey family tradition has it, Edwin Aubrey was a great admirer of Lord Melbourne. Unfortunately the registrar spelt the name incorrectly - hence Melbourn. M. E. Aubrey was the first child of a family which was to grow to six, two other sons and three daughters. By 1888 Edwin Aubrey was ministering at Commercial Road, Abercarn, and in 1895 he moved to North Frederick Street, Glasgow. There his eldest son, at the age of about eleven, contracted polio which resulted in a permanent disability in his left leg, necessitating the wearing of a special surgical

boot. During his long illness the young Melbourn was encouraged by his parents to read and he became, throughout his life, a voracious reader. Initially the Bible was his required priority, with the result that his biblical knowledge was remarkable and his ability to quote verses - and longer passages - became a great asset in his subsequent outstanding preaching ministry.

By 1899, Edwin Aubrey was back in Wales, at Morlais, Merthyr, and M. E. Aubrey, showing considerable academic promise, was sent as a boarder to Taunton School. This school was the successor to the old Independent College and was in the process of becoming reorganized with the support, financial and otherwise, of Baptist and Congregational laymen.<sup>6</sup> The newly appointed headmaster was a Baptist, Dr C. D. Whittaker, who was successful in restoring the school's Free Church tradition. Whittaker soon saw that M. E. Aubrey was a pupil of the highest potential. He was proved right. Aubrey's list of prizes are startling in their number and diversity.<sup>7</sup> In 1902 he won a special matriculation prize, a prize each for drawing, reading, shorthand and science. He matriculated in the same year with the Cambridge Senior Certificate and gained the South Kensington Certificate in Science, Art and Theoretical Chemistry. By 1904 he had won further prizes in Science, Mathematics, Essay Writing, Good Conduct - and had passed the University of London examination in Science, together with the London Chamber of Commerce Certificate with distinction. In addition, he had become a prefect and headboy of the school. He was keenly interested in sport and deeply regretted his limited physical ability. He became scorer for the 1st XI and an able swimmer. When Aubrey died in 1957, the School Magazine carried an obituary notice written by a contemporary of his schooldays. The writer describes him 'as one of the most brilliant scholars to have passed through Taunton School'. He goes on: 'At no time had Aubrey a "highbrow" disposition, he was a friend of all and willing to help those in trouble with their work.'<sup>8</sup>

Most significantly, Whittaker discovered that Aubrey had thoughts about the ministry. He encouraged him to try his hand at preaching, arranging for him to take the services at a small village chapel - regrettably we do not know where exactly. Oral tradition in the Aubrey family has it that, as the Captain of the School stood up to announce the first hymn, the door of the chapel opened to admit all the school prefects, whose presence more than doubled the congregation, if not the offering! It was the first of very many challenging public occasions which Aubrey was to face. By all accounts, he was soon recognized as having all the gifts for ministry amongst Baptists. The school records note in the summer of 1904 that 'M. E. Aubrey is to be heartily congratulated on obtaining an entrance into the Baptist College in Cardiff, and, at the same time, in winning a Glamorgan County Free Scholarship and Studentship.'<sup>9</sup>

He was at Cardiff for four years, during which he read for a philosophy degree through the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, along with his Baptist College tasks. Not content with the academic responsibilities, he became deeply involved in the student life of the University College. In his final year he was President of the Students' Representative Council, where he was clearly influential. The student magazine *Cap and Gown* has a contributed letter signed 'The Official Panegyrist', in which the writer links suitable quotations from English Literature with each student office holder. For Mr M. E. Aubrey, B.A., the quotation is attributed to William Cowper, 'I am monarch of all I survey'.<sup>10</sup> We may note that it goes on, 'My right there is none to dispute'. Whilst the quotation may have been apt for Aubrey in Cardiff days, in the subsequent Church House days, whilst it perhaps should have at least approached the truth, the experience of J. H. Shakespeare's unrestrained leadership<sup>11</sup> ensured that strong Baptist restraining arms were all too

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often hampering his successor's plans. But at Cardiff, Aubrey clearly enjoyed himself and found early opportunity to display and develop his many talents. At the end of his student days, an anonymous writer in *Cap and Gown* includes these words in a tribute:

We have his mother's authority to testify to the flow of language and oratorical pleading which were features even of his earlier days - even though his quest was limited then to a piece of barley sugar. . . He has served the University College for four years and he is its most popular student and president into the bargain. His lady friends (we believe there is just one fresher whom he doesn't know very well) must testify to his beauty; the professors must testify to his industry; we can testify to the charms of his company and his good fellowship. Friends enquiring for him should look first in the Principal's room and secondly in the Dutch Café. If he is found in neither of those two places, we regret to say that Mr Aubrey is at home with influenza.<sup>12</sup>

## II

In 1908, in company with a Rawdon student named Arthur Dakin, Aubrey sat for the Baptist Union Scholarship.<sup>13</sup> Both men received an award. Dakin left for Halle and Heidelberg; Aubrey, after abortive correspondence with Union Theological Seminary in New York, went to Mansfield College, Oxford. He did not settle easily at Oxford. Intellectually he could cope, but the Oxford of the years just prior to the First World War was in stark contrast to the more relaxed, less sophisticated life of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire. Aubrey was twenty-three; he had been a leader in Cardiff and probably above average in intellectual ability. Oxford was a very different place. The big fish of the smaller Cardiff pond, understandably, found it difficult to adjust to becoming a much smaller fish in the much larger Oxford lake. His closest friend at Mansfield was a young Congregational student, Charles Harold Dodd. Aubrey kept relatively few letters, but he kept many of Dodd's. Reading between the lines of some of these letters enables us to discern Aubrey's unease about Oxford. Just after he left Mansfield, in 1911, Aubrey wrote to Dodd apparently setting out his feelings about Oxford in general and Mansfield in particular. Aubrey's letter is not extant, but Dodd's reply, dated 1st July 1911, has survived. It runs as follows:

My dear Aubrey,

It is a sad letter you wrote me on Thursday. I was afraid you were unhappy about something. I am fearfully sorry that you are feeling like that about Mansfield. I have felt sorry, certainly, that you didn't seem to enter into things a bit more. I ought to have realized it was our fault. I hardly imagined before how very strangely our Oxford atmosphere must strike anyone who comes into it with an experience matured elsewhere. . .

[Dodd goes on to express what he owed personally to Aubrey's friendship and conversation. Then the letter continues:]

I am a reticent sort of person I know - deeply tarred with that Oxford 'artificiality' - but I don't - and I shall not forget your

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sympathy and kindness. . . it made me very happy, and humble, too.<sup>14</sup>

In the event Aubrey was awarded a third class Honours Degree in the Oxford School of Theology, a result which probably reflects his dis-ease with Oxford and Mansfield.

By the time he left Oxford, in the middle of June 1911, Aubrey had received a call from Victoria Road, Leicester, to become associated with the Revd P. T. Thomson in the ministry there. This was not the first approach he had had from a church. As early as December 1906, he had had a preliminary enquiry about his future plans from a Welsh church.<sup>15</sup> Early in 1911 he was approached by Alperton. This was five years before the appointment of Superintendents and so Aubrey wrote to J. H. Shakespeare asking for information and advice. Shakespeare replied that he had not seen Alperton, but that he understood it to be a growing neighbourhood with some cultivated people connected with the church! The letter then went on: 'However I have now written to an influential member of the church at Cotham Grove, Bristol, and I have also seen the secretary of the church at Hammersmith.'<sup>16</sup> The result was that the secretary of West End, Hammersmith, wrote to Principal Selbie of Mansfield, asking if Aubrey could give them a Sunday, adding that the usual fee was £3-3s-0d.<sup>17</sup> Whilst nothing came of these contacts, Archway Road, Highgate, was very keen that Aubrey should go there. Indeed, Archway called him contemporaneously with Victoria Road, Leicester.<sup>18</sup> Aubrey chose Leicester. He was ordained there on the evening of Wednesday, 27th September 1911, with J. H. Shakespeare preaching and ordaining, W. B. Selbie of Mansfield College sharing the ordination, and C. H. Dodd present as a student representative and friend.

During Aubrey's final year in Oxford, Edwin Aubrey had been involved in the preparation of yet another move, this time to a pastorate in America. With his father to the States went Aubrey's two brothers and three sisters, all of whom settled there permanently, leaving him alone in the United Kingdom.

The time at Leicester was pleasurable. Thomson and Aubrey related well together. Victoria Road was an exciting and forward-looking church. The fellowship was warm and welcoming. In November 1911, he wrote to Allen Gaunt at Mansfield, clearly extolling the joys of ministry. Gaunt replied:

Your vigorous letter was most welcome - like a communication from the outside to our garden enclosed by Academe . . . You touched a sympathetic chord when you asked me if I wouldn't rather be out in the thick of it.<sup>19</sup>

C. H. Dodd was also still at Oxford, helping at Mansfield whilst seeking a settlement which was long in coming. Aubrey wrote to him frequently and on 9th January 1912 Dodd replied:

I was delighted to hear such cheery news of your work. I hope things are continuing to hum. How many people have you visited by now? I expect it must be running into five figures!

Dodd goes on ruefully, 'I am still a preacher errant. Nineteen churches have I wooed, but to none am I wedded.'<sup>20</sup> That was soon to alter, for on 8th February 1912 Dodd wrote to Aubrey, telling him that he had accepted a call to Warwick, asking him to come to his recognition service and expressing pleasure at reasonable proximity. The letter ends delightfully and happily:

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Garvie is dining here to-night and is going to read a paper on "the metaphysics of the General Councils with especial reference to Nestorius!" - Don't you wish you were here!! Love C.H.D.<sup>21</sup>

The joy of the year 1912 was increased still further in June when Aubrey was married at Victoria Road, Leicester, to Edith Mary Moore of Watford. She was an Anglican by upbringing, but no information, written or oral, have I been able to discover as to how or where they met. The marriage was to prove very happy and the letters M. E. Aubrey wrote to his wife more than forty years later show how lasting and ever-deepening their happiness was.<sup>22</sup>

### III

But the calm delight of the Leicester ministry was all too shortlived. In the late summer of 1912, St Andrew's Street, Cambridge, began, to use Dodd's words, to woo Aubrey. At the beginning of August he received a letter from Mr Sturton, Senior Deacon at Cambridge, asking whether a previously arranged visit to St Andrew's Street, planned for 8th September, could possibly be considered as with a view to the pastorate. On 12th August, Aubrey wrote a letter in reply, of which he kept a copy - an all too rare occurrence. He points out that he has been scarcely a year in Leicester, yet already there is a bond of affection binding him to the church, so that his disinclination to leave Leicester amounts almost to a determination. But he does not close the door totally. As Aubrey admits, the reply is indefinite and unsatisfactory.<sup>23</sup> Sturton replies on 17th August, indicating that they will wait and see, and acknowledges the difficult question posed to Aubrey. Sturton also confesses that two deacons from St Andrew's Street had been at Leicester the previous Sunday - and had been discovered! 'As they were leaving your church,' wrote Sturton, 'they overheard the remark that St Andrew's Street are here to-day!'<sup>24</sup> Aubrey preached at Cambridge on 8th September and, thanks to T. R. Glover's diaries, we can follow events closely.<sup>25</sup> Aubrey's texts are recorded by Glover as: 'In the morning, Isaiah 32:12 'Man as a shadow of rock' - a thoughtful sermon. In the evening, Paul to the Ephesian elders - sense and no ear tickling'. On the Sunday afternoon Glover spent some time with Mr and Mrs Aubrey in the garden of a fellow deacon, A. C. Mansfield. From this day forward T. R. Glover became growingly influential in the Aubrey story. A church meeting had been called for the following Wednesday, 11th September. Glover was away at his holiday house in Sheringham, but he wrote a letter on the Tuesday to J. C. Sturton to be read at the meeting. Glover admits that he re-wrote part of it after a talk with Selbie, 'who reassured me on Aubrey's extraordinary maturity'. He was, of course, just twenty-seven. By some remarkable postal feat, Glover heard from Sturton on 12th September that, 'he never saw a meeting more unanimous and enthusiastic than last night in calling Aubrey'. On the same day Glover wrote an eight-page letter to Aubrey.<sup>26</sup> There was good reason so to do. Seemingly Sturton and Aubrey had come to a tacit agreement that any positive outcome of the 11th September church meeting should not go beyond an invitation to preach for a second time. On 12th September, Sturton also wrote to Aubrey, saying that whatever understanding they [i.e. Aubrey and himself] may have reached about procedure, 'We overlooked I had eight brother deacons to handle - their enthusiasm was so great and what they had gathered about the feeling of many church members made them united for going ahead [i.e. with an invitation] . . . I feel you to be too good and great a man to allow this unexpected procedure to prejudice the main question in any way.'<sup>27</sup>

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Glover's eight pages produced a formidable and urgent argument that Aubrey was the man, relatively young though he was, for Cambridge. Here are, in Glover's own words, the reasons why Aubrey should move:

St Andrew's Street is a place unique in the denomination, and it is at a crisis in its history. The leading men realize with vigour that a change must be made now and that we must do something to help all the other churches in the country who send young men and women to Cambridge. This church has been a great source of leakage and weakness in the Baptist denomination. I have known it off and on for 24 years. Now just at this moment you preach - you appeal - and you unite a church of peculiarly disparate elements, and it gives you a warm and urgent call to a great piece of work. . . I agree with Dr Selbie that a man should not move quickly - I quite agree with him. If it were any other church, you might well stay where you are. But you can do what is needed in Cambridge and Cambridge calls you. Other men might whom it would not call and it might call others who could not. In your case the two things meet . . . I expect you wish in a way that we had left you alone. I find this in Jeremiah and other prophetic records. A call is an upset very often.<sup>28</sup>

Not only did Glover write. On 15th September, Sturton wrote with a formal call, emphasizing that, 'I have never known the church so united before.' He goes on to say that the strength of the invitation cannot be expressed adequately in a letter and asks if he and one or two others can visit Aubrey in Leicester as bearers of the invitation.<sup>29</sup> On Wednesday, 18th September, Sturton, John Bird, A. C. Mansfield and T. R. Glover travelled to Leicester. Glover's diary records for that date: 'To Leicester - a jolly journey - and lunch at the station. Walked up over Park (once a race course) to Aubrey's house - and had a long "sederunt" with him and his wife putting case of St Andrew's Street. They showed well - she very sensible - and quiet - making one hope still for their coming. Back with Mansfield and Bird - neither thinking now we shall get him.' Further persuaders joined in to bring pressure on the young Melbourn Aubrey. J. H. Shakespeare wrote a personal note from Arundel House where he was recuperating from illness. He sets out six reasons why Aubrey should go - and adds a personal plea, 'I hope you will go. My Geoffrey [later Sir Geoffrey] is going to Emmanuel. There are many fathers like myself who will rejoice if you go.'<sup>30</sup> On the same day W. Y. Fullerton, Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, wrote a letter, as from Furnival Street though headed: 'Written in a train' (and it looks as if it was!). Fullerton writes that he has heard from Cambridge friends of the call and 'that they are going to press you hard. I do not wonder - and they have such a strong case that you will find it very difficult to resist them.'<sup>31</sup> Aubrey had no-one to whom to turn - in those days not even an Area Superintendent! So he wrote to Charles Dodd in Warwick. Dodd replied with a letter, the first sentence of which spoke more truly of Aubrey's whole life than Dodd could possibly have guessed.

Dear Aubrey,

You have a genius for getting into perplexing crossways - penalty of greatness of course! . . . I really feel it is a case that is quite beyond me. I have prayed - and will pray, that you may have clear guidance . . . to have

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a man like Reaveley Glover at one's side would be a privilege beyond all words - my admiration for him is unbounded - almost.<sup>32</sup>

Selbie joined in the chorus of persuasive pressure,<sup>33</sup> as did Alexander Souter, the New Testament and patristic scholar, who had been on the Mansfield staff until the previous year and who was now Regius Professor at Aberdeen.<sup>34</sup> Dr J. W. Ewing, the then President of the Baptist Union, wrote that 'a friend in Cambridge writes suggesting that I should send you a line in support of the invitation . . .'.<sup>35</sup> On 3rd October, Glover's diary records: 'P.C. from Father [i.e. Dr Richard Glover]<sup>36</sup> says Aubrey likely to accept.' T. R. Glover apparently wrote urgently again to Aubrey on the same day, but the decision had already been taken. On the following day Glover records that A. C. Mansfield had called to say that Aubrey is coming and that he [Glover] had received a letter from Aubrey to the same effect. The diary entry concludes: 'End and beginning - God prosper it!'

So the young Mr Aubrey moved to Cambridge in February 1913. He began his ministry on Sunday, 23rd February, preaching on the text, as recorded by Glover's diary, 'St Matthew 28:20. A full congregation and a great sermon - a high note'. The diary continues: 'The evening subject was Acts 17 6/15 and addressed to the young. In the morning wondered whether we should have hymn "Ring out the old - ring in the new!"'

For the next twelve years Aubrey ministered at St Andrew's Street. They were years of war and of peace. By any standards - humanly speaking - the Cambridge ministry was outstandingly successful. Almost certainly they were the happiest years of Aubrey's life. The church grew in numbers. In 1912 the membership was 412. When he left in 1925 it stood at 544. That increase was against a strong trend of decline in the English churches over the same period. His preaching was outstanding. As a young man, intelligent, academically gifted, well read, with broad interests, he appealed to the undergraduate population. The people heard him gladly. He was well known in the city, becoming mayor's chaplain. He successfully took the theological tripos through Trinity Hall. His two children were born during the Cambridge days.

An incident of no particular historical significance, but perhaps of some general interest, occurred in July 1924 during a family holiday at Hunstanton. A lady swimmer got into serious difficulties and was rescued from the sea by Aubrey. That it was literally a life-saving act may be judged from the letter the grateful husband wrote to him. 'It is quite impossible to find words that will adequately convey to you our gratitude and admiration for your noble act. Had it not been for your timely assistance my wife would undoubtedly have lost her life. That fact is probably of some comfort to you at times, but what *we* feel about it can only be left to the imagination.' The writer, Mr B. K. Halse of Leigh on Sea, sent a silver cigarette box as a gift which he suggested, 'may serve to remind you that we shall never forget the day that you risked your life to save that of a stranger.'<sup>37</sup>

## IV

The Cambridge calm was soon to be shattered. In 1925 Aubrey was to find himself in another of Dodd's 'perplexing crossways'. During 1923, J. H. Shakespeare's health had deteriorated seriously. He had been asked to preach at the great service in Uppsala Cathedral connected with the third Baptist World Congress in Stockholm. J. C. Carlile of Folkestone, editor of the *Baptist Times* and ex-President of the Baptist Union, was a close friend and was with him in Uppsala sharing in the service. Carlile records what happened next:



After I had read the Scriptures, he came to the pulpit to deliver the sermon. He did not notice the Bible and to the consternation of the congregation he pushed it over the pulpit. It fell with a great crash between me and the lady sitting at my side.<sup>38</sup> The preacher did not recover his composure and the sermon was hopelessly spoiled in delivery. At supper later he broke down and said, 'the falling of that Bible is the sign that my work is done'.<sup>39</sup>

The Assembly of 1924 accepted Shakespeare's resignation and appointed J. C. Carlile as acting secretary. For some time previously Carlile had been a power in the denomination; he was to remain influential for a further fifteen years. He was strong-minded and capable, a lively editor of and columnist in the *Baptist Times*, and also something of an 'ecclesiastical politician'. He was not universally popular and there were those who question whether perhaps too much power had accrued to him. Certainly the Focus group, which was a pressure group of younger Council members in the 1930s, including R. L. Child, J. O. Barrett, J. B. Middlebrook and E. A. Payne, viewed Carlile's influence on affairs with some concern.<sup>40</sup>

During the summer of 1924 Carlile made it clear that he was not really interested in being more than 'acting' secretary. He comments in his autobiography: 'Secretarial work is not my vocation'.<sup>41</sup> It was decided to proceed with the search for a Secretary of the Baptist Union. At that time there was no General Purposes and Finance Committee to nominate a secretarial committee, so, at the Baptist Union Council on 18th November, when T. R. Glover as President of the Union was in the chair, the past Presidents on the platform, together with the Vice President, T. S. Penny, a layman from Taunton, and Herbert Marnham the treasurer, were asked to withdraw and select fifteen ministers and laymen representative of every area of the Baptist Union. The fifteen selected, together with the officers and two representatives of the Baptist Women's League, were to serve as a Selection Committee. The minutes record that the past Presidents returned with their selected 'team' 'after a somewhat protracted absence'!

On 24th November, the *Baptist Times* reported that the committee is to meet early in December and 'will, it is hoped, submit one or more names to the Council in January'.<sup>42</sup> Time was clearly of the essence! T. R. Glover, for one, had no doubt not only that there would be only one name nominated, but also whose name it would be. His diary for 18th November 1924, the very day the Council chose the nominating committee, records: 'Council sets up committee of 15 to propose name of new secretary - who will be Aubrey, now Rushbrooke clear that he will stick to the European work.'

When the nominating committee did meet on 19th December, Glover, as President, was in the chair. He opened proceedings by reading two letters, one from Dr Carlile and the other from Dr Rushbrooke, requesting that their names should not be considered by the selection committee. After protracted discussion (the content of which is not minuted!), one name was agreed upon for recommendation to the Council at its meeting on 20 January 1925. The name was certainly that of M. E. Aubrey who seems to have been informed immediately but sworn to virtual secrecy. A somewhat bizarre problem then arose. On Christmas Eve, Glover's diary records: 'Aubrey called with scandalous fears re B.U. Secretaryship in *Christian World*.' Two paragraphs had, in fact, appeared in the *Christian World* dated 25th December, inferring that Aubrey was second-best choice.<sup>43</sup> The first and larger paragraph was headed 'Dr Carlile not a candidate'. It goes on to indicate that Carlile had written to the treasurer, Herbert Marnham, saying that, whilst he had agreed to

act in place of his friend J. H. Shakespeare when the latter became incapacitated, he had agreed to do so for one year only, by agreement with his Folkestone Church. The paragraph goes on to describe how much had been achieved in that one year but that now Dr Carlile wished to settle down again in the Folkestone ministry.

The second paragraph is headed 'Probable Secretary' and reads: 'The name of Rev. M. E. Aubrey of Cambridge is freely mentioned as the probable successor to Dr J. H. Shakespeare as Secretary of the Baptist Union now that Dr Carlile has intimated his desire to retain his Folkestone pastorate.' So much for Baptist confidentiality! Where the leak came from we may only guess. We may make what we will of Glover's further diary comment on 24th December that the *Christian World* paragraph 'verbally tallies with Carlile's letter to Marnham'. The Marnham letter is not extant but it is improbable that he showed it to the *Christian World*.

After Christmas, on 30th December, T. R. Glover records that he went out to Aubrey's with letters of support re secretaryship and discovered that he had received others in the same vein. Aubrey kept some of these letters, including those from T. S. Penny, W. E. Blomfield, Herbert Marnham and Charles Brown.<sup>44</sup> Aubrey became growingly perplexed as to what to do. He was bound to silence so far as St Andrew's Street was concerned. But he knew, only too well, what the reaction would be to his leaving. He must have known, also, that some in Cambridge would hear rumours and read the *Christian World*. Then a somewhat enigmatic paragraph appeared in the *Baptist Times* of 9th January, relating to press leaks. It stated that the appointment of a Secretary rested with the Baptist Union Assembly, that the nominating committee was pledged to secrecy and concluded: 'Our journalistic prophets have no information beyond this though they may make very shrewd guesses as to what is to happen.' The developing situation at Cambridge, and most particularly the rumours and insinuations that he was really the second choice, caused Aubrey to write a letter to the nominating committee - or to Glover as its chairman - refusing to allow his name to go to Council. Glover shared this information with some of the committee when he met them on 7th January, but was determined to proceed with the nomination. They tried to contact Aubrey but he was in Brighton and could not be located. Another batch of letters was sent to him in support of his nomination.<sup>45</sup> On 12th January, Glover, Marnham and Charles Brown met Aubrey. It was clearly a difficult meeting all round. Glover records: 'Aubrey did not show his best - nor near it - but will let his name go to Council and I expect will accept.'

I give all these details because they are relevant to all that follows. They also give an insight into how perplexing for Aubrey the crossway at which he stood actually was. He was thirty-nine, happy in Cambridge, he was being put under great pressure by Baptist leaders - both lay and ministerial. He was aware that, had Rushbrooke not refused to be considered, the chances were that the nomination would have gone in that direction. W. E. Blomfield had implied as much in a letter dated 30th December 1924.<sup>46</sup> Aubrey could not talk to his church before the nomination came to Council on 20th January; humanly speaking, he was on his own at this 'perplexing crossway', for there was no disinterested person to whom he could turn for advice.

At the Baptist Union Council on 20th January, T. R. Glover moved the nomination of M. E. Aubrey, making clear in so doing that neither Carlile nor Rushbrooke wanted their names considered. There was therefore one name, that of Aubrey, which came to Council as a unanimous recommendation from the nominating committee. The recommendation was seconded by J. H. Rushbrooke. A number of speakers followed, all of them warmly supporting the proposal. They represented a very broad band of support. Amongst them were Herbert Marnham (Baptist Union Treasurer), B. Grey Griffith (from South Wales), C. E. Wilson (Baptist

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Missionary Society), Mrs Carey Bonner (Baptist Women's League), S. W. Hughes, T. S. Penny (Vice President of the Union), John Chivers, Thomas Stewart (Scotland), and Dr J. H. Ewing (on behalf of the Superintendents). When Aubrey returned to hear the result, the whole Council stood in their places to signify the unanimity of the voting. Aubrey thanked the Council. He said that he would give the matter his prayerful consideration in conjunction with his church at Cambridge. He added that he believed that a man who left a church and a pastorate took a step downward.<sup>47</sup> Dr Dakin proposed that a suitable letter be sent to St Andrew's Street, Cambridge. The letter was written over the signature of T. S. Penny, Herbert Marnham and John C. Carlile.<sup>48</sup> They were, of course, Treasurer, Vice-President and Acting Secretary of the Baptist Union respectively. For obvious reasons, T. R. Glover, the President, could not be a signatory. The letter is addressed to Mr Smart as the chairman of the Deacons Meeting at St Andrew's Street and hopes that it will be possible for him to read it to the brethren when they assemble. The letter acknowledges T. R. Glover's service to the denomination as President and then reports the unanimous decision of Council to send forward the name of the Revd M. E. Aubrey to the Assembly in April as their nomination for the Secretaryship. The letter continues:

The Council are very conscious that in nominating Mr Aubrey to the vacant Secretaryship, they are putting a strain upon the loyalty of the Church at Cambridge. Mr Aubrey's ministry is known throughout the country, and nothing but the imperative sense of need would have constrained the Council to make the nomination. We trust that, when you are considering the matter, you will think, as of course you must, of the vital interests of the local church; but that you will also allow full force to the considerations of the larger needs of the denomination and that you will not make it too difficult for your pastor if he feels led to accept the nomination.

At last the whole church at St Andrew's Street could know what was going on - and react. React, it did, with determination, clarity and graciousness. On 28th January 1925 a special church meeting was held to consider the situation. A verbatim report of what happened reached Aubrey.<sup>49</sup> T. R. Glover began by explaining the background to, and the strength of, the Baptist Union's invitation to the church's minister. He admitted his own embarrassment that he was required, as Baptist Union President, to ask that his own minister should be released. A later speaker aptly described Glover as 'a predatory hawk with the spirit of a dove'. The minutes show a Baptist church meeting at its best as the members together struggled to discern God's will. They honoured Aubrey for the gloriously gifted minister that he clearly was - and how those people wanted him to stay. Yet there was a recognition that God might be determining otherwise. Oswin Smith was in the chair and moved a four-part resolution on behalf of the deacons.<sup>50</sup> This spoke first of the honour shown to the minister in the call to the Secretaryship of the Union; secondly, it expressed affection for him and recognition of his outstanding ministry; thirdly, it recognized that 'the denomination as a whole should be considered before the interests of any particular Church', yet submits that both must exist for the extension of the Kingdom of God and is confident that the minister will consider prayerfully and carefully whether the Kingdom of God may not be better served by his remaining in Cambridge; finally, it assures him of the confidence in him and esteem

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for him, and of the prayers of the people that he may be divinely guided. The resolution was seconded by Mrs Bird, who was also a deacon.

Reading through the speeches, it is possible to hear and to begin to share the anguish of those people of sixty-five years ago who wanted Aubrey to continue - and yet felt that they could not and should not try to stop him going. Here are just two examples: Mr Ridgeon is speaking, '... A good many of us here are business men, and we know what it is to chafe and ruffle from Monday morning to Saturday night. When we come here on Sunday we are all of a frazzle and we feel as if life is not worth living. But on Sunday night we go home with a stiffer backbone and that is because of Mr Aubrey's message to us Sunday after Sunday. I should certainly like to have made the resolution stronger, but I have a feeling that we cannot suggest to him what his duty is, but we can say to him that we want you badly, and we do not feel that we can let you go.'<sup>51</sup> Mr Smith (of Ashden) says, '... After listening to the remarks of Dr Glover, does it not rather point to the matter as being of God? And if the matter be of God, must we not leave it there? Further, we can express to Mr Aubrey our great devotion to him, and I yield to no-one here in love for him, having been a member of his for four years and should feel a deep loss should he accept the Council's invitation. I therefore think that what we should do to-night is to make that resolution a resolution of love to him and a wish that he should retain his position of minister among us, but that we must leave it entirely to him who will be prompted by God in the matter...' <sup>52</sup>

There were nearly twenty speakers in all. After a fascinating debate of the highest order, the resolution was put to the meeting and passed unanimously. It was further agreed that a copy should be sent to the Acting Secretary of the Baptist Union and also to the Editor of the *Baptist Times* (they were, of course, the same person, J. C. Carlile!).

Now Aubrey had to decide what to do. Glover and his committee had to sit it out and wait. They were not inactive and the persuaders were at it again, including Glover himself in a phone call to Mrs Aubrey. The *Baptist Times* published the resolution the following week, 6th February, with a comment by Carlile: 'If Mr Aubrey becomes the pilot, the captain or the engineer - whichever term may be used to describe the secretary - he may be quite sure that he will be surrounded by loyal spirits and will have the prayers of a great community.' Fine words - all too typical of those spoken before a voyage commences!

On 7th February, Aubrey wrote to Glover accepting nomination:

After a great deal of hesitation I have been led irresistibly to the conclusion that it is God's will that in this matter I should submit myself to the wish of the Baptist people... It is one of life's strange happenings that this letter should be addressed to one of my own deacons, who did so much to bring me to Cambridge and to keep me for these twelve years of the happiest fellowship and service.<sup>53</sup>

At the Tuesday morning session of the Assembly on 28th April,<sup>54</sup> the President, T. S. Penny, proposed Aubrey's election. Herbert Marnham seconded. Mr Oswin Smart, of Cambridge, made a felicitous speech including, according to the *Baptist Times*, 'an unrepeatable humorous reference to the Cambridge diaconate - and especially to the 'super deacon' whose identity our discernment found in Dr Glover!' Representatives from Wales, the Baptist Missionary Society and the North of England all spoke warmly in support and the resolution was carried unanimously. Carlile, never lost for words, describes the scene:

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Mr Aubrey was welcomed by the President, who held him by the hand for quite a few moments. The feeling of some of our leaders was apparent in eyes that glistened strangely. It could not but be felt by them that a new chapter in our denominational life was being opened in that welcoming act. An old order was passing, grand but now closed. A new era was coming to birth.

So Melbourn Evans Aubrey entered into his secretaryship.

### NOTES

1. W. M. S. West, *To be a Pilgrim*, Lutterworth, 1983, obtainable from Bristol Baptist College or through Baptist Historical Society.
2. West, *op.cit.*, pp.xi, 203.
3. Manuscript at present in possession of Mr J. M. Aubrey, eventually to go to Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.
4. There are in fact two further laconic references, written partly in shorthand, which Aubrey learnt at school. Both refer to Dr Johnson and have to do with public houses! The first comes from *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, vol.ii, p.452, and reads, 'There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn'. The second is from *Hawkin's Life of Johnson*, p.91, and reads, 'I have heard him assert, that a tavern chair was the throne of human felicity'.
5. For details of Edwin Aubrey's service to the Baptist denomination in the United Kingdom, see his entry in *Baptist Union Handbook*, 1906.
6. See *Proud Century: The first hundred years of Taunton School*, S. P. Record, Taunton, 1948, especially Chapters II and III.
7. Details recorded in *The Tauntonian* for 1902, 1903, 1904; bound copies available at Taunton School.
8. *The Tauntonian*, April 1958.
9. *The Tauntonian*, Summer 1904.
10. *Cap and Gown*, Vol.5, p.54, (in possession of author). Almost certainly November 1907.
11. J. C. Carlile describes Shakespeare as 'an autocrat to his fingertips; a leader who knew his own mind and followed his own way', and as one whose 'dictatorship was wise and benevolent'. John C. Carlile, *My Life's Little Day*, 1935, pp.152, 169.
12. *Cap and Gown*, *op.cit.*, March ? 1908, p.96. This issue contains a frontispiece photograph of M. E. Aubrey, B.A.
13. See *Baptist Union Handbook* entries for A. Dakin and M. E. Aubrey.
14. This letter and all the other letters referred to in this paper are, unless otherwise stated, in the present possession of the author. In due course they will go with all other Aubrey material to the Angus Library.
15. A letter was written to Aubrey on 14th December 1906 from Llangollen but does not make clear exactly the church involved.
16. Letter from J. H. Shakespeare dated 23rd February 1911.
17. Letters from Campbell Macintosh, Secretary, West End Baptist Church, Hammersmith, to Selbie, dated 21st February 1911, and to Aubrey, dated 23rd February 1911.
18. Letter from G. S. Angas, Secretary, Archway Road Baptist Church, Highgate, dated 5th June 1911, replying to Aubrey's letter of refusal dated 29th May 1911.
19. Letter dated 29th November 1911.
20. A 10-page letter written from 92 Southmoor Road, Oxford.
21. Letter written from same address.
22. A small number of personal letters written by Aubrey to his wife over the years are extant and in the possession of the family.
23. Letter written from 'Northcote', 101 Clarendon Park Road, Leicester.
24. Letter written from Gonville House, Hills Road, Cambridge.
25. T. R. Glover's diaries are housed with his correspondence in the Library of St John's College, Cambridge. See H. G. Wood, *Terrot Reaveley Glover*, Cambridge, 1953, p.222 for a description of these diaries. It would appear that they have remained unconsulted by Baptist writers since H. G. Wood used them.
26. Written from Sheringham.
27. Written from address as in note 24.
28. It is a formidable letter written by a formidable man. Although towards the end of the letter Glover writes, 'It may be that you are to stay at Leicester', the whole argument in the letter points the other way.
29. Letter from same address in Cambridge as notes 24 and 27.
30. Letter dated 18th September and written on Arundel House notepaper.
31. Letter dated 18th September.
32. Letter written from 23 West Street, Warwick.
33. Letter written from Mansfield College, 4th October.
34. Letter written from 9 College Bounds, Aberdeen, 29th September.
35. Letter written from Ste Marguerite, 40 Grove Park, Camberwell SE, 23rd September 1912.
36. Dr Richard Glover, elder statesman amongst Baptists, had been Baptist Union President in

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- 1884 and remained influential until his death in 1919.
37. Letter dated 9th December 1924 and written from The Cottage, Leigh Hall Road, Leigh on Sea.
  38. J. C. Carlile, *op.cit.*, p.167.
  39. In assessing the affect upon J. H. Shakespeare, it has to be remembered that the pulpit in the Cathedral at Uppsala is a very high one and the Bible was very heavy.
  40. Ernest Payne's Journal comments of the B. U. Councils re early 1930s: 'M. E. Aubrey the Secretary was still a relatively young man and a rather dominating role was played by Dr J. C. Carlile who had had charge of the Union during Dr Shakespeare's breakdown in health.'
  41. Carlile, *op.cit.*, p.168.
  42. *Baptist Times* 24th November 1924. The Council was to meet on 20th January.
  43. *Christian World* 25th December 1924. Bound copies are in the Congregational Library now housed in Dr Williams's Library.
  44. T. S. Penny from Taunton dated 27th December 1924. W. E. Blomfield from Rawdon College, dated 27th December 1924. Herbert Marnham from Frognal Rise, Hampstead Heath, dated 29th December 1924. Charles Brown from Chorley Wood (on Ferme-Park notepaper) dated 30th December 1924.
  45. Including one from R. Rowntree Clifford of West Ham Central Mission dated 7th January 1925.
  46. Blomfield wrote from Rawdon: 'I should have been quite content to see Dr R. in the position but I always had some doubt as to the practicability of his taking up a work which must interfere with the close attention needful for the Baptists on the Continent . . .' He goes on to write forcibly, pastorally and persuasively to Aubrey. The letter reveals Blomfield's interesting view of the denominational leadership situation in 1925. 'Securing a denominational leader is as hard as securing the Principal of a College. I saw that clearly enough when Bristol was vacant. The thing was narrowed down to about three possible men. Were you to decline we should find it hard to secure anything like unanimity.'
  47. Blomfield had written a third letter to Aubrey on 1st January 1925, having apparently received one from Aubrey. In the letter he talks about whether to become the Secretary of the Baptist Union and therefore to leave the pastoral ministry is a step up or a step down. He suggests that it would be a step down if Aubrey were simply to be a Secretary. But he suggests, 'You are going to be vastly more and 20 years hence you will rejoice.'
  48. A copy of this letter is among the Aubrey papers in author's possession.
  49. This report is also amongst the Aubrey papers.
  50. A copy of this resolution is attached to the report in author's possession.
  51. Page 12 of report of meeting.
  52. Page 13 of report.
  53. Letter in *Baptist Times*, 13th February 1925.
  54. Report of Assembly in *Baptist Times*, 1st May 1925.

The author wishes to express his appreciation of the ready help given to him by Mr J. M. Aubrey in the preparation of this lecture.

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### RECENT DEPOSITS IN THE ANGUS LIBRARY

Newport Pagnell Churchbook 1824-1878. Smarden, Kent, Churchbook 1705-1843; Churchbook 2 1845-1908; Church Minutes 1888-1906; Register of Members 1756. Harlow, Foster Street Burial Ground Register. General Baptist Association of the New Connexion, Minutes and Register 1887-1938; Minutes 1922-1939. Saffron Walden, Cosens General Baptist Trust Volume 1 - summary of Documents 1725-1864; copy of Will of Robert Cosens; Contributions to the New Meeting House 1792.

and a puzzle

Also two small books of lists of Members and Baptismal Records dated 1767 onwards for an unnamed church. They have references to Trowbridge and to Bradford (presumably on Avon) and seem to relate to a church in Wiltshire. Anyone interested in trying to establish to which church they refer should contact the Librarian/Archivist, Mrs Sue Mills, at Regent's Park College, Pusey Street, Oxford, OX1 2LB.