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JOHN HOWARD SHAKESPEARE
Prophet of Ecumenism

J.H. Shakespeare was a pioneer of the ecumenical movement before it became fashionable,[1] but he is given scant reference in official histories of the movement and in the writings of commentators on ecumenical affairs. One of the few references to him and to his ecumenical testament, *The Churches at the Cross-Roads*, is by Father H.R. Brandreth in a chapter on 'Approaches of the Churches to each other in the Nineteenth Century' in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement.* Writing about Shakespeare's efforts to hold the first Baptist World Congress in London in 1905, Brandreth refers to him as 'one of the most notable Baptist ecumenists of his day'.[2] The Revd K. Slack, in a recent edition of his comprehensive *The British Churches To-day*, whilst granting that 'British Baptists have given outstanding leaders to the [ecumenical] movement',[3] refers only to Dr Hugh Martin and Dr E.A. Payne in a footnote. In a memoir[4] written in 1929, Dr Charles Brown, a Baptist minister in London, although praising Shakespeare for his qualities as a leader of men and his contribution to the development of the Baptist denomination, says nothing of his work for Christian unity. It is paradoxical that his commitment aroused such widespread controversy in his own denomination as he remained the most loyal of Baptists.

John Howard Shakespeare was born at Malton in the East Riding of Yorkshire in 1857. His father, Benjamin, was a Baptist minister and a native of Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire. Benjamin and his wife, Mary, went to Malton in 1857 and six years later the family moved to Derby and then to Leicester, where the young J.H. Shakespeare came under the influence of the Revd James Thew, 'the cultured minister of the Belvoir Street Church whose "advanced" theological opinions gravely disturbed Charles Haddon Spurgeon'.[5]

After studying at Regent's Park College and London University, he became minister of St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich, in 1883, at the age of twenty-six. During his ministry in Norwich the foundations of his commitment to Christian unity were laid. Before he took up his new appointment as Secretary of the Baptist Union, a Valedictory Service was held on 17 October 1898. In thanking the Church Secretary, Shakespeare spoke of the influence his work in Norwich had had on him - his words were a portent of his later views:

> I am conscious that I have changed in many directions. I was brought up in a very severe and strict school of ecclesiastical thought. I probably attached too much importance to the questions which divide Christians from each other. I was too fond of controversy, and made too much of the necessary divergence of opinion among the people of God. But I have learned to say with a more intense meaning, 'grace, mercy and peace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth'. I hold my own convictions as

> strongly as ever, but I trust that I respect the sincere convictions of other Christians more than I did.[6]

The strong and unswerving commitment he made to Christian unity has to be seen in the context of his organizational and administrative work to strengthen and develop the Baptist Union. He turned his attention first to Free Church unity and was disappointed when federation had to be accepted in its place. He refers often to the federal principle: 'I have already stated my view, that Church unity will never come by the denominations uniting in social service, but I am equally sure that if they could be brought together as Churches into a real federation, they could exert a greatly increased influence on all public and moral issues'.[7]

Ecumenical leaders are driven by various forces. All, like Shakespeare, have the theological motive in some measure, but certainly Archbishop Söderblom of Uppsala and Bishop G.K.A. Bell of Chichester felt that more could be achieved by co-operation on social questions *as a first step* than through theological debates and the defining of theological positions. Shakespeare's commitment was, however, firstly theological. Although he was greatly influenced by Söderblom's work after the 1914-18 war, it was Bishop Brent's Faith and Order movement meetings, in which he took part, that most affected him. During the General Convention of the American Episcopal Church in October 1910, Brent, who was Bishop of the Philippines, spoke of the time being right for the Churches to come together in a world conference on faith and order.[8] The concept was developed at the Edinburgh Conference of 1910.

Shakespeare sought through reunion to preserve the one catholic Church and bring the riches of his own tradition to bear on this, as his friend, P.T. Forsyth, had always suggested. 'Forsyth sought to draw attention to those elements of Congregationalism that ought to be preserved in the great Church. So, in his own way, did Shakespeare'.[9]

This is not to minimize the theological commitment of Söderblom and Bell. Söderblom had always insisted on something very near to Shakespeare's heart, 'evangelical Catholicity', as a sound basis for the social co-operation he wanted: 'The new catholicity which we now consider as the foundation for supranational order of law and supranational continuity of law'.[10] He and Bell were both very near to Marc Boegner who, in his life of Fallot[11], had quoted him as saying, 'The Church will be Catholic or it will not be the Church; the Christian will be Protestant or he will not be Christian'. Boegner describes how he read through some of Fallot's notes and correspondence and found: '*Evangelical Catholic* - the phrase is Oberlin's. I am taking it over and making it my own. It is more than a name - it is a programme that sums up for me thirty years of thinking and working. Henceforth I look on myself as an evangelical Catholic seconded by the will of the Head to the service of the Reformed Church of France.' This was written on 23 April 1895. Boegner comments:

> It is now sixty years since I was reading those pages, written some ten years earlier ... It was on that day that I was born into the ecumenical life, and the summons it contains was never more to leave me.[12]

Not only is this almost identical with Söderblom's conception, it is also practically akin to Forsyth's and Shakespeare's. In an essay on unity and theology, Forsyth speaks of a liberal evangelicalism being the true catholicism.[13] This was Shakespeare's grounding in his approach to unity.

Shakespeare's utterances and writings often seem more conciliatory than those of many Free Churchmen of the period but he did not write from an undefined theological basis. In a letter dated 7 May 1915 to Canon Tissington Tatlow, the Chairman of the Faith and Order meetings, he wrote:

> With great respect I suggest that it is to misconceive the question to suggest that there is any proposal that Episcopacy should be abandoned by any Church or that any Church should abandon its heritage, 'this solemn trust'. The question is rather whether Anglicanism is prepared for purposes of Communion to acknowledge a ministry which derives its validity from Christ through the people of God. Free Churchism can claim such a ministry. We have an undoubted succession in the call to the ministry by the succession of believers.[14]

The 1914-18 war made a deep impression on Shakespeare - it was to him an unmitigated disaster - and it is clear that for him, as for Söderblom, it brought an almost frenzied urgency into the work for unity. Although his friendship with the Archbishop of Uppsala did not develop until some years later, their attitude to the war was similar. Even in the immediate post-war period, despite the widespread shallow optimism, Shakespeare did not change his view.

> We live in a world which has had a terrible set-back. So sure were we of ourselves that peace had become a platitude. Our audiences yawned when pious resolutions were moved at our assemblies. It seemed unreal and incredible that nations should be involved in the waste and agony and in the supreme folly and wickedness of universal war. But Armageddon has arrived. In a moment, the crust of our civilization has broken up and the raging fires have flared up more fiercely than ever before.[15]

In 1922 Archbishop Söderblom had given an interview on the occasion of the Copenhagen meeting of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches.

> He had listened to Dr Mott suggesting in his most optimistic vein that a world war had been a necessity in order to create, as a reaction, a renaissance movement all over the world. Söderblom challenged this: 'No, no, no! I know John Mott very well, but I cannot share his view on this subject. The world war was terrible, only terrible. It was disaster, only disaster!'[16]

Throughout the war Shakespeare appeared to remain relatively passive but he organized a number of schemes for the housing of Belgian refugees. He remained loyal to Lloyd George and the Government even as the slaughter mounted. The horror so well depicted in Joan Littlewood's play, *Oh, what a lovely war!* affected the homes and families of most of the Baptist ministers for whom he was responsible. It was during the war that one of Shakespeare's most notable achievements was implemented - the foundation of the United Board for the appointment of Baptist, Congregational and Primitive Methodist Chaplains to the forces.

Social and international questions became more prominent in his preaching and writing; many churches' lack of contact with the idealism prompted by the war seemed scandalous. Shakespeare returns to this theme again and again. It affected his political action: whilst remaining a staunch Liberal he became more internationalist in outlook and moved very far from a *laissez-faire* Liberalism which saw only danger in the rise of the Labour movement and the need for constant and radical reform.

Gradually new contacts between the Churches in Britain were being formed and Shakespeare's ideas, spurred on by the work in connection with Free Church unity, were developed into an outline for his book, *The Churches at the Cross-Roads*, which dealt with the post-war situation, the severance of denominationalism from the younger generation, the need for Free Church unity and his acceptance of Federation as a step in the right direction towards full unity, the theological basis of his commitment to unity, and his acceptance of episcopacy. The last section dealt briefly with some personal reminiscences of churchmen and meetings he had attended in connection with reunion; there were also some reminiscences of his early religious life.

Allegations that Shakespeare was a naïve idealist with regard to Church unity are refuted by much of the book. Shakespeare clearly distinguished between the scandal of disunity from a theological point of view, reflected in the discomfort of many denominational leaders, and the circumstances enabling denominations to be mobilized for change. His acceptance of and work for Free Church Federation is a clear example of his pragmatic approach to many of the problems.

At first the book was well received, particularly by those Free Churchmen and Anglicans who had worked with Shakespeare on the many commissions connected with Faith and Order. These men, of course, knew Shakespeare well and appreciated his sensitive personality. Typical is a letter from Dr Edward Talbot, Bishop of Winchester, who wrote:

> Once in the Church we thought gravely of schism and proscribed Nonconformists as schismatical.
>
> Then we began to feel this unbecoming, and with a mixture of charity and of indifference we thought that the old view of schism was in bad taste and narrow.

> But you bring us into a third condition; the old dread of schism revives but it is not imputed to others; we all share its guilt, shame and loss. *You* have made me feel this more than I ever felt before.
>
> The way forward is still hard to see; some steps of it at any rate are plainer for you than for us. May you be strengthened and guided to take them and we shall all be the gainers.[17]

Writers in the *Baptist Times* were surprisingly encouraging. Dr Wheeler Robinson wrote of his commitment to the 'Unity of the Church of which cause he is the most distinguished prophet and apostle', and found that 'The book strikes its deepest and most deeply-moving note in the autobiographical survey with which it closes - the first instalment, we may hope, of that volume of recollections which ought to come from Mr Shakespeare's eventual and deserved freedom from the world of affairs.'[18] Later in the month the *Baptist Times* editorial confined itself to general comment: 'The loudest call for Christian union which we have ever heard arose from the famous Edinburgh Conference and its records supply Mr Shakespeare with material of which he makes admirable use'.[19]

The book had been published a few days before the war ended on 11 November. A copy was sent on 6 November to King George V whose secretary, Lord Stamfordham, acknowledged it on the 9th, saying that 'His Majesty is graciously pleased to accept it. He has found it most interesting as he has the matter of Church unity truly at heart'.[20]

On 15 November a United Free Church service, conducted by Dr Shakespeare, took place in the Albert Hall, attended by King George V, Queen Mary and the Princess Royal. It was a wet, chilly evening and one can imagine the great amphitheatre aglow, its solidity and gilt boxes still witnessing to the Victorian era which was now in ruins. The king was quite sympathetic to the Free Churches and, through the wise and tactful counsel of Lord Stamfordham, endeavoured to understand not only Dissent but also the early Labour movement. He must, however, have been conscious of the changed circumstances, with so many of his European relatives overthrown, and joy in victory tarnished by the appalling carnage and loss of life, ending in a period of revolution. 'More than most of his associates King George V earnestly desired a world of social justice; but all that he could see around him was a new world of vituperation and disobedience that was destroying everything that he had known and respected since 1879'.[21] This was apparent at the Albert Hall service: 'To Mr Shakespeare, both before and after the service, both King George and Queen Mary expressed the strongest sympathy with his work for the unity of the churches.'[22]

However, the favourable comments by some Baptists on *The Churches at the Cross-Roads*, and more especially by members of the Establishment, lulled Shakespeare into a false sense of the acceptance of his own views within the Baptist denomination and the Free Churches at large. In fact they were not ready for such advanced ideas. During a visit to discuss the memorial to Shakespeare, Sir James

Marchant (Shakespeare's friend) told the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, that Robertson Nicoll 'is opposed violently to the policy of Shakespeare and his friends in favour of reunion and is going to "go" for Shakespeare as a renegade who is truckling to episcopacy'.[23]

As editor of the *British Weekly*, Sir William Roberston Nicoll saw himself as the guardian of Free Church principles and he took immediate exception to Shakespeare's views on episcopacy. In *The Churches at the Cross-Roads* Shakespeare had written:

> It is an idle dream that unity can be secured between the Church of England and the Evangelical Free Churches except upon the basis of episcopacy ... Free Churchmen may regret that it is so. They may, and do, wish that the attitude of the episcopal to the non-episcopal Churches was, in respect to all questions of ministry and sacraments, like that of the non-episcopal to one another. But the fact remains that any widespread attempt to surrender episcopacy would inevitably break up the Church of England; that its evangelical members, no less than its Anglo-Catholic, value episcopacy far too much to let it go; and that no responsible Anglican leader has any intention of forfeiting the mediating position which the English Church holds as between East and West.[24]

With regard to re-ordination he observed:

> The question of re-ordination will inevitably arise. A way must be found at a later stage and in a calm and gentle atmosphere. It must be considered simply as involving regularity within the Church of England, and not validity.[25]

There was an immediate outcry and people overlooked his words a few lines lower down:

> In the most emphatic language, every suggestion that Free Church ministers are to cast any doubt or suspicion upon their own ordination to the ministry must be expressly excluded.[26]

Robertson Nicoll wrote an editorial in the *British Weekly* on 5 December 1918 entitled 'Mr Shakespeare at the Cross-Roads':

> It is time to speak plainly about this business in which Mr Shakespeare is one of the protagonists. It has gone quite far enough while people were too preoccupied by the war to pay attention to private enclaves of ecclesiastics at Oxford.
>
> We challenge Mr Shakespeare to put the straight forward issue before the Baptist Union next May and to ask the rank and file of the delegates to say whether their Secretary is representing them or vitally misrepresenting them.
>
> Five and twenty years ago we ardently defended the Baptist Union when Mr Spurgeon denounced its members as being on the 'down grade'. We are confident that they are not on the 'down grade' today. Mr Shakespeare will

> find no followers along the steep gradient down which he is pointing them. But one thing we cannot help regretting; we do wish it were possible to hear Mr Spurgeon on Mr Shakespeare.[27]

He also wrote to Dr J.D. Jones, a Congregational minister in Bournemouth who had a long, detailed correspondence with Sir William Robertson Nicoll, editor of the *British Weekly*.

> That people like Talbot [Bishop of Winchester] should be pleased with Shakespeare is quite natural. He means, if he means anything, a submission, and if we were in their position we should favour this as a sign of grace.[28]

The controversy raged in the columns of the *British Weekly*. Amongst Baptists, T.R. Glover and Henry Townsend were Shakespeare's strongest critics. 'Dr Henry Townsend went so far as to say that many Baptist churches considered that the pass was being sold behind their backs by the association of Dr Shakespeare with such proposals'.[29] Few in the denomination came to Shakespeare's aid but Dr J.E. Roberts, President of the Baptist Union and minister of Union Chapel, Oxford Road, Manchester, reproved the *British Weekly* on 9 January 1919:

> May I be allowed to express my opinion that the article does Mr Shakespeare a serious injustice, and, what is more to be deplored, is calculated to imperil the cause of Christian co-operation. The injustice to Mr Shakespeare must be apparent to those who know him well and who are acquainted not only with his book but with his incessant toil for more efficient Church work.

He concluded by saying that he was appalled at 'the utter absence of any adequate sense of the urgency of Christian co-operation'.[30]

Shakespeare was not completely alone in his stand on the Free Church side. Malcolm Spencer, a Congregationalist, urged Free Churchmen to accept episcopacy as the safeguard of catholicity. He was in some senses less hesitant than Shakespeare in advocating episcopal ordination:

> I therefore plead that we should accept the Bishops' plea for a ministry having the acknowledged authority of the whole Church, which should administer on behalf of the whole Church the Church's central sacrament of Christian unity; and that those who have not the recognised authorization should not, in general, be held competent for the office.[31]

Two other events should be mentioned: Shakespeare's speech to the Baptist Union Assembly in May 1919 and the presentation to him on 30 October 1919 in connection with Sir James Marchant's appeal. Shakespeare was a sensitive man and the harsh criticism troubled him deeply, but he was determined to make strong reply to his critics. The *Baptist Times* recorded his protest at the Assembly:

> 'I feel very great difficulty in speaking at all because, as you will imagine, after the long controversy and after the utterance of a great many things that I know to be inaccurate and irrelevant, it is not easy to control the old Adam

> in me.' He continued by mentioning that in Sheffield Cathedral for a whole day clergy and Nonconformists had conducted half-hour services and that a week ago he had had a letter from the Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields and in response had attended his Church and received the Communion at his hands; he had also read the lesson at the morning service. Anglican chaplains in France had declared themselves in favour of intercommunion with Nonconformists.
>
> 'What is to be said to these facts, these outstretched hands, these calls for help in the saving of England and the world?' Nothing on earth (he declared in passionate tones) would induce him to slam the door in the face of these men. 'I am not at the cross roads. I have chosen my path and I shall follow it.'[32]

The presentation to him by so many Anglicans and Free Churchmen in the autumn came as a great tonic. Shakespeare did not search for praise or seek the limelight. He declined a number of offers of a political nature from the Lloyd George administration. The only honours he accepted were the honorary DD from Glasgow University and the honorary LLD from McMaster University in Canada. Whatever the impulses behind Marchant's organization were, the great response would not have been possible without spontaneous, warm feelings towards Shakespeare's leadership.

> In appreciation of his services to the cause of Christian unity, the Rev. J.H. Shakespeare, secretary of the Baptist Union, was honoured by many representatives of all the different Christian denominations yesterday, when his portrait in oils, by John Collier, was unveiled at the Baptist Church House, Southampton Row. He was also given an illuminated address, signed by the Archbishops, Bishops, the Prime Minister and the leading members of the different denominations. The portrait is to be placed in the library of the Baptist Church House, and a replica will hang in Mr Shakespeare's home ...
>
> The Rev. H.R.L. Sheppard, speaking on behalf of many in the Church of England, expressed their indebtedness to Mr Shakespeare for what he had done for Christian unity.[33]

It was indeed an irony of the times that the Establishment praised him while a strong section of his own denomination would have gladly disowned him.

Despite this apparent rejection by many of his own denomination, the Lambeth Conference of 1920 appeared to vindicate his views. Speaking of the 'Appeal to all Christian People', Archbishop Lang wrote:

> Here is dear old Halifax writing that few things in his life have given him more pleasure. And on the other hand here is Scott Lidgett saying that it is the most remarkable document issued since the Reformation; Shakespeare, saying that 'it is the finger of God'; Horton, that it creates a new epoch; and Zanzibar pleading with all his fellow-Catholics that they will make it their guiding vision for years to come. How can one doubt, with all this in mind, that there is some purpose of God in this thing.[34]

Shakespeare welcomed these new developments with enthusiasm. After Archbishop Lang spoke at the Baptist Union Assembly in 1921, Shakespeare wrote to him, 'Your address was so persuasive that I said afterwards that if someone had risen and moved that we accept episcopal ordination, it would have been carried. I think this is an exaggeration, but something very near it would have been reached.'[35]

In late 1922 Shakespeare was still writing in a hopeful vein about the Free Churches accepting episcopacy. Commenting on the series of meetings that resulted from the Lambeth Conference, he wrote:

> Let us think nobly and generously in the presence of a great situation. Only by bad history can we cite our Puritan forefathers against episcopacy for they believed in it and desired to remain under it within the Church of England.[36]

Yet one wonders whether some of the Anglican leaders fully appreciated the heart-searching that had gone on amongst many Free Church ministers who in fact had a strong conception of the Church. Archbishop Lang wrote in 1921, after addressing both the Baptist and Presbyterian Assemblies, 'In both cases the reception was very cordial to me personally, but I do not think these good people have any real care about a visible Church at all. I am afraid that they are still content if only they can preach at St Paul's and communicate at our altars'.[37]

J.H. Shakespeare never had a strong constitution and his son, Sir Geoffrey Shakespeare, has told me how he took his father on many occasions to Devon in states of deepest melancholy and that it would be several days before this feeling would pass.[38] During all these days of controversy he had to continue with the day-to-day work of the Baptist Union, as well as preparing for the Third Baptist World Congress to be held in Stockholm, 21-27 July 1923. Shakespeare always felt that the Baptist World Alliance was a force for good and a step in the right direction, although he was aware of the dangers of denominational organizations engendering an anti-ecumenical spirit.[39]

These meetings in July 1923 brought him in touch with Nathan Söderblom, Archbishop of Uppsala, who was one of the most significant leaders of the ecumenical movement, particularly in its Life and Work form. Söderblom asked Shakespeare to preach in Uppsala Cathedral. On 9 February 1923 Shakespeare replied, 'Though we have not met, I have known for a long time that we were both deeply interested in the same cause and were moved by the same principles of peace and unity'. They corresponded about other matters. Shakespeare was becoming more international in outlook and looked to Söderblom as champion for a united Church which would be able to raise its voice on the complex international problems of post-war Europe and would be in tune with the thought of many of those who had returned from the war.

The situation when French troops occupied the Ruhr on 11 January 1923 greatly troubled Söderblom because he was a great admirer of France.[40] 'There is hardly anybody [in Sweden] who feels warmer gratitude towards France and its culture than

I, towards the best in the French spirit, its great personalities or humble servants ... It is a fact that in Sweden there is nobody whose heart beats faster at the sound of the most beautiful of all languages'.[41] Nevertheless he was convinced that the Church had to speak. The Swedish bishops signed Söderblom's appeal on 1 February. The statement said:

> We judge nobody for our knowledge is in part. But we condemn the methods of violence. The curse which is sown will bear new, even more terrible wars. Conscience and hearts everywhere burn with the question, What can be done? We, the servants of the Church in Sweden, appeal to our fellow Christians in France and in all countries, to join with us to invoke from God clarity and strength for a heartening act.[42]

Shakespeare felt the seriousness of the situation and commented to Söderblom:

> I have received a copy of the appeal from the Primarius and from the Swedish Bishops with regard to the unhappy movements which are now taking place in Europe. I shall put it before my Council shortly. I am sure that their agreement and sympathy with the appeal will be unanimous, and that any influence the Baptist Union can exert will be in favour of putting aside old hatreds and selfish ambitions, and seeking to promote the spirit of brotherhood and goodwill among the nations of Europe.[43]

Preparations continued for the Third Baptist World Congress in Stockholm and on 17 July 1923 the English delegates set out from King's Cross for Immingham where they boarded the Canadian Pacific liner *Marloch*. On Sunday, 22 July, the delegates went by special trains from Stockholm to Uppsala for the Cathedral service. The Revd J.C. Carlile conducted the service with Archbishop Söderblom and the Revd J. Byström. J.H. Shakespeare preached the sermon. Söderblom's favourite text was in his mind as he referred to 'unprofitable servants' in the search for unity.[44] However, he decided to preach from Luke 9:62, 'And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'. This was particularly appropriate with regard to the stand he had taken on the question of unity. After a strong appeal for world peace, Shakespeare said:

> The other problem of our time is Church Unity. Indeed the two are very closely related, for men will only deride Churches which desire peace everywhere except among themselves. Warring Churches cannot speak convincingly to a warring world. It is evident that many have put their hands to this plough, and among them the Archbishop of Uppsala, the central figure of Protestant Europe both in Peace and Unity. It is a hard field, full of stones and weeds and poisonous things. But I would bear my testimony to the change which has been wrought by the appeal of the Bishops of the Church of England to all Christian people. What a change has come about during the last five years. Once we Baptists were hunted through Europe - now we preach in Cathedrals; once we were shut up in dungeons, now we meet in fraternal

> conferences; once we of different Churches looked upon one another as enemies - now we unite in protest of that awful spirit of Anti-Christ which is at work in Europe today. At present we do not see the way by which God is leading us. We are at the stage of determining values and of trying to understand one another. We are seeking to realise the glorious vision of the Epistle to the Ephesians - to realise the great spiritual fact of our oneness in Christ. We have put our hands to the plough and in spite of the opposition of foes, and what is harder to bear, the *misunderstandings of friends*, we must not look back ...
>
> We have been unprofitable servants, we have sometimes looked back since, in youth, we put our hand to the plough, but may God in His great mercy give us a place, even though a humble one, in the Harvest Home.[45]

Before the sermon, the Bible had crashed from the great pulpit and Shakespeare always regarded this as an indication that his work was finished. In a personal diary the Revd David Glass, a lecturer at Rawdon College and delegate present in Uppsala, noted:

> Sunday, 22nd July '23. Arrived in Uppsala. People lined roads outside the station and waved welcome. To the Baptist Church. Coffee and cakes served. Very simple, kind people - Swedish flags on table. Then to the Cathedral - enormous building completely packed. J.H.S. preached on 'Hand to plough'. Falling bible incident and translation by Rector spoiled effect. But indeed whole service flat. J.H.S. and Archbishop walked to the altar for the benediction.

Such were the impressions of one delegate, but only intimate friends fully realized the effect the Bible incident had upon Shakespeare. J.C. Carlile, knowing that Shakespeare was already suffering from nervous exhaustion, recalls the day vividly:

> I shared with Dr Shakespeare the great service in Uppsala Cathedral. 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 crash between me and a lady sitting at my side. That incident was fraught with great results. The preacher did not recover his composure, and the sermon was hopelessly spoiled in delivery. After the service he joined me at supper and cried like a child. Between his sobs he said, 'The falling of that Bible is the sign that my work is done'. After that he was not quite responsible; emotion clouded his judgment. It was a relief to me when we landed at the railway station in London. From that time I saw him in a new light ...
>
> Dr Shakespeare came to my twenty-fifth anniversary at Folkestone. The meeting was held in the Town Hall ... Dr Shakespeare, Viscount Radnor and Sir Philip Sassoon were among the speakers. Dr Shakespeare made a poor speech; it was his last public utterance ... He was my guest, but not until two days after, when he had seen a specialist, did I learn that he had discovered,

> while he was speaking, that he had lost the sight of one eye and the sight of the other was feeble.[46]

This really marked Shakespeare's collapse, and it would seem that his judgement was to some extent clouded, particularly in his reaction to the Malines conversations in Janaury 1924.[47] Carlile suggests that Shakepeare wrote saying that all attempts at reunion with the Church of England should be broken off.[48] There is no trace of this letter and in any case it is not typical of Shakespeare. If it was ever written it was done under the influence of nervous exhaustion. Not long before he had written:

> When we get to the heart of the Catholic faith, we find that it is mystical, and not mechanical. Thus Father Tyrrell insists that the Church is more than an institution, and that it is the conception of the spirit and personality of Jesus as an abiding presence in the Church which for the Catholic Christian makes the Church a sacrament.[49]

Shakespeare made a partial recovery in 1925 but it was shortlived. Mr W.H. Ball, his personal secretary for many years, has written of Dr Shakespeare's last visit to the Baptist Church House on Monday, 23 March 1925, when he appeared to have regained some of his former vigour after a nervous breakdown. But it was only two days later that he had his first cerebral haemorrhage.[50]

There were many tributes following his death on 12 March 1928, at the age of seventy. *The Times* obituary spoke of 'the eminent Baptist Minister' and continued, 'Few among Nonconformist ministers have been better known, or have exerted greater influence on the religious life of our time, than John Howard Shakespeare, and this is the more remarkable because, though a speaker of no mean powers, he preferred to work in the background rather than on the platform. He used to the full his gifts as organizer and inspirer of far-reaching movements.'[51]

In assessing J.H. Shakespeare's place in the history of ecumenism as part of the Baptist contribution, a number of factors, both theological and non-theological, have to be taken into account; many of these factors are closely interrelated.

Firstly, Shakespeare is often said to have had a lifelong commitment to Liberalism; it is more accurate to say that he had a lifelong commitment to Lloyd George's Liberalism, which is not so easily defined. Shakespeare had a sincere concern for social justice but was quite happy in Conservative company and co-operated with Conservative, Establishment and ecclesiastical elements in connection with his work for unity. Loyalty was important to Shakespeare; his friendship with Lloyd George had a strong element of loyalty which was not reciprocated in the same way. Lloyd George did not have the same sensitivity with regard to his own position, advancement and personal relations as did Shakespeare; Lloyd George could abandon friends, if not callously, then without any great sentiment. It is not clear how much Shakespeare knew of Lloyd George's private life at the time and this may have been an added complication to the relationship. Shakespeare was a

much more complex character than has generally been realized, in whom sensitivity, ambition and loyalty were inextricably linked.

Secondly, his breakdown in health in 1923 and death in 1928 place him outside some of the historical landmarks. He was, for example, too ill to attend Nathan Söderblom's Stockholm Meeting in 1925 with its emphasis on Life and Work and the Church as guardian of an international morality - a position Shakespeare was enthusiastically taking up himself. It was, therefore, Charles Brent's conception of Faith and Order and the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 which had the greatest influence on him. Shakespeare's was essentially a theological commitment in the tradition of historic Puritanism. His fascination with the influence of Puritan divines was genuine, as can be seen in his book *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers*.[52] Yet, seeing the need from both a theological and a practical denominational point of view for a new liberal position after the 1914-18 war, he fell back on what he considered to be the influence of the best in Puritan tradition, particularly with regard to the doctrine of the Church. Discerning that the theological liberal influence in the post-war period was detrimental to a catholic doctrine of the Church, which he considered necessary for his own denomination, he tended to stress certain aspects of Puritan orthodoxy. He overlooked the fact that much of Puritan Church Order was essentially medieval and totally unsuitable for the twentieth century, such was the need he felt to establish a doctrine of the church which would both convey strength and unity and yet appeal to the liberal temper of the post-war generation.

His position in Baptist history is that he strengthened the Baptist Union by his organizational skills and fortified the liberal elements in an essentially conservative evangelical denomination. He stressed that Baptists were part of the one catholic Church as Puritan tradition had stressed, and showed clearly the part Baptists ought to play in the ecumenical movement; but it was his stand and commitment for unity at an extremely early and unfashionable stage in ecumenical development, against terrific opposition, that was his greatest contribution. There have been many opportunities and parallels in the denomination's history since 1920 but they have never been acted upon with such determination, vigour and personal sacrifice as that shown by this prophet of ecumenism.

In July 1931 a memorial plaque to J.H. Shakespeare was placed in the Baptist Church House. On unveiling the plaque Mr Herbert Marnham, Treasurer of the Baptist Union, said, 'It is well that this tablet should be placed on the walls of our Council Chamber. It was in this room he unfolded his many schemes and inspired us with something of his enthusiasm to carry them to a successful issue'.[53] Only three years after Shakespeare's death the omission of any major reference to his work for church unity is significant. It was a portent of an unyielding denominational complacency which, even in more recent times, other Baptist ecumenists have found extremely difficult, if not impossible, to break.[54]

However, as we approach the millenium and, with the re-organization of the British Council of Churches stressing 'Churches together', there has been a strong

flowering of local fellowship and co-operation between Churches, Baptist and Roman Catholic included. Acts of contrition for past failures at home and abroad in all sections of the Church have encouraged further moves towards unity. J.H. Shakespeare's influence is still alive to make us re-think our positions and help us to see a vision of the Church of the future to which Christ continually calls us.

NOTES

1 In this he resembles Charles Raven (cf. F.W. Dillistone, *Charles Raven: Naturalist, Historian, Theologian*, 1975).
2 R. Rouse and S.C. Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517 to 1948*, 1954, p.268.
3 K. Slack, *The British Churches To-day*, 1970, p.64.
4 *Baptist Handbook 1929*, p.323.
5 A.S. Clement, ed., *Baptists who made history*, p.128.
6 *St Mary's Magazine* October 1898, Vol.III, No.34, p.85.
7 J.H. Shakespeare, *The Churches at the Cross-Roads*, 1918, p.144.
8 S. Neill, *Men of Unity*, 1960, p.41.
9 J.W. Grant, *Free Churchmanship in England 1870-1940*, p.267.
10 E. Kristendom, *Söderblom and Others*, 1919, p.105.
11 M. Boegner, *La vie et la pensée de T. Fallot*, 2 vols, Paris 1914 and 1926.
12 *ibid.*, p.31.
13 In an essay in a Commemorative Volume, *Towards Reunion*, to mark the 1918 meeting of Anglicans and Free Churchmen at Mansfield College, Oxford, 1919, p.52.
14 Tissington Tatlow MSS, Lambeth Palace Library.
15 J.H. Shakespeare, *op.cit.*, p.37.
16 B. Sundkler, *Nathan Söderblom*, 1968, p.331.
17 Shakespeare MSS: Letter from Bishop of Winchester, 2 December 1918.
18 *Baptist Times*, 8 November 1918.
19 *Baptist Times*, 22 November 1918.
20 Shakespeare MSS.
21 H. Nicholson, *George V: His life and reign*, 1953, p.412.
22 *Baptist Times*, 22 November 1918.
23 Randall Davidson MSS, Lambeth Palace Library.
24 J.H. Shakespeare, *op.cit.*, pp.180-1.
25 *ibid.*, p.186.
26 *ibid.*, p.186.
27 *British Weekly*, 5 December 1918.
28 T.H. Darlow, *William Robertson Nicoll: Life and Letters*, 1925, p.386.
29 E.K.H. Jordan, *Free Church Unity*, 1956, p.172.
30 *British Weekly*, 16 January 1919.
31 M. Spencer, *Impasse or Opportunity*, 1922, p.103.
32 *Baptist Times*, 9 May 1919.
33 *The Times*, 31 October 1919.
34 Quoted by J.G. Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang*, 1949, p.271.
35 Shakespeare MSS.
36 J. Marchant, ed., *The Coming Renaissance*, 1923, p.87.
37 Quoted by J.G. Lockhart, *op.cit.*, p.274.
38 cf. Sir Geoffrey Shakespeare, Bt, *Let candles be brought in*, chapter 17 on his father.
39 Cf. Professor Gordon Rupp on this question: 'Baptists and Methodists are the two great Protestant Free Churches who in our time have to decide whether they will be World Church or World Sect', *BQ* XVII, No.7, July 1958.
40 Cf. also Darril Hudson, *The Ecumenical Movement in World Affairs*, 1969, pp.66-8.
41 Quoted by B. Sundkler, *op.cit.*, p.333.
42 *ibid.*, p.334.
43 Nathan Söderblom MSS, Universitets Biblioteket, Uppsala.
44 Luke 17:10, 'So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.' This text was used constantly by Söderblom and was eventually engraved on his tomb in Uppsala Cathedral.
45 Shakespeare MSS.
46 J.C. Carlile, *My Life's Little Day*, 1935, pp.167-8.
47 G.K.A. Bell, *Documents on Christian Unity*, 1st series, 1920-24, Oxford, p.349.

48 Cf. J.C. Carlile, *op.cit.*, p.181.
49 J.H. Shakespeare, *op.cit.*, p.183.
50 *Baptist Times*, 15 March 1928.
51 *The Times*, 13 March 1928.
52 J.H. Shakespeare, *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers*, 1906.
53 *Baptist Times* 9 July 1931.
54 In this regard the work of the Revd Dr E.A. Payne CH, Secretary of the Baptist Union 1951-67, should be noted; a consistent ecumenist, he became a Presiden of the World Council of Churches in 1960. Under the Secretaryship of the Revd Dr M.E. Aubrey CH (1925-51), the British Council of Churches was formed in the Council Chamber of the Baptist Church House, Southampton Row, London, in September 1942. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr William Temple, was present and appointed President.

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BENJAMIN HENTON LECTURE 1998

'H. Howard Williams: Preacher, Pastor - Prophet without honour?'
Lecturer: Faith Bowers BA MPhil
at Cleveleys Baptist Church, St George's Avenue, Blackpool, on Saturday, 2 May 1998 at 3.45 p.m., and at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8EL on Wednesday, 27 May 1998 at 7.30 p.m.

BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY SUMMER SCHOOL

This will take place 16-19 July 1998 at Westminster College, Cambridge. Booking forms from the Secretary (address inside front cover, including new e-mail address).

INTERNATIONAL JOHN BUNYAN SOCIETY

Second Triennial Conference: 'The Holy War: Ideology, Culture and Dissent in Bunyan's England', at the University of Stirling, Scotland, 31 August to 4 September 1998. Details from Professor N.H. Keeble, Department of English Studies, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, Scotland, tel. +44 (0)1786 467506, fax +44 (0)1786 466210, e-mail nhk1@stir.ac.uk.

NB: In bibliographic references in the *Baptist Quarterly*, if the place of publication is not given, London should be assumed.