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THE BAPTIST UNION'S MINISTERIAL SETTLEMENT AND SUSTENTATION SCHEME
The end of congregational church polity?

During my first ministry in Norfolk, I came across the 'J.H. Shakespeare Memorial Baptist Church' in Norwich; my impression was that I was not alone in having to ask, with some embarrassment, because Baptists do not often name churches after people, 'and just what did J.H. Shakespeare do?' The well-known figures of Baptist history tend to be from either the seventeenth century, or from the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Even in the twentieth century, a number of personalities are much better known than Shakespeare - John Clifford, Alexander Maclaren, F.B. Meyer, J.H. Rushbrooke and E.A. Payne among the most prominent. The J.H. Shakespeare Memorial Baptist Church has now, probably wisely, been renamed Witard Road Baptist Church.

In fact, the shape of Baptist life in England today owes more to Shakespeare than any other twentieth-century leader, and probably than any since the seventeenth century. He was described by Rushbrooke as 'the real founder of the Baptist Union'[1], and by Arthur Porritt as 'the Maker of the Baptist Denomination'.[2] He was primarily responsible for the creation of many aspects of Baptist life that we now take for granted, including Home Mission, Area Superintendents, Baptist House, the *Baptist Times*, the Baptist World Alliance, and ministerial accreditation. It is due to him that we have come to identify the Baptist Union with the Baptist denomination, without considering it in any way remarkable. He also founded the Federal Council of the Free Churches, and was acknowledged to be the leading figure among the Free Church denominations during and after the 1914-18 war; he was the prime mover behind the acceptance of Free Church chaplains in the armed services; he was on intimate terms with Lloyd George during his time as Prime Minister.

Unlike other prominent English Baptists of the twentieth century, Shakespeare's biography has never been written. He made his friend and successor as Secretary of the Baptist Union, J.C. Carlile, promise not to allow this to be done.[3] His personal papers have been lost, or deliberately destroyed, possibly at his own request, and the biographical material available is very meagre, helping to explain the failure to give Shakespeare his rightful place in Baptist history. There are other factors too, including Shakespeare's attempt to lead Baptists in directions they later decided they did not want to travel. This was true of his desire for a ministry that was selected, trained, directed and supported by the Union, and his use of the *Baptist Times* as an official Union publication. It was also true of his stubborn and outspoken support of Lloyd George. Above all, it was true of his passionate commitment to the reunion of the Church of England and Nonconformity during the post-war years. English Baptists have largely turned their backs on these aspects of Shakespeare's legacy, and have wanted to disown his leadership in these directions.

Sadly, the lasting elements of Shakespeare's achievements have sometimes been forgotten along the way. None has been more important than the Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Scheme. After a long gestation period, and not a little controversy, this came to life in 1916. Although some aspects have been modified since, it remains very substantially in place today. It constituted a radical change in Baptist church polity. I hope in this article to shed a little light on the nature and significance of these changes, that have been integrated so successfully into our denominational life.

THE ORIGINS OF THE SCHEME

It was not until the end of 1908 that real progress began to be made towards the implementation of a denominational system for ministerial support. There were, however, many signs beforehand that such a system was on its way, and it was frequently in Shakespeare's mind. From his appointment in 1898 onwards one of his principle objectives was to ease the financial burden on the ministers of the smaller churches. As effective denominational machinery was, step by step, put in place in the early years of the century, so the possibility became a reality. The construction of a workable system was complicated because each church was free to call (and dismiss) its minister, and to pay him whatever it wanted or could afford, and that each college was free to accept and train candidates as it saw fit. The results were haphazard arrangements for the movement of ministers between churches, and large variations in stipends and standards of training. Many ministers received no formal training at all.

Every aspect of ministerial practice among Baptists was confusingly varied. Procedures for calling, recognizing and ordaining ministers differed from church to church, association to association, and between associations and Union. The distinction between lay and ordained ministries was vague, if it existed at all. Pay and conditions of service varied substantially. The disorderly state of affairs was particularly acute among the smaller churches, where ministers might move in and out of secular work and augment their stipends in whatever way they could.

For Shakespeare, this lack of coherent organization was a scandal, and the primary cause of ineffectiveness in mission. He viewed 'unorganised congregationalism' with dismay, accusing those who refused to co-operate of being 'rapt in glorious memories and clutching at a dead idol, the brazen and deceptive serpent of an extreme and selfish independency'.[4] The Union had moved very tentatively towards a more strategic national approach to the ministry in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, assuming responsibility for the Home Missionary Society and the Pastors' Income Augmentation Society, and forming a Union Ministerial Recognition Committee and a Board of Introduction and Consultation, but these steps were relatively ineffective. It was not until the appointment of Shakespeare in 1898 and the raising of the Twentieth Century Fund between 1899 and 1902 that significant progress was made.

Shakespeare himself wrote that the initiative that ultimately led to the 1916 Scheme first came from a series of articles in the *Baptist Times* by William Chivers during the closing stages of the raising of the Twentieth Century Fund.[5] The Fund itself was vitally important in giving the Union a sense of corporate identity. Of more immediate and practical importance, it gave the Union financial muscle, particularly as the distribution of all the money raised was in its own hands. The pages of the *Baptist Times* were full, not only of appeals for money for the Fund, but also of calls for greater denominational unity. In January 1901, for example, a leading article said:

> We have no adequate or approximately adequate sustentation fund for our old men. We have no organised and graduated method of education for our students, and we have no means of relieving our disheartened pastors in the prolonged depression of spheres from which there is no honourable escape. We can neither, as a denomination, found new churches nor dispose of decaying causes. In all directions our strength is wasted and our good work injured for lack of cohesion.[6]

In 1902, following an address by W.E. Blomfield at the spring Assembly, it was agreed to create a Union committee to look into the possibility of creating a ministerial Sustentation Fund. In 1904 the finances of the Union were rationalised with the amalgamation of the Home Mission, Augmentation and Church Extension Funds to form the 'Home Work Fund'. The Union's rules for ministerial recognition took on a greater significance, with the money at its disposal being available only to those 'on the list'.

The *Baptist Times* was from 1901 under the personal editorial control of Shakespeare, and opposition to schemes for greater denominational unity, and control of the ministry, were muted in its pages. However, there was opposition, and it found expression in other centres of denominational life. The *Baptist* was, until its disappearance in 1910, the only other denominational newspaper and, during the last few years of its publication, provided an outlet for the views of those who were uneasy with Shakespeare's policy. 'We must lovingly but courteously oppose at every point any infringement of the crown rights of the Holy Spirit in making his own appointments', it said, and: 'To make the ministry amongst us the close preserve of a 'profession', or to turn it into a mere trade union, will be to downgrade a calling noble only in proportion as it is divinely free'.[7]

Shakespeare was also opposed by the 1905 President of the Union, Judge Willis, and, more significantly, by the respected Richard Glover of Bristol, who called the scheme when it was first proposed 'a wild cat scheme'.[8] However, Shakespeare's personal standing within the denomination was extremely high in the years leading up to the war. Not only had he successfully raised £250,000 for the Twentieth Century Fund; he had also built Baptist Church House, and been largely responsible for the first Baptist World Congress in 1905 and the resulting Baptist World Alliance, of which he was a joint secretary. His plans for a unified and centrally

controlled ministerial system continued to gather pace.

Between 1906 and 1912, the contents of a workable scheme were hammered out. Those years are marked both by Shakespeare's determination and persistence, and by the churches' reluctance to move forward in the way and at the speed he wanted. It is not possible here to give a blow-by-blow account of the rather tortuous sequence of events. An outline of some of the major events will have to suffice.

It was essential to draw up clear and enforceable rules for ministerial recognition, and the struggle to do this was a major feature of these years. The central points were the 1907 spring Assembly and the 1911 autumn Assembly, at which new recognition rules were first adopted, and subsequently, after widespread complaints that they were too rigorous and academic, revised. The agreed rules established two lists of ministers – the probationers' and the ministerial lists – and set down the conditions for inclusion in both. Union recognition was important as a way of clearly identifying those who were eligible for financial and other kinds of support from the Union, and as a way of encouraging ministerial candidates to receive proper training. It also had other effects. It made it possible to speak of 'the Baptist Ministry' as a separated body of men within the denomination, united by a common process of selection and authorisation. This is reflected by the gradual change in terminology from 'recognition' – the word used almost exclusively before about 1912 – to 'accreditation' – terms that carry quite different connotations about the role of the Union in the process of qualifying for the ministry. The growing emphasis on Union accreditation or recognition constituted a shift in perspective from the local church to the Union as far as ministry was concerned.

Different versions of the proposed scheme were presented to the Assembly, or major debates held about it, in one form or another, in spring 1909, autumn 1909, spring 1910 and spring 1912. In the spring of 1909 Shakespeare first formally introduced the scheme. Although it followed more than three years of debate and enquiry in committee, its contents were in the end rather hurriedly put together in early 1909. It had three basic elements – settlement, sustentation and training. Of these, settlement was the most radical, involving the establishment of local ministerial settlement committees overseen by a central committee, seven-year terms of appointment and the stationing of unsettled ministers in vacant churches. With regard to sustentation, a capital fund would be raised to help increase stipends. As far as training was concerned, the colleges would be consulted individually about the need to establish control over the numbers of candidates accepted and the training they received. Churches that wanted to be part of the scheme would be invited to join a new 'federation' within the Union. The Assembly voted to refer the scheme to the churches and associations for their consideration.

At the autumn Assembly of the same year a debate was held between two of the leading protagonists and their supporters. J.G. Greenhough spoke in favour of the scheme and Richard Glover gave his reasons for opposing it. Glover said that the scheme was cumbersome and bureaucratic, that it would not solve the problems it

was designed to address, and that it traversed the Scriptural principle that each local church was autonomous and complete. Greenhough described Glover as 'the champion of ultra-Independency'.[9] Greenhough and Shakespeare must have been disappointed that only 140 churches had responded since the spring Assembly – 106 of them in favour.

Six months later, at the 1910 spring Assembly, a revised scheme was presented to the delegates, that took account of some of the reservations received from the churches and associations. Shakespeare's aim was for the Union to be ultimately responsible for the support and settlement of every accredited minister in the proposed federation. In what the *Baptist Times* described as 'one of the most remarkable, as well as the most important, sessions we have ever held',[10] the Assembly agreed to commend the scheme to the churches. Only nine voted against – including Richard Glover. 800 churches had still not replied to Shakespeare. It was hoped to get substantial consensus by the spring of 1911, so that the scheme could be adopted, and an appeal for the Sustentation Fund launched. However, responses were slow in being returned to Baptist Church House, and it was agreed to delay the decision until 1912.

The scheme was modified again at the end of 1911 to try and win over the doubters. One of the most significant changes was the abandonment of the proposed elaborate committee structure for the new federation. Instead, the local administration of the scheme would be in the hands of the associations themselves, and the Council of the Union would assume overall responsibility for its direction. This avoided the duplication of committees that had been one of Richard Glover's criticisms. It also ensured that the scheme would be an integral part of the life of the Union.

In spring 1912, Shakespeare once more presented the scheme to the Assembly. This time for adoption. He believed that the modifications made during the course of the previous three years had resulted in a weaker scheme. One of the three main elements – that concerned with the selection and training of candidates by the colleges – had been dropped, because the colleges, Spurgeon's in particular, had refused to abandon their independence and allow their selection and training policy to be determined in any way by the Union. Nevertheless, he urged the Assembly to agree to the scheme's acceptance in a passionate appeal. 'We are dealing with a tragic situation, a gigantic problem, and, I fear, a serious scandal', he said. 'I plead for this scheme . . . on the ground of humanity . . . I plead for it on the ground of efficiency . . . '. How can the pastor love his people, he asked, when 'all the week he moves about in a dream of helpless wrath that ever he was caught up in the whirling wheels of this denominational system?' He charged his audience by their 'debt to the ministry of the Word and by the memory of faithful pastors' to set their hands as an undivided host to the work of implementing the scheme.[11] John Clifford seconded his proposal. Herbert Marnham, the Union treasurer, spoke in favour, and in the end the vote was unanimous. It was followed by a decision to

launch an appeal for a capital fund of £250,000, to be called the Sustentation Fund.

An important part of the background to the adoption of the scheme by the Assembly was the disturbing revelation in 1907 that for the first time in living memory, the national membership figures showed a drop on the previous year. It injected a sense of urgency into the debates, and added impetus to the movement for reform. Shakespeare's response to this sharp statistical reminder of the challenges faced by the denomination was a powerful address at the 1908 spring Assembly entitled 'The Arrested Progress of the Church'. He was convinced that ministerial standards were a vital element in any strategy aimed at reversing this arrested progress. Speaking of the ministry, he said, 'I am deeply conscious that the root and secret of the whole matter is here. With so few exceptions as to be insignificant, the Church is what the minister makes it . . . when he is right, everything is right. . . . To its infinite disadvantage, the Baptist Church has lost its sense of the greatness and sacredness of the ministerial calling. . . . The call of the risen Lord to this office . . . through the Church . . . is its most solemn function'.[12] One of the chief causes of the decline was what he called 'our defective denominational system', which was a 'standing menace' to the relationship between pastor and people, and resulted in the ministry being degraded. Not everyone agreed with Shakespeare's diagnosis, but concern about the state of the denomination was widespread, and his leadership was decisive and his vision clear. No other way forward seemed to be on offer.

The second major phase in the long struggle to gain support for the scheme, the raising of the necessary finance to launch it, was undertaken between 1912 and 1914. Shakespeare himself, exhausted by the effort to get the scheme accepted, was not well enough to play an active part in the fund raising, and the burden fell on others, F. B. Meyer in particular. By means of the *Baptist Times*, in which progress was reported each week by diagrams showing the gradual erection of 'Nehemiah's Wall', and the new denominational machinery centred on Baptist Church House, the promises and gifts came in steadily, so that by the 1914 spring assembly Shakespeare could report that the target of £250,000 had been exceeded. It was, according to Rushbrooke, 'another monument to his inspired leadership and practical statesmanship'. Rushbrooke also pointed out, more significantly, that the Fund marked the 'recognition of the minister, not as the servant of a local community, but as the representative of a far wider fellowship'.[13] In similar fashion, the incoming Union President, Charles Joseph, remarked that, while the Fund had been inaugurated 'to help Baptist churches', it had, in fact, 'revealed the Baptist Church'![14]

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHEME

During the first half of 1914, the practical financial arrangements for the operation of the Sustentation Fund began to be considered. If the objective of a guaranteed minimum stipend for all recognized ministers was to be achieved, a substantial

annual sum would have to be raised in addition to the interest on the capital fund. Shakespeare laid stress on the fact that there should be complete co-operation between the Union and the associations in this.[15] The outbreak of war changed everything, of course. Baptists were caught up in the deluge as much as everyone else in the country, and it affected the development of their national denominational life as well as everything else. By November, the Union Council was able to find room on its agenda for a consideration of the scheme, and whether it could be implemented as planned, given the disruption caused by the war. The main initial anxiety was over whether the money that had been pledged to the Sustentation Fund would actually be given. War conditions were already having an impact on people's economic circumstances, and only £165,000 of the £250,000 promised had actually arrived at Baptist Church House.[16] It was decided, however, to start the operation of the scheme at the beginning of 1916, and steps were put in place for the appointment of an executive committee to run it.

The day after this November Council meeting, a conference was held with association secretaries and treasurers to sort out the relationship between association funds and the Sustentation Fund, and to clarify the precise responsibilities of the associations with regard to the latter. There was considerable overlap between churches that would qualify for Union help, and those already receiving help from the associations. It was also likely that many of the churches supported by the associations would either not meet the qualifications for central funding, or not wish to join the federation. It was agreed that there should be only one annual appeal for the maintenance of ministers in aided churches, whether or not the Sustentation Fund was involved. The associations would negotiate with the Union the amount they needed to meet commitments not covered by the scheme, and for their own expenses. The annual appeal would take the form of a simultaneous national collection administered jointly by the Union and the associations. As far as the actual payment of stipends from the Fund was concerned, Shakespeare outlined the method that would be used:

> In the case of aided churches, the proportion of stipend provided by the church under the scheme shall be sent by it to the association treasurer, to be forwarded by him to the Baptist Union, which shall pay the full stipend to the minister as it becomes due.

This November conference at Baptist Church House was little short of revolutionary, and only the circumstances of the war can explain the lack of controversy or even debate about the decisions made at it. They may have been presented as necessary administrative arrangements, but were actually far more radical than anything proposed so far. Firstly, the associations agreed to forego the right to appeal for money from their member churches for any purpose, other than through the simultaneous collection. Secondly, it was agreed that ultimate responsibility for paying the stipends of ministers aided by the fund should lie with the Union, rather than churches themselves. As if this was not enough, the

association officers were told that a second conference would take place two months later, at which arrangements for grouping churches, and the division of the country into districts under the curiously entitled 'General Superintendents' would be discussed.[17]

An hour and a half before this second conference took place, in January 1915, a sub-committee of six met to prepare the ground. 'After considerable discussion', it was agreed to recommend that England be divided into ten districts, with a superintendent over each.[18] At the following conference, the association officers agreed that the target for the simultaneous collection would be £15,000 a year. This was the figure that Shakespeare had calculated would be required to meet all existing association commitments, plus the additional sustentation grants from the Union, when added to the interest received on the capital fund. It amounted to a 50% increase on the total amounts already raised by the associations each year. Shakespeare then introduced the creation of ten areas and the appointment of the ten superintendents. They were to be paid by, and accountable to, the Union. Where there were already existing full time association secretaries, the intention was that they would become superintendents for their areas. Where this was not the case, the Union and the associations in the areas concerned would make a joint appointment.[19]

After further committee discussions over the precise duties of the Superintendents, and other matters concerning the administration of the scheme, including the creation of area committees, the Council agreed to support a resolution at the 1915 spring Assembly. Although the primary responsibility of the Superintendents was for the administration of the scheme within their respective areas, the hope that they should not be 'unduly absorbed in business and financial cares' but should exercise a 'spiritual ministry in the churches', was specifically stated in the resolution. Shakespeare told the delegates that their appointment was 'a most important and vital element' of the scheme. He told them of the custom of the old General Baptists to have 'an officer to supervise the churches', and assured them it was not an attempt to impose episcopacy. G.P. Gould, however, in seconding the resolution, made it clear that the Assembly was being asked to approve 'a new order of ministry'. The resolution was passed and the new scheme adopted.[20]

After the 1915 Assembly, applications from churches to join the federation flooded in. By the middle of July, over 1,000 had done so (over two thirds of those eligible). The previous lack of enthusiasm disappeared, and it was soon apparent that the number of churches not wanting to join would be very small. The Union, in effect, became a federation. The promised money for the Sustentation Fund gradually came in, and Shakespeare was able to announce at the 1917 Assembly that the £250,000 had been received. By then 1,300 of the 1,600 churches in the Union had joined the federation.

By November 1915 ten Superintendents had been appointed, ready to assume

their responsibilities at the beginning of 1916. Five had been full-time association secretaries before their appointment, and, with the provision of extra clerical help, continued with these duties afterwards. J.W. Ewing combined the duties of Metropolitan Superintendent with those of Secretary of the London Baptist Association. This meant that, officially, the secretaries of five associations (East Midlands, Lancashire and Cheshire, London, West Midlands, and Yorkshire) were now employees of the Union.

The immediate success of the scheme was remarkable. As far as settlement was concerned, the Superintendents met regularly with Shakespeare, and within a year were making dozens of recommendations each month. The number of grants made from the Sustentation Fund increased rapidly, so that by February 1917 the total was 462.[21] The financial and administrative pressure on the Fund increased markedly after the war, and modifications became inevitable, but during its first two or three years of operation, the scheme became such an integral part of the life of the denomination that any return to the pre-war situation became unthinkable. In some respects, the impact of the scheme, including the work of the Superintendents, the payment of hundreds of grants, and the co-ordination of ministers' deployment, became the central feature of national Baptist life.

At the end of 1916, an interview with Shakespeare was printed in the *Christian World* under the heading, 'Creating a Denomination: The Revolution at the Baptist Church House'. The interviewer described the way in which the Baptist Union had become 'a powerful central authority' within the denomination over the previous fifteen years. 'This revolution is the achievement of Rev. J.H. Shakespeare', and its impact is 'not yet fully apprehended' by the churches, he wrote. The interviewer insisted (without being contradicted) on calling the Superintendents bishops.[22] It is impossible to quarrel with the use of the word 'revolution' to describe such a turn-around in Baptist church polity.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SCHEME FOR BAPTIST CHURCH POLITY

The Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Scheme can only properly be understood in the light of other major denominational developments that took place around the time of its implementation. In particular, the growth in importance of the Union in Baptist life, which had accelerated enormously in the early years of the century, provides an essential part of the background. Shakespeare promoted with vigour and persistence the idea of a national Baptist Church, alongside the more traditional emphasis on the local Baptist church, or congregation. The very name 'Baptist Church House' implies this.

The main focus for Baptist collective consciousness had historically been the associations. Other institutions, such as colleges and the missionary society, as well as the Union, had also become important in the nineteenth century. The Sustentation Scheme resulted in a substantial reduction of the associations' independence and authority. Their financial independence was sharply reduced by their agreement with

Shakespeare to allow their money-raising and grant-making activities to be incorporated into his national strategy. They became, in effect, agents for the Union in raising funds for ministerial support. Just as important was the transformation of the full-time association secretaries into Superintendents employed by the Union. Much of the denominational leadership that the associations still possessed in 1914 was thus voluntarily surrendered to the Union.

This was important for the local churches because it meant they were more isolated, and less able to offer any challenge to the power of the central body. As Paul Harrison has shown in his study of the American Baptist Convention in the early twentieth century, a balance of power between the local church and the central ecclesiastical authority is only possible if local associations, through which churches can make their voices heard, have a significant degree of independence and authority. 'The Baptists may have been wise when they removed the bishops from their places', he wrote, 'but when they also eliminated the ecclesiastical authority of their own associations the bishops returned in business suits'.[23]

There were, of course, the other centres of power within the denomination, including especially the colleges and the missionary society. It is significant that resistance to Shakespeare's reforms came primarily from these institutions, and from people associated with them. Spurgeon's College was a particular thorn in his side, and after the war, his main opponent, especially over church unity, was T.R. Glover, much more a BMS than a Union man.

Shakespeare's commitment to church unity was another part of the background to the scheme, and provides part of the context necessary for a full understanding of it. His vision took shape during the war, and was published in *The Churches at the Cross Roads* in 1918. If Baptists were to be part of the national English Church of which he dreamt, not only would they have to modify severely their congregational polity, but they, along with all the other Free Churches, would also have to adopt episcopacy. The Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Scheme went a long way towards achieving both of these objectives.

There is no doubt that the ecumenical incentive played an important part in Shakespeare's creation of areas and Superintendents. The idea of dividing the country into administrative areas had not featured in the versions of the scheme debated before 1915, although it was not in itself entirely new. It was considered, though not implemented, in 1902, when Shakespeare's revision of the Union constitution was under way. In fact a similar arrangement was made in 1896,when, for a short while, the Union's Ministerial Recognition Committee functioned by means of a system of eleven auxiliary committees.

The idea of 'senior regional ministers', if I may be allowed to use that contemporary phrase, was, on the other hand, entirely novel. The claim by Shakespeare that the appointment of Superintendents was a return to an old Baptist custom, and was therefore consistent with Baptist principles and history, is one that must be challenged. It is a claim that has been repeated a number of times since. It

is true, as Payne says, that the General Baptist Messengers (sometimes called bishops) of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century had, in some respects, a similar role to that of the Superintendents.[24] The primary function of the Messengers when they first appeared among General Baptists, however, was evangelistic, not administrative or supervisory. The Particular Baptists had no such office. Barrie White has convincingly shown that John Collier, who is sometimes cited in this respect, cannot be regarded as a forerunner to the Superintendents.[25] Another decisive factor is that the New Connexion rejected outright at the end of the eighteenth century the General Baptists' office of Messenger, along with their dubious doctrine and lack of enthusiasm for evangelism.

If Superintendents and the areas they served were not really part of the Baptist inheritance, where did they come from? They were more than simply administrative officials, that is clear. The title 'Superintendent' probably originated from the German Lutheran Church. Shakespeare acknowledged this connection in his address to the 1915 spring Assembly. Rushbrooke later claimed to have suggested it,[26] but there must be an element of doubt about this, because as early as March 1914 Shakespeare himself used the term in an address to the National Free Church Council.[27] Wherever the title came from, and however much he protested that it was not episcopacy by the back door, the idea of regional ministers to oversee churches and ministers was undoubtedly linked in Shakespeare's mind with the Anglican Episcopate. In his address at the March 1914 annual meetings of the National Free Church Council, at which he used the term 'Superintendent', he pleaded for the establishing of a United Free Church of England. He said he hoped to live to see 'England divided into Free Church dioceses with Free Church bishops'.[28] Inevitably, as time went on, parallels between Superintendents and bishops were drawn. The President of the Devon and Cornwall Association, commenting on the new appointments in the spring of 1916, said, 'it is to the credit of us Baptists of these latter days that we have produced an ideal Bench of Bishops'.[29] In his discussions with Randall Davidson at Lambeth Palace following the Lambeth Appeal in 1920, Shakespeare seems to have taken for granted the episcopal role of the Superintendents in any future united Church.

The ecclesiastical significance of this was never spelt out, and one of the remarkable things about the creation of Superintendents was the lack of debate or, indeed, any kind of public service of induction or recognition in which their role could be defined and acknowledged. As Mayor said of the similar step taken by the Congregationalists a few years later, 'Congregationalism was becoming episcopal, almost without noticing'.[30] This lack of theological and ecclesiastical definition has been described as 'quite unsatisfactory' by Geoffrey Reynolds.[31] One cannot help being drawn to the conclusion that Shakespeare was speaking with a 'forked tongue'. Officially the emphasis was on officials to help administer the scheme. In reality they were intended to be Baptist bishops. Quite what the phrase 'Baptist bishop' meant, what authority such a figure had in relation to the local church, and how

similar or dissimilar he was to his Anglican counterpart, are questions that were never addressed.

Whatever the motivation of Shakespeare, or the confusion in the minds of Baptists about the true nature of what they were doing in creating Superintendents, they rapidly became a vital part of denominational machinery. Their spiritual and pastoral leadership was soon widely acknowledged. As well as their key role in questions of ministerial settlement, Shakespeare included them in debates about the state of the churches and the ministry in general. It soon became difficult to conceive of the denomination without them. The Superintendents were another powerful sign, along with the central payment of aided stipends and strict rules for accreditation, that the ministry belonged not only, or even mainly, to the local church, but was the possession of the Union.

This obviously has important implications for the local church for its relationship with its minister. Whatever debates one might have about the limits of congregational independence in Baptist polity, the close relationship between pastor and people was for almost three centuries central to it. The 1916 scheme distanced the pastor from his congregation in an unprecedented way. This may not have been so marked with the large, and financially independent, churches, with their high profile, gifted ministers, but as far as the bulk of churches were concerned, it was a major change.

The story of the denomination throughout this century, including contemporary debates about the transformation of superintendency, and relating and resourcing, cannot be understood unless the importance of the 1916 scheme is appreciated. This is not the time to review that process. We await with interest the forthcoming fourth volume of our society's history of the denomination to do that. But one question remains to be asked. How was it that, under Shakespeare, such a sudden and radical transformation could take place? How could it be that the creation of a new order of ministry, the degrading of the associations, and the shift in responsibility for the ministry from the local to the national level, could occur?

The exceptional war-time situation may account for Shakespeare's freedom of action. His personal status, organizing genius and leadership qualities no doubt played their part, as did the Union's increased financial strength which he helped build up. A changing national culture towards greater centralization in many areas of life was also important. Just as significant, however, was the apparent lack of concern amongst most Baptists about the loss of their ecclesiastical inheritance. We admire Shakespeare, and should pay tribute to him for his remarkable achievements, which brought practical benefits to hundreds of struggling ministers. But we should also consider what has been lost along the way, and take note of the fact that the arrested progress which so distressed Shakespeare and all his fellow Baptists, and which the scheme was intended to reverse, has continued to this day.

NOTES

1 *Baptist Times*, 15 March 1928.
2 *Christian World*, 15 March 1928.
3 J.C. Carlile, *My Life's Little Day*, 1935, p.169.
4 J.H. Shakespeare, *Baptist Church Extension in Large Towns*, 1892, p.14.
5 J.H. Shakespeare, *The Founding of the Baptist Union Sustentation Fund*, unpublished manuscript in E.A. Payne collection, Angus Library, Oxford; n.d.
6 *Baptist Times*, 17 January 1902.
7 *Baptist*, 16 and 23 June 1904.
8 *Baptist Times*, 6 October 1905, and a letter from Richard Glover to his son, T.R. Glover, 21 February 1909 (Glover manuscripts, St John's College, Cambridge).
9 *Baptist***p606XT*[illegible]ctober 1909.
10 *Baptist Times*, 6 May 1910.
11 *Baptist Times*, 26 April 1912.
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The Baptist Historical Society offers congratulations to:

Dr Peter Shepherd, on whom in December 1999 the University of Durham conferred the degree of PhD for his dissertation entitled 'John Howard Shakespeare and the English Baptists, 1898-1924.

Dr David Bebbington on his recent election to a Chair in the University of Stirling,

and **Dr Clyde Binfield** recently elected to a Chair at the University of Sheffield.

The Baptist Historical Society now has a website. This can be found at **www.baptisthistory.org.uk**