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Congregationalism's Two Sides of the Baptistry — A Paedobaptist View*

WHAT is the essential Baptistness of Baptists? The circular response of a late Victorian Baptist *enfant terrible* suggests that this is not an idle question, however much one must despair of any answers to it: "The Baptist position does not depend upon a solitary rite. It is a protest against tyranny in church and state. . . . It grows out of the love of stalwart men for freedom . . . this is the Baptist! Not a cantankerous, little-brained man battling for trifles, but a passionate fighter for liberty . . . Baptism is only a detail. We are not Baptists because we baptise: we baptise because we are Baptists".¹

All this is no doubt true, not that Baptists are less blessed than other evangelical denominations in their cantankerous freedom-fighters for trifles. But it does not go very far, and more responsible Victorian Baptists than Dr. Aked could go little further. They feared that they were unique among the churches in not regarding baptism as the prime condition of communion, if not of membership. And they trembled at the irony of it.² If Congregationalists were equally lax, their uncertainty was surely a Baptist infection.

The relationship between these twin inheritors of the Independent principle was such as might be expected from opinionated but close blood-relatives. Congregationalists were more numerous and more united. They seemed to be more respectable and, therefore, in the eyes of the world, they were more "representative". They were certainly less baffling. Baptists like to play up to this picture. Dr. Landels, speaking at Birmingham, warmed to the role of country cousin. He imagined a rustic Baptist minister—"his Independent neighbour, who dined occasionally with the vicar, and exchanged nods of recognition with the squire of the parish, spoke of him patronisingly as a good man, but very imprudent"³—and he ruminated about Baptist notables: "when . . . Baptists of good social position merge themselves so completely in Paedobaptist Churches, and maintain such discreet reticence that no one can tell whether they are Baptists or not; when those who have attained to the position of local magnates make so light of their principles that they desert the Church of their fathers and of their youth for the more fashionable place hard by, pleading that there is but little difference between the two—a thing which happens so often that some have wondered how it is that when Baptists who have been accustomed to one horse, start a carriage and pair, the second horse generally objects to stopping at the door of the Baptist Chapel—when these things happen, our Paedobaptist friends may well

* A paper given to the Baptist Historical Society Summer School, July 1974.

regard us with a degree of complacency in which we can hardly be expected to share."⁴

Landels protested too much. His imaginings were perhaps fostered by the cultivated countryside of Regent's Park and the excitements of its erstwhile Diorama. Between Baptists and Congregationalists of the opinion-forming sort there were closer likenesses than might now be imagined. Whether or not Victorian Baptists of the opinion-forming sort—aggressive Christians from outward-looking churches, self-confident, in the world—in fact formed Baptist opinion is of course matter for another paper.

The scene may be set in several ways. Thus, if in an excess of genealogical enthusiasm, a stirring as it were of the dry bones of former fathers and brethren, one were to construct a family tree of Nonconformist divines, then of 82 Presidents of the Baptist Union and 93 chairmen of the Congregational Union from their inception until 1925, at least 50 (18 Baptists and 32 Congregationalists) might appear on it as mutual connexions, however extended the relationship. Or again, while still botanising amongst Puritan ancestries, there remain Free Churchmen, of whom Lord Pilkington might be the best known, who descend from that valiant Baptist regicide Colonel Okey, who in 1662 "went forward with undaunted courage to meet Death in the face, like a Christian Souldier indeed"⁵ It is a Dissenting succession of at least 12 generations, almost equally Baptist and Congregationalist: and it is rather more suggestive of inbuilt attitudes and inherited casts of mind, for example, than those pedigrees which flourish at royal weddings to prove that we all descend from Edward II.

Or yet again, a litany of families prominent on the diaconates of Victorian Baptist and Congregational churches would show a restless but brotherly criss-crossing of denominational boundaries: the Kelsalls of Rochdale, the brewing and newspaper owning Byleses of Henley and Bradford, the Micklems, the Hepburns (where, in a genealogy, do Hepburns end and Gotches begin?), the Colmans of Norwich and Peterborough, the Benhams of Paddington Chapel, Bloomsbury Chapel and Grafton Square, Clapham. To turn from families to individuals, what of Edward Bean Underhill or Henry Mason Bompas? Underhill may have been a pioneer Baptist historian, missionary advocate, and second lay President of the Union, but he was also a founder member and a trustee of George Street Congregational Church, Oxford, of which his family and that of his first wife were long supporters, and his brother-in-law, James Spence, was Joseph Parker's predecessor at Poultry Chapel, London. H. M. Bompas's career of church membership began with James Stratten's Paddington Chapel, progressed to Dr. Landels at Regent's Park and Dr. Horton at Lyndhurst Road, taking in South Parade, Leeds, until it found perfect expression in Christ Church, Westminster Bridge Road, under Dr. Meyer: a Nonconformist game of "consequences".⁶

None of this is entirely a reflection of angular characters or snobbish natures or Victorian insouciance about good order. Rather is it a mark

of close similarities in belief and polity, and of close social and political sympathy. It might be illustrated in another way.

In the first months of 1906—a season without recent parallel for hope and thanksgiving among Free Churchmen—a metropolitan chapel magazine bubbled over with bonhomie. The chapel's Cycling Club had its first run in April, one lady and eight men, including the minister, pedalling to Pinner (alas, a strong head wind forced the lady to turn back); on 1 April the minister preached a special sermon for young men and women on "The Greatest Preacher in London" (who was G. F. Watts, the "prophet of the Tate Gallery"); periodically the chapel "Parliament" debated on Unemployment or Protection (which was thrown out by a large majority, although interestingly enough the "Liberal Ministerial Statement" was carried only by a casting vote), and in May the minister addressed the men on "Mr. Birrell, the Bishops and Dr. Clifford", just as five months earlier he had talked on "Gladstone the Christian Statesman". And at a Saturday Concert, back in December 1905, he had proposed a "Goodness" Cabinet. It was to be "on lines of virtue and service", with Lord Aberdeen as premier, General Booth as Chancellor of the Exchequer ("He knows how to get money better than any man in England, and how to put it to better use"), Bishop Percival of Hereford as Foreign Secretary, George Cadbury at the Board of Trade, Dr. Clifford at the War Office ("He won't fight if he can help it but if principle compels, then look out") and Lord Hugh Cecil and Lloyd George together would preside at the Board of Education ("to be shut up in the Clock Tower until they agree on a compromise that will satisfy all parties").

Then, returning to the Cabinet they actually had, the magazine quoted that *beau idéal* of London ministers, R. F. Horton, who "doubted if anyone foresaw what a magnificent Cabinet would have been got together so soon. It was a pleasure to have Cabinet Ministers whose names were known before they entered the Cabinet, and it was a pleasure, too, to know that the poor law was to be administered under the guidance of a working man. 'May John Burns', he concluded, 'never get a dress-coat; may he never wear a top-hat, may he continue to appreciate and to teach Parliament the intrinsic greatness and grandeur of work.'"

Oh, the rapture of pious hopes! These were raptures which might have filled the magazine of any aggressive Congregational church. It could have been Whitefield's under Silvester Horne. In fact it was Bloomsbury under Thomas Phillips.⁷

This is a picture which might be authenticated by a more concentrated reference to three active Baptist churches, sufficiently different from each other for the concentration to be helpful. The suggestion will be that there is little to distinguish the life of these churches from that of similarly placed Congregational ones: which brings one back to this paper's opening question as to the essential *Baptistness* of Victorian Baptists. The assumption is that these three churches are representative of mainstream Victorian Nonconformity, and therefore

of Victorian Baptists, and that their life depended on a nicely achieved mean of aggressiveness. The fineness of the achievement is suggested by the fate of one of the three churches which too consistently despised the mean, for woe betide that Christian Church which dissents beyond the establishment. There are two further underlying assumptions. The first is that calculated aggressiveness requires a high degree of self-confidence, and that if there must be error it should be in the direction of the world: an outward thing. The second is that this was the natural issue of two centuries of spiritual superiority mingling with social and political inferiority, set in a context which had at last become one of change. For the time being this meant that English religious Nonconformity was more than ever a political statement. Baptists and Congregationalists shared in this, although it is perhaps true that Baptists had had less initial opportunity for their worldly stance to be flawed by compromise: as the earlier reference to Colonel Okey might indeed suggest.

The three churches are Queen's Road, Coventry, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, and Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool.⁸

Queen's Road is a composite of Nonconformist history.⁹ From Cow Lane to Queen's Road; from the quintessential preaching box of the 1790s to the confident, eligibly situated church of the 1880s, doing its best to combine the requirements of a numerous auditory (501 full members in 1900: "the church is in direct contact with about 2,200 men, women and children . . . It is not easy to state the number of workers in the Church. But there are 137 who are regularly engaged in some branch of the work".¹⁰) with due deference to current architectural good manners; all this suggests the classic Nonconformist pattern. Its pastorates have been decorated by Presidencies of the Union, and they have been preludes to chairs in the denominational colleges. Its politics have had a text book perfection about them. In 1794 the Revd. James Butterworth, the pastor's brother, retired to Cow Lane from Bromsgrove "owing to persecution from the Church and King party for uttering his honest views about the French revolution".¹¹ Over 100 years later the minister, W. E. Blomfield, was a passive resister.¹² Of subsequent ministers one has become a Labour M.P., and another was invited in 1939 to prepare for the next General Election as a Christian Pacifist candidate.¹³ The church nurtured a provincial press baron, and of its inevitable mayors, one held office six times between 1903 and 1909.¹⁴

But it is in the two men who ministered to the church between 1752 and 1852 that the text book symmetry is seen at its most tidy. John Butterworth was pastor from 1752 to 1803. Respectable descendants liked to think that he was of "an old Lancashire family which became seated at Butterworth near Rochdale, in the time of King Stephen."¹⁵ More certainly he could claim a pastoral and academic descent from Richard Baxter and John Bunyan; he once heard John Wesley preach, and he was ordained at Coventry on the day that George Whitefield preached elsewhere in the town. Four of his brothers were preachers,

three of them Dissenting ministers. His son Joseph prospered on this spiritual capital. He moved to London where he lived in Bedford Square. He entered into partnership with a successful firm of legal publishers. From 1812 to 1826 he was M.P. for Coventry and then for Dover, giving "an independent support to the government of the day." And he was a Wesleyan Methodist: brother-in-law of Dr. Adam Clarke, treasurer of the Methodist Missionary Society from 1819, and within the fringes of the Clapham Sect.¹⁶

The Butterworths may be rare among Baptists in moving so firmly into that different world of Wesleyanism in the age of Bunting, but they illustrate excellently in themselves and in their leadership of the Coventry church that transition from Dissent to Nonconformity which brought the Baptists, Congregationalists and Methodists together as the pacesetters of English evangelical religion.¹⁷ John Butterworth's successor, Francis Franklin, illustrates the next stage in the process: the heroic age of Nonconformity, fluid, expansive years already ending by the 1840s, when church extension was a matter of pushing the frontiers forward into virgin territory and reclaiming souls hitherto beyond reach. Thereafter it was more a question of structural re-arrangement, of fishing within as yet undepleted home waters. Franklin fitted this heroic age. Andrew Fuller assisted at his ordination. He fathered eight neighbouring Baptist causes ("our departed brother, during his protracted ministry must have preached in this place nearly ten thousand sermons") and he was affectionately remembered in the funeral oration preached by a neighbouring Congregational minister as one who "seldom made any remark on ordinary topics such as the state of the weather, but perhaps quoted some passage of scripture on which he made some useful comment."¹⁸ He will be longer remembered as the inspiration for Rufus Lyon in *Felix Holt*: and between 1832 and Christmas 1835 Mary Ann Evans attended the school kept at Nantglyn, Warwick Row, by his daughters Rebekah and Mary, ladies with little bodies and big heads like their father: "his was an iron frame, he knew nothing of headaches".

Baxter, Bunyan, Wesley, Whitefield, Adam Clarke—and "George Eliot". What need is there of an apostolic succession? John Butterworth moved the cause from the seventeenth century, and Dissenting meeting house, Jordan Well, to the Nonconformist chapel, Cow Lane; Francis Franklin used Cow Lane as the centre of a web of evangelism; and when the cause removed to Queen's Road and Nonconformity became Free Churchmanship, members of the Franklin family remained suitably active in the church.

But what was specifically Baptist about it, other than its earliest name of Jordan Well? Its development is no different from that of a Congregational church; its attitudes strike a suitably positive mean between extremes of radicalism; its families are to be found scarcely less frequently in the rolls of Coventry's Congregational churches. What then was the chemistry of the church? Or, to put it more pointedly, was it simply chance which led to Cow Lane setting the

seal on the spiritual life of another sort of Baptist, no less important in his way than Butterworth or Bunyan, Franklin or Andrew Fuller? For it was at Cow Lane at the end of 1793 that William Gadsby was baptised: the germ of a ministry culminating in a church which "has never deviated from its late pastor's doctrines in the 139 years since his death"¹⁹

Such questions persist when one considers Bloomsbury Chapel, whose links with Queen's Road are amiable enough. Metropolitan kinsmen of the Franklins were active at Bloomsbury; the two churches compete with each other in the number of Presidents furnished by each of them for the Baptist Union.²⁰ Bloomsbury is, of course, a Baptist church, if only because of its special relationship with the Union and its hospitality to the Union's annual assemblies. But what is *Baptist* about it? Dr. Aked considered Baptism to be but a detail; yet there is something ineradicably extreme about this detail which challenges one to refine it.

At Bloomsbury they did their best. In 1875 "it was reported . . . that the curtains to the Baptistery were a great improvement, enabling the candidate to pass from the water to the vestry entirely excluded from observation. Upon the question of the Baptismal dress it was thought desirable to leave this to the discretion of the Lady attendants".²¹ Twenty-five years earlier the church was described as one "which, recognizing no other Baptism but the immersion of professed believers, should welcome to its fellowship all followers of Christ; should observe the ordinance of the Lord's Supper every Lord's-day, and should co-operate with other churches of Christ in such marks of faith and labours of love as are incumbent on all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."²² From the first, and throughout William Brock's ministry, it attracted to its membership a large number of people from prominent Congregational families, and his carefully kept roll of members shows not merely the challenging mobility of a large Victorian London church but also the regular interchange between Baptist and Congregational churches.²³

Like Queen's Road, Bloomsbury Chapel stands as a text book example of a type of urban Nonconformist church. It does so in its surroundings, in its leading personality, and in its first outstanding minister. It seldom deviated from its mean of judicious radicalism, aggressiveness, in any of these respects.

A Congregational journalist caught the essence of these characteristics in the 1850s. "Amongst the great railway contractors, one of them, it seems, was a Baptist, and an M.P. Sir M. Peto—for it is he to whom I allude—became M.P. for Norwich, and bought an estate in the neighbourhood. This naturally led to his connection with Mr. Brock, and this connection led to Mr. Brock's removal to London. In the immediate neighbourhood of the baronet's residence, Russell Square, there was no popular Baptist preacher. To go every Sunday to Devonshire Square, where the *élite* of the Baptists did congregate, was a long and dreary ride. It were far better that the mountain should come to

Mahomet . . . Sir M. Peto did not wish in vain. These great railway contractors can do what they like. In a very short while a very fashionable chapel was built in the neighbourhood of Bedford Square. It stands out in bold relief by the side of a tawdry Episcopalian chapel-of-ease and a French Protestant place of worship".²⁴ The journalist then turned from places to people: "In a very snug pew, at the extreme end on the right, you will see Sir M. Peto and his family. Half-way down on your left you will see the spectacles and long head of Dr. Price, Editor of the 'Eclectic Review'. Lance, the beautiful painter of fruits and flowers, also attends here, but I believe you will find him in the gallery." It was all very comfortable and full and well-fed, especially William Brock, who came across as positive, dogmatic and not very learned. Brock seemed to be more affected than in his Norwich days, occasionally reminding one "of a vulgar man trying to speak fine".²⁵

But then that was Bloomsbury, "not exactly high life, but it is respectable. The better sort of professional men and merchants abound in it. Its neighbourhood is a step in a genteel direction. It is not part and parcel of that vulgar place, the City. It is on the way to the West-end. One might live in a worse place. Its natives are civilised, eschew steel forks, and affect silver spoons. Most of them speak English, and a few have carriages of their own. The place has seen better days; but it is not altogether of the past. It abounds with the latest fashions. It can talk of the last new novel. Even its religion smacks of the genteel—carries a morocco prayer-book, with silver clasps, is followed by a page with buttons of shining hue, and has its services performed by men of honourable and exalted name." It demanded a William Brock, "a true type of Saxon energy and power . . . they are the men who move the world".²⁶

And clearly Morton Peto was among the men who moved mountains. "How I envy the Baptists Sir Morton Peto, whose twinkling eye and fine presence bespeak a broad humanity."²⁷ Peto must compete with Congregationalism's Samuel Morley or Wesleyan Methodism's "Imperial" Perks as Nonconformity's statutory grandee. In Peto's case the features are etched more crudely and there is more shade than light. A man who planted churches ready grown and watered (and expected them to bring dividends, like Gladstone's father, but from better motives), whose commercial life was a saga of thrilling indebtedness on the grand scale, and whose financial candour bound him to sell his country place (cruelly described as "characterised by a good deal of pretentiousness and that of an unsuccessful kind") and his palace in Kensington (where his was the largest household in an opulent thoroughfare) merely to build bigger in the garden when his affairs were already past unravelling, invites judgment.²⁸ Yet there may be worse ways of founding a gathered church and Bloomsbury's records show Peto to have been a conscientious church member and an assiduous deacon, whose commitment outpaced his financial support and whose demeanour, not least towards Brock, was sufficiently

humble for so imaginative and masterful a man.²⁹ His imagination made him a stimulating employer; it gave a new twist to Baptist activity; it allowed him to design for Spurgeon a special reading lamp, suitable for railway journeys. It turned the established building contractor into a railway pioneer; few such could escape infection from its mania.

Neither may his pastor be dismissed quite so crisply as one might like to do. Prototype metropolitan pulpiteers seldom lasted the course: indeed, few of the princes of the London pulpit were prototypes. William Brock was at Bloomsbury for a resounding 23 years. When he closed his portion of the Church Roll with a note that 2,074 had joined the fellowship in that time, he added, with the yearning natural to one whose calling was beyond question: "May *these* names be found written in the Book of Life! So prays, with many tears that he shall add no more to their number, the first Pastor of the Church, William Brock, October 4th 1872"³⁰

He ensured that his church made the most of its strategic position between Bloomsbury and Seven Dials. Its activities marched closely with those exemplars of free enterprise, Evangelicalism, Ragged Schools, City Missions and the Y.M.C.A. It included philanthropies of a refreshing delicacy: its Ladies' Charity For Assisting Poor Married Women was a body whose kind actions belied its pompous title.³¹

Brock's commitment went beyond philanthropy. He commended Dr. Arnold to Mrs. Peto as a model of "unquestionably pre-eminent" Christianity in 1845,³² and in 1858 he assured his people that "he dare not preach anything but the old Gospel" while reminding them that this meant illustration. "The literature that is in vogue becomes suggestive; so does current conversation; so does national prosperity, or national distress . . ." He based this on first principles when he set it all in the context of the prayers of his congregation. "The worship, you know, is yours . . . The theory of our exercise is, that we are all one . . . it is the exercise of the whole church".³³

Brock refused to be trammelled. In 1848 he warned Peto, *à propos* the prospect of ministering in Peto's creation, that "with my convictions of Christian duty, I cannot refrain from saying what I think about the oppression of the poor, the carnality of our national religious establishments, the general character of our legislation, and much that is deplorable in the condition of the commonwealth at large . . . My religion compels me to be the citizen throughout . . . from politics, properly understood, I dare not abstain."³⁴

What he wrote to Peto he proclaimed to his people: "You are not to be taken out of the world in order to glorify God: you are for that purpose to remain here. And, remaining here, you are to be an active and reputable citizen. You may be summoned to serve on juries. You may have to vote for representation in Parliament. You may be called to fill offices of labor and responsibility. You may have to vindicate injuries which have been done to others and to demand that their injuries be relieved. It is impossible to say what may not be required

from you by the civic necessities of your neighbourhood and your country. To those requirements be ever ready to give heed. If summoned to the post of duty, instead of evading it, if you can, go and occupy it as a man of God".³⁵

The whole man merged very easily into the political man in Brock's sight. Once, he had expressed to Peto a fear lest "you would regret having for your pastor a man known to be a person of so-called ultra sentiments."³⁶ But his were ultra sentiments only beyond the confines of mid-Victorian Nonconformity. The mean carefully achieved between church and preaching-shop, paternalism and autocracy, was echoed by a political mean.

In Norwich Brock had been at variance with Peto, and he was always less of a trimmer. Bloomsbury fostered other M.P.s than Peto and a whole army of unsuccessful parliamentary candidates. But Peto stands nonetheless as a representative Nonconformist parliamentarian. Purists found him unsatisfactory about the Sabbath and Disestablishment (though who was ever wholly consistent on either?), but he was quite otherwise on Chapel Trusts, Church Rate and Burials. In short his political career shows the narrowness of the line dividing Nonconformist politics from Liberal politics and the closeness of the former to mere crotchets. The line itself was flanked by quicksands which were impossible to avoid. Politically, safety (and sanity) lay towards the Liberal side just as religiously it lay towards "the World". It was so for Baptists no less than for Congregationalists.

None of the three churches wholly escaped the quicksands. Only Pembroke Chapel perished in them; in this it too might stand as a textbook example of a type of Nonconformist church.

Like Bloomsbury it was an early Victorian foundation. Like Bloomsbury its first pastorate was a remarkable one; and its minister, C. M. Birrell, became William Brock's biographer.³⁷ Like Bloomsbury, its beginning was much blessed by Congregationalists, indeed rather more so, because unlike Bloomsbury it was founded in schism in the existing Baptist community. Like Bloomsbury, but again rather more so, it was at the mercy of a mobile population and rapidly changing surroundings. In one chief respect it differed from Bloomsbury. It was not the creation of a masterful contractor, but it relied over-much on the example of one family and on the past glories of Liverpool's reputation as a centre of philanthropy as well as the slave trade. Despite its pastor's wide contacts and intelligent sympathies (could they be other with Josephine Butler as kinswoman and neighbour?) it lacked that strength as a gathered church which characterised Bloomsbury. The inadequate churchmanship of Victorian Nonconformists is too easily stressed, but such seems to have been the case at Pembroke, Liverpool: it was a community almost wholly reliant on the charms of the parson of the day. It was unable to escape from this occupational hazard of Nonconformity.

Yet this too can be over stressed. In 1900, with Birrell long dead, with auditories of between one and two thousand, a membership of

600, a diaconate of young respectables, a minister who was at the least an inspired original, and a ministerial stipend of at least £600, it more than compared with Bloomsbury or Queen's Road, Coventry.

What then were the quicksands and why did Pembroke succumb and not Bloomsbury or Queen's Road? One, inevitably, was scandal, that other hazard of self-sufficient religious communities. Bloomsbury was not immune from scandal. The embarrassment of Peto's insolvency was followed within a few years by the financial and moral entanglements of Brock's successor, T. W. Handford, whose brief ministry showed only too clearly the vulnerability of personable and facile young ministers in the exposed chapel world. At his recognition service Brock had praised the choice "as an illustration of the good working of Nonconformist methods of Church government and Church action" and Hugh Stowell Brown, speaking for Lancashire whence Handford came, added "I tell you frankly, with all my heart, that I wish you had left him alone": both of them assertions to which events gave an unintended irony.³⁸

Bloomsbury survived: and Pembroke Chapel was strangely resilient beneath a succession of torrid alarms and excursions. There were other perils. Church records and chapel histories can be unsatisfactory guides to the nuances of doctrine, but it is certain that the erratic personalities of Birrell's successors at Pembroke reflected an equally erratic grasp of churchly matters. No responsible late Victorian chapel could be free of doctrinal perplexity and too many of them used their activities, their dumb-bell classes and their "Crutch and Kindness" schemes, as a surrogate theology. In 1905 the Bloomsbury Endeavour Society described itself as "a home circle for all who seek to know the truth and do the right" and the Men's Meeting stated: "Believing that Jesus Christ came to redeem the whole man, our platform is as broad as the needs and aspirations of man".³⁹ It should not have been otherwise, but the *tone* lacked the body of Brock, for example, daring not preach anything but the old Gospel.

Translated to Pembroke under Dr. Aked and his successors, that bewildering procession of Baptist, Congregational and avowedly Unitarian pastorates, of which not the least bizarre was a wartime interlude with Leyton Richards, later of Carr's Lane, Birmingham, the question of tone becomes vital. C. F. Aked announced that "the Word came to Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, to the Buddha, to Zoroaster, to Socrates and to prophets everywhere", and then renounced theology for the higher life and travelled to Grindelwald to sample Christian unity with Hugh Price Hughes and Henry Lunn, before becoming pastor to the Rockefellers and befriending Cecil B. de Mille. Harry Youlden quarrelled with his deacons over the nuances of socialist bicycling. Donald Fraser wrote, "There is only one love and one truth and one good and that is the divine presence in human life wherever found . . . The proof of God is the nature of man . . ." ⁴⁰ Mercifully J. Vint Laughland is beyond the scope of this paper.

All this is a caricature of tendencies to be found within any

Edwardian Baptist or Congregational church, even down to the circumstance that Pembroke's later ministers came from either denomination. But a caricature reflects reality. The robust pacifism, for instance, which was a notorious feature of Pembroke's life was respectably echoed elsewhere. Which brings us to further unanswerable questions, such as the stage at which Christian pacifism becomes a Christian deviation (and how far did Queen's Road, Coventry, err in this respect between the wars?); or the stage at which Christian citizenship turns into Christian politicking. Bloomsbury's chapel "Parliament" was healthy enough and its Labour members were vocal enough, but there is an undertone in the story, which no doubt is only a story, concerning the negotiations in 1906 for the purchase of the freehold when the Baptists' negotiator threatened an obstructive Commissioner of Woods and Forests with questions in the House. "Don't forget, this is a Free Church Parliament".⁴¹

The problems facing Pembroke were not more pressing than those facing Bloomsbury: impossible social conditions, a renewed Liberalism and the insistent rise of militant Labour were common to both communities. But Liverpool had its own politics and the mingling of this with the personalities of the Pembroke pulpit produced a unique situation for Baptists. Yet this is merely to say that the local circumstances of any church make its situation unique. The personalities, politics, and churchmanship of Pembroke were doubtless deviations from the mean maintained at Bloomsbury or Queen's Road, but they were nonetheless reflections of that mean. They were no less a part of mainstream Free Churchmanship on either side of the baptistery.

This paper began with an excursion into the farther shores of cousinhood to discern the dry bones of opinion-forming Nonconformists. Before a conclusion is reached, a fresh excursion into a political genealogy might be justified to illustrate the mean and to underline the kinship between Baptists and Congregationalists.

To a jaundiced posterity it might seem that Lloyd George failed the Baptists and that Asquith was Congregationalism's lost leader.⁴² Asquith bore almost the same sort of family relationship to J. J. Colman, East Anglia's representative Nonconformist layman, straddling the twin denominations in those parts, that the first Mrs. Asquith bore to Morton Peto, in whose pew at Bloomsbury the Colmans occasionally sat. Asquith should be the perfect type of the Free Church *via media*, but facts and people sometimes recoil at symmetry as mere fantasy. Yet one might go further in sketching in the desired mean. Asquith's predecessor as Prime Minister, Campbell Bannerman, who was a remote family connexion of Mrs. C. M. Birrell, had a brother, James, who was a Unionist M.P. Mrs. James Campbell was the only one of Morton Peto's daughters to have been in membership at Bloomsbury.⁴³

Such cogitations come too close to a game for comfort, save that the Free Churches were once marked for their large, active and inter-related families of notables. Their views did not always coincide, and

they may not have known each other well. But they knew of each other; they could *place* each other; and they still shared a common fund of received principles, as well as prejudices.

To our successors this will be matter for remark, as will much else concerning the old kinship of our churches, if it is not already so. Congregationalism's two sides of the baptistery are moving away from each other. This is not entirely a question of the passage of the years or the facts of personal life, and one from the paedobaptist side is tempted to ascribe the cause, however partially, to a development which has been absent from this paper: "Spurgeonism". The thing is meant, not the man. For Spurgeon was after all a son of the Congregational manse and his friendships embraced Congregational ecclesiastics like Henry Allon as well as Congregational originals like Joseph Parker. But a great man's disciples can confound his good intentions, whether his name be John Calvin, John Wesley, or Spurgeon.

"Spurgeonism" is a comforting, understandable, proven, but intuned thing. Even Bloomsbury succumbed to it in the 1880s and 1890s. It accurately reflected a not unjustified pessimism about the way things were going that was not peculiar to Baptists. It does not, however, seem to reflect adequately the tendencies of opinion-forming Baptists, which raises interesting questions about who the real opinion-formers were. Until these are considered one must conclude that it is not clear that it was the obvious development for Baptists to follow, and an observer can only regret it: and perhaps bow out with a reference to Queen's Road's "job description" for a minister in 1905.

"We want a minister who above all things is a spiritually minded man of high character, one who is apt to teach and preach, a thinker and a ripe scholar: specially one in sympathy with young people, willing to work and work hard: a man of good repute, well spoken of by older ministers, vigorous both in mind and body, a gentleman both in appearance and in reality, a man likely to grow in power and in influence in the Church and in the world, a pastor who has done good work in winning souls and in building up the Church of Christ elsewhere."⁴

NOTES

¹ C. F. Aked's sermon, "The Place of Baptists in the Making of England" (1892), quoted in I. Sellers *Salute to Pembroke*, typescript, Liverpool 1960 p. 12. A copy of this is in Dr. Williams's Library.

² As Dr. Gotch put it in his Spring Presidential Address: "That the denomination which has led Christian Communities . . . to the conclusion that baptism is not the essential prerequisite to communion should be charged with narrowness, is unreasonable". *Baptist Handbook 1869* p. 162.

³ *Ibid 1877*, p. 78.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 69.

⁵ "who through the Lord's assistance, presently obtained more than a conquest over all his enemies", quoted in H. G. Tibbutt, *Colonel John Okey 1602-1662*. Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, Vol. XXXV, Streatley, Beds., 1953, p. 153.

⁹ So one might continue. I have lately enjoyed a correspondence with one whose name (Raffles McLaren) bespeaks her maternal descent from Dr. Raffles of Liverpool and her paternal kinship with Dr. McLaren of Manchester.

⁷ *Bloomsbury Magazine* January 1906 Vol. ix, No. 1, pp. i, ii; April 1906 Vol. ix, No. 4, pp. i, v; May 1906 Vol. ix, No. 5, pp. ii, v. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Brian Bowers for guiding me through the voluminous records of Bloomsbury Chapel.

⁸ It could very properly be urged that these are hardly representative churches, even of the mainstream. I wonder if, for example, a Congregationalist selected Carr's Lane, Birmingham and The City Temple, the same criticism could be made: yet they are more representative of Victorian Congregationalism than it is now fashionable to suppose. Small may be beautiful—but is big (and urban) always ugly (or wrong), even for Baptists?

⁹ I am indebted to the Revd. R. J. Hamper and to the church's archivist, Mr. F. Smyth, for encouraging my search of the records of Queen's Road.

¹⁰ *Church Meeting Minute Book 1900-1912*, 28 May 1900.

¹¹ Queen's Road archives: *Typescript* on the Butterworth family.

¹² *Book of Cuttings*. Alas for his subsequent purity; in October 1924 a retired Congregational academic, the Revd. Elkanah Armitage, formerly of Yorkshire United Independent College, Bradford, had valiantly to restrain Principal Blomfield, then of Rawdon College, Bradford, from voting Conservative. The extent of his success must remain a secret of the ballot box: it made no difference to the election result: Mss. *Diary of the Revd. Elkanah Armitage, Oct.-Nov. 1924*, in the possession of the Revd. H. A. Wilson.

¹³ For Swansea East. This was H. Ingle James, minister 1931-43, who became instead a General Superintendent: a brave, imaginative appointment for so lovably *distract* a man. Tom Williams, minister 1945-6, is M.P. for Warrington at the time of writing.

¹⁴ The press baron was Lord Iliffe whose family attended Queen's Road. The mayor was Alderman William Lee. This information is culled from extensive books of cuttings, etc., in the church archives.

¹⁵ This account owes much to the *Typescript* op. cit., and to B. Franklin, *The Life and Times of the Reverend John Butterworth, Minister of the Baptist Church at Coventry 1753-1803*, (1908) a typed copy of which is in the Queen's Road archives.

¹⁶ Joseph Butterworth M.P., 1770-1826. His firm, Butterworth and Son of 43 Fleet Street, was sold in 1826. His nephew, Henry Butterworth, 1786-1860, started a separate business in 1818 at 7 Fleet Street. This famous publishing business survived into the present century. The two firms have often been confused.

¹⁷ This transition is discussed in an important dissertation: A. D. Gilbert *The Growth and Decline of Nonconformity in England and Wales, with Special Reference to the Period before 1850; An Historical Interpretation of Statistics of Religious Practice* Oxford D.Phil. 1973 esp. pp. 26ff. From another angle, and with Baptists in mind, the transition is treated in W. R. Ward "The Baptists and the Transformation of the Church, 1780-1830" *Baptist Quarterly* Vol. XXV No. 4, October 1973, pp. 167-184.

¹⁸ A tiresome habit which he had in common with John Leifchild and James Sherman. For Franklin, assistant minister from 1799 and full minister from 1803 to 1852 see the *Funeral Oration* by the Revd. John Sibree, of which a typescript copy is in the Queen's Road archives.

¹⁹ Or so boasts his church at Rochdale Road, Manchester. Gadsby was baptised on December 29 1793. B. A. Ramsbottom *William Gadsby Bexhill, January 1793* p. 3; B. A. Ramsbottom "William Gadsby (1773-1844)". *The Evangelical Library Bulletin* No. 50, Spring 1973, p. 5.

²⁰ Perhaps Bloomsbury won on points when they snatched a protesting Townley Lord from Queen's Road in 1930.

²¹ *Deacons' Meetings Minute Book 1849-78*, Volume I, 17 December 1875.

²² *The Bloomsbury Chapel Directory 1850*, pp. 3-4.

²³ Members passing through included Ramsay MacDonald's father-in-law,

an ancestor and namesake of the present Poet Laureate and a variety of Whympers, Lances and others of artistic, philanthropic and commercial disposition. The increasing mobility can be illustrated simply, thanks to admirably kept membership rolls. Membership dropped from a peak under Brock of 800 to 406 in 1905. Yet, taken over 15 year intervals between 1849 and 1904, it is clear that the admission of *new* members remained steady at a rate of 1,500 each 15 years.

²⁴ J. Ewing Ritchie, *The London Pulpit*, 2nd ed. 1858, pp. 128-9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-2. Ritchie's father had been minister of Wrentham Congregational church, on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk, and Ritchie himself had lived in Norwich. Bloomsbury's Norwich links are many. Its first minister, Brock, and the first minister of the re-formed Central Church, Thomas Phillips, were previously ministers of St. Mary's, Norwich; George Lance's son-in-law, G. S. Barrett, was minister of Princes Street Congregational church, which supplanted St. Mary's as the forcing house of Norwich Nonconformity.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 130. This, of course, was really the Anglican face of Bloomsbury; but the Baptists had Baptist Noel in John Street, and the Petos were not quite the only persons of title in Bloomsbury chapel itself.

²⁷ Quoted in J. L. Chown *Sir Samuel Morton Peto, Bart., M.P.* No. 1 Brief Biographies of Leading Laymen; n.d. c. 1943, p. 12.

²⁸ He lived at 12, then 12a, Kensington Palace Gardens. Years later, Perks lived at No. 11. The best account of Peto's domestic arrangements in the 1860s is in M. Girouard "Gilded Preserves for the Rich: Kensington Palace Gardens—II" *Country Life*, 18 November 1971, pp. 1360-1363. For Somerleyton, his Mansion in Suffolk, see M. Girouard "A Town Built on Carpets" *Country Life*, 24 September 1970, p. 759.

²⁹ Brock was not in Peto's pocket. His stipend, which reached £800, maintained its relative level after "Black Friday" caused Peto to diminish, and ultimately to cease, his subscription. For Peto's business arrangements see "Samuel Morton Peto: A Note" *Baptist Quarterly* XXIV, 8, October 1972, pp. 411-2.

³⁰ *Register of Church Members, Vol. II 1865-1885.*

³¹ "In no instance do the poor of the metropolis so especially suffer as during their maternal troubles. The history of London mothers in such a neighbourhood as the Seven Dials is incredibly deplorable. By loans and gifts of such various appliances as are known to be necessary, the Ladies' Charity seeks to alleviate the mother's trouble". Mrs. Brock and Mrs. G. T. Kemp, Peto's sister-in-law, were treasurers, *The Bloomsbury Chapel Directory 1850*, p. 21.

³² C. M. Birrell, *The Life of William Brock D.D.* 1878, pp. 132-5.

³³ *The Annual Reports of the Religious Institutions Connected with Bloomsbury Chapel*, January 1858, pp. 7, 13, 14.

³⁴ Birrell *op. cit.*, pp. 161-2.

³⁵ *The Annual Reports . . .* January 1855, pp. 18-19.

³⁶ Birrell, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

³⁷ And a good one. For C. M. Birrell the most accessible account is probably A. Birrell *Things Past Redress 1937*. The earlier history of Pembroke receives ample treatment in two theses:— G. A. Weston *The Baptists of North West England 1750-1850* Sheffield Ph.D. 1969 and J. Lea *The Baptists in Lancashire 1837-1887* Manchester Ph.D. 1970; otherwise I have chiefly relied for this account on Sellers *Salute to Pembroke* *op. cit.*: a remarkable story, told with affection as well as judgment.

³⁸ *The Annual Reports . . .* January 1873, pp. 12-18. The plot is Trollopian. Handford was minister from 1872 to 1874. His pastorate ended in debt and adultery and was subsequently regarded as if it had never been. It is, however, fully treated in the Deacons' minutes and it is clear that they acted not merely honourably, but with understanding and as much humanity as Handford, who was a disingenuous young man, allowed them.

³⁹ *Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church Year Book 1906*, pp. 30, 27.

⁴⁰ Sellers *op. cit. passim* esp. pp. 13-14, 15, 25, 28.

" S. J. Price *Bloomsbury* 1948, pp. 9-10.

" If current conversations between the United Reformed Church and the Churches of Christ reach their desired end it will mean that former Congregationalists take not episcopacy but Lloyd George into their system. They are already doing their best with Edward Irving. Can more be required?

" But here the symmetry goes awry: there is doubtless food for thought in the number of Conservative M.P.s descending from this bankrupt Baptist Baronet; as there is in the fact that a grandson married the widow of Prince Lichnowsky, the Kaiser's last ambassador to the Court of St. James.

" *Minute Book 1900-1912 op. cit.*: the rate for the job, it seems, was £600 p.a.

J. C. G. BINFIELD

Which God is Dead? R. C. Zaehner. London. Dr. Williams's Trust. 1974. Pp. 23. 30p. Friends of Dr. Williams's Library Lecture, No. 28

This lecture is not another nail in the coffin of the "God is Dead" theology, as its title might suggest. It is a study in Comparative Religion, or the History of Religion as this subject is now called, by the Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics in the University of Oxford. Its thesis is that only immediate experience of God can satisfy man, and that this is provided by many forms of mysticism and by the great Eastern religions. Here God is very much alive, whereas, by contrast, the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, who revealed Himself in the past, is dead. Professor Zaehner ranges widely as he develops this theme. He makes no reference to the Christian claim to experience of God through the Holy Spirit, and his general attitude to the Christian Faith is unsympathetic.

The lecture serves to direct attention to a number of the questions arising out of recent studies in world religions which press for answers. We may note Zaehner's opinion that more often than we think young people are looking for a transcendental dimension to life, and consider its implications for the place of the numinous in our worship. We are left facing the painful question why so many in the West are turning to Eastern religions. Is it because Christians have failed to make others aware of the new life which they possess in Christ? Or is it because too few of us have this experience in depth?

D. MONKCOM