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# EVANGELICAL ECUMENISM
# The Amalgamation of General and Particular Baptists in 1891

## PART II: FROM COURTSHIP TO MARRIAGE

From the very beginning, it proved impossible to keep the two strands of Baptist life separate. Members moved from churches of one order to those of the other, and were so fully accepted that, if possessing the appropriate gifts, they soon secured appointment to the diaconate within churches of the other communion. There was little restriction on pulpit access - the same sermons, it was claimed, were equally acceptable in both parts of the family. Thus there soon developed an interchange of ministry. Study of the magazines and the handbooks will swiftly reveal examples of men trained in one of the Particular Colleges serving in New Connexion pastorates and conversely men from the New Connexion College serving Particular Baptist charges. By 1870, when the adjective 'New' before the word 'Connexion' was becoming something of an embarrassment, Dr Underwood calculated that of 400+ General Baptists who had served in the foregoing hundred years, 30+ had gone on to Particular Baptist charges; about half that number to other churches; whilst some dozen ministers and ex-students had avowed themselves Unitarians. In the early years, accessions had mainly come from Methodist bodies; that was why Dr Halley, in *Congregationalism in Lancashire*, had written, 'the General Baptists were for the most part an off-shoot of the Wesleyans'. One-sixth of New Connexion pastors serving in 1870, however, came direct from Particular Baptist Colleges or churches. 'If this extensive co-mingling of ministers who were trained outside of us, and who were once otherwise associated, has occurred without any harm, and with some positive benefit, may not a much wider comprehension be wished and welcomed?'[1]

But that 'wider comprehension' had to take account of the total context, for the modified Calvinism of post-Fuller Particular Baptists and the revival faith of the New Connexion still represented median positions, between the remaining High Calvinists and those General Baptists who adopted a unitarian Christology. Those positions, and the suspicions that they bred, continued to exercise an influence on those who trod the middle ground.

## THE FULL SPECTRUM OF BAPTIST ORGANIZATIONS

Whilst the Gadsbyites and the new Strict Baptists of the 1830s, who left the Church of England at a time when an innovative form of High-churchmanship was beginning to stir,[2] had little to do with the reformulated Baptist Union, it included Strict Baptists holding the doctrine of particular redemption, including especially those who promoted the activities of the Baptist Tract Society (1841), and the Strict Baptist Society which later became the Baptist Evangelical Society.[3] The northern branch of that society was active, leading in 1860 to the withdrawal of strict-communionist churches from the Lancashire and Cheshire Churches to form the North Western Association. In 1875 it reunited with the older association, bringing Manchester College with it.[4] Its title notwithstanding, whilst this Association lasted, it meant that within the Baptist Union a second confessionally, rather than geographically, defined association had its existence.

On the other side, the New Connexion, in spite of Dan Taylor's withdrawal from the assembly of the Old Connexion in 1803, and the declaration by New Connexion ministers ten years later condemning the 'baneful poison of Socinianism', continued in some kind of conversation with the older body. Within the counsels of the latter, the Reverend J.C. Means, minister of their leading London congregation, Messenger, Secretary of the Assembly and editor of the *General Baptist Advocate* from 1831 to 1836, attacked the Unitarianism of many General Baptists and sought to

steer the body into closer fellowship with the New Connexion. Means' energies over many year secured an exchange of delegations in 1868: two messengers from the Old Connexion were received at the assembly of the New Connexion in Derby and the New Connexion sent two delegates to the Worship Street Assembly in London. This exchange was repeated and consolidated in 1869 and 1870, when an ageing Means, as a last act before resigning the Secretaryship of the General Baptist Assembly, proposed the virtual absorption of the few remaining old General Baptist Chapels by the New Connexion, which had so signally demonstrated its more effective evangelistic fervour.

Such proposals were not surprisingly opposed by the more rationalist of the old General Baptist congregations, their ministers and their Unitarian friends, while some in the New Connexion were concerned at this amount of fellowship with those whose orthodoxy remained suspect. In 1868 the *General Baptist Magazine*, commenting on the proceedings of the General Assembly, wrote, 'When we are informed that to be designated Unitarian and to hold the Unitarian doctrine "is neither a qualification nor a disqualification of communion" with it, our approval ends and our judgment begins to discern the secret of diminished numbers and decreasing influence.'[5] The following year, those who proposed the motion to send delegates to the General Assembly, Dr Underwood and the Revd Isaac Preston, as well as other speakers, took care to defend themselves against the accusation that they 'had any sympathy with the unevangelical views whose prevalence had been so pernicious to the well-being of the old connexion.'[6] In 1875 at the New Connexion Assembly at Wisbech, there was a hostile demonstration against the visiting delegates.

In 1878, however, Means, through personal friendship, secured John Clifford as preacher of the annual sermon at a rather more optimistic assembly of the older body. By this date a number of New Connexion ministers had accepted pastoral charges in Old Connexion churches and were bringing more vigorous evangelistic leadership to their outreach. Thus the improved relationship continued through the early 'eighties, with Clifford again addressing the assembly in both 1887 and 1888 when the ageing radical reformer, Henry Solly, on behalf of the more conservative elements in the Old Connexion, made a bold plea for reunion. But 1888 was to prove the end of a process rather than a new beginning. Arguably the early rumblings of Downgrade and the delicate negotiations between the New Connexion and the Particular Baptists within the Baptist Union made the New Connexion chary of going further down the road of reunion with the old connexion, which seemed to offer little for the future of the churches, though four Old Connexion churches - Headcorn, Winchmore Hill, Long Sutton and Saffron Walden - were subsequently recognized as members of the Baptist Union.[7]

## MID CENTURY BLUES

New Connexion minds were most disposed to consider total integration into the life of the Baptist Union, when the progress of their own connexion was brought into question. Discussion of a decline in numbers, a lack of pastors of real ability, the able being dissuaded from ministry by the miserable stipends then offered, the absence of an urgent and earnest Home Missionary spirit securing proper financial support for the work - all could quickly lead to proposals about organizational unity. This seems to have been particularly true of the late 1860s.[8] The advent of a younger leadership, of whom John Clifford was the most conspicuous example, was successful in restoring morale in the 'seventies, when, as editor of the denominational magazine, Clifford was well-placed to build confidence. In a paper to the autumnal session of the Baptist Union in 1864, Dr Underwood, then Principal of Chilwell College, provided interesting statistical data for the Connexion: just over 21,000 members in

about 150 churches were served by some hundred ordained clergy, about three-quarters of whom had academic training. Although ministerial salaries had improved over the past twenty years they were still lower than for other denominations. About 20% of the ministers came from other traditions, principally the Particular Baptists.[9]

In the late 'sixties there was a great consciousness that baptisms had been on the decline in the Connexion from 1862, and that membership too had declined from 1865 to 1867. Thomas Goadby of Derby, writing in 1868, saw the watershed as coming earlier: denominational expansion up to 1846 had been steady, doubling every twenty years, or more in the first twenty years, but in 1846 such progress suddenly halted and from 1847-1867 the rate of growth was only 13%, with the failure equally spread between town and country. The towns of the East Midlands, the heartland of the Connexion, actually showed a decline in membership during these twenty years. All this, he reluctantly concluded, presented a fearful testimony to a decline in evangelistic zeal. In London, there had been some increase, but not the bold expansion secured by the London Baptist Association, with one new church planted each year. The Connexion's centenary found it in a grave crisis of 'comparative languor and inefficiency' - not an attractive option to any body seeking amalgamation.

For all his pessimism about the last twenty years, Goadby was ambiguous about further integration with the Particular Baptists, affirming:,

> Not as yet has denominationalism completed its work in the world . . . Not as a loose and heterogeneous mass would we best wage the warfare of the time. Nothing is gained by laxity of principle or looseness of fellowship or motley or disjointed agglomerations of unorganized and undisciplined units. In relation to other Baptist churches our duty is plain and clear. So far as they can unite and coalesce with us, we are anxious to unite and coalesce with them. Already we are blended with the larger body of Baptists in the Baptist Union, and take rank as a recognized and distinct community. For there is a main body of Baptists, and there are a right wing and a left wing: the brave-hearted Spurgeon commands the one, and we are remanded to the other. We cannot alter this if we would, and it is scarcely possible for us except by gradual steps to effect any closer amalgamation. We must grow into union; resolutions and plans can only open and clear the way. It is, I believe, the desire of our churches to preserve their autonomy as a Connexion. Great and insuperable, or well-nigh insuperable, difficulties stand in the way of any immediate or important change, and the difficulties as we have at length discovered are not only or mainly upon our side. Union not absorption; brotherly love not denominational disintegration; catholicity of spirit not dissolution of the body; - these are our truest maxims and our wisest watchwords.[10]

Goadby accordingly argued that it was best not to over-press the issue but to continue the fraternal relationship that already existed, since he was fearful of the various societies becoming over-centralised and controlled by 'irresponsible officialism'. He still articulated a concern that the distinction between 'General' and 'Particular' - 'the relics of scholastic speculation' - were of less than major importance to the theological and social strivings of the day. The contemporary challenge came in the form of rationalism and Romanism and their associates, raising large issues as to 'the inspiration and authority of the Word of God and the character

and claims of Our Lord Jesus Christ.' At the same time there were possibilities of wider coalitions of Evangelical Christians and Free Churchmen which were most encouraging. Somewhat changing his earlier emphasis, he argued,

> The principle of denominationalism must not be, as I sometimes fear it has been of late, too prominent and conspicuous among us . . . Brethren, what is our distinctive creed but an idle speculation, what are our churches but purposeless institutions, what is our denomination but a blunder and a mistake, if we are not bringing sinners to repentance and saving souls from death?[11]

In July 1869, there was the baldest statement of the situation: 'There seems to be an impression abroad that General Baptists have done their work, and that nothing remains for them but either absorption into some other body, or else perpetual decline and ultimate extinction.'[12] The former option, though, if properly accomplished, was worthy of serious thought. When statistical reports improved in the 'seventies, talk of unification tended to disappear from the agenda. But there were other causes of disquiet: for example, an increasing indifference to the responsibilities of church membership,[13] many churches embracing in their congregations those 'who are undoubtedly Christians, but will not take on the commitment of baptism and membership.' In part this helped to explain away the small growth of recent years: 'Our congregations contain scores of persons, the most regular in their attendance and most liberal in their contributions, who prefer not to enter the communion . . . though not actually in the church they virtually belong to us, and their lives will bear favourable comparison with those whose names are written on our registers.'[14]

Reviewing the mid-century melancholy, John Clifford mused that anybody reading the magazine for the late fifties and sixties could not but deduce that here was the record of a connexion that 'had lived too long' and was 'asking for somebody in sheer pity' to bury it. So desperate was the situation that 'if the leaders of that incoherent denomination [the Particular Baptists] had only given us the faintest encouragement, we should have performed the Japanese Trick with inimitable dexterity'. So by 1877, he maintained, 'compelled to go our own way . . . now the subject of the union is not so much as named amongst the possibilities of our near future.'[15] Clifford himself as editor had played a considerable part in raising denominational morale and saving it from over much navel-gazing. In part, there was better news to report, and even when it was not particularly encouraging Clifford still produced an inspiring vision of the future.

## NON-THEOLOGICAL FACTORS

One of the features that brought the two parts of the family together was joint participation in a number of Baptist societies, in addition to the Baptist Union itself, for example, the Bible Translation Society, the Baptist Total Abstinence Association, and the Hanserd Knollys Society. Certain Funds - the Augmentation Fund, the National Association for Aged and Infirm Baptist Ministers, and the Board of Education - also supported ministers of both sections of the family which increasingly involved some subsidy by Particular Baptists of General Baptist work. Moreover, good General Baptist names like Pike, Stevenson, and Goadby were soon found among the alumni of the Stepney-Regent's Park College. When John Clifford was ordained at Paddington on Good Friday 1859, Dr Underwood of the New Connexion College at Nottingham preached in the afternoon and Dr Angus of Regent's Park College in the evening.[16]

Common interests and common needs played their part. For example, the

distribution of funds, collected by the Baptist Lancashire Relief Committee during the cotton famine of the 1860s, to General Baptist Churches without distinction was warmly appreciated. A resolution from the New Connexion expressed their warmest thanks 'for this timely help, while it hails the spirit in which the help was given as an expression of true brotherly love, and as a means of drawing the two sections of the Baptist body into closer and more practical union.'[17]

In 1864, a proposal to establish a General Baptist Building Fund[18] had interesting results. The committee appointed to investigate this, composed of the Leicester ministers, and Messrs George Stevenson, J. F. Winks, and J. Roper, all also of Leicester, soon discovered that the older Baptist Building Fund, founded in 1824 as the London Baptist Building Fund, was restricted to assisting Particular Baptist churches. Considerable legal difficulties would be entailed in dispensing with this restriction. Thwarted in their attempt to join the older body, they widened their brief and set up 'The Union Baptist Building Fund', in the interests of avoiding anything that would 'in the least degree tend to fetter or hinder united action on the part of the whole Baptist body at any future time.' It was resolved that the new fund 'be exclusively a loan fund for Baptists without distinction.' Regrettably the fund did not secure the hoped-for scale of support and this seriously circumscribed its usefulness in its early years. By 1877, the Fund Treasurer was asking benefactors not to use the title 'Union Baptist Building Fund' in their wills as this had changed to the General Baptist Building Fund.[19]

In the same year the New Connexion established a Board of Reference 'to facilitate the removal of ministers and the supply of churches', consisting of four senior ministers (initially the Revd. W. Underwood, Dr Jabez Burns, the Revd. T. W. Mathews, and the Revd. R. Ingham) serving for three years. It was to be almost twenty years before the Baptist Union considered a similar proposal and more than ten years before it took effective action.[20] The Association became incorporated in 1884, thereby providing the precedent for the creation of the Baptist Union Corporation, which, as an instrument of the Union, helped to make amalgamation effective.[21] All this indicates the way in which the New Connexion had developed various instruments for the support of denominational life which later fed into the work of the Union as a whole.

As New Connexion members became more mobile, they tended to move to areas where there was either no new Connexion chapel, or only a struggling one. Earlier they would have used the opportunity to establish a New Connexion cause, but later in the century it became more acceptable to join the nearest Particular Baptist or Independent church, especially where that offered lively fellowship and good opportunities for Christian service. Sometimes those concerned did not join the new church but left their membership with their former church, thereby impoverishing two church fellowships.[22] A proposal was made for a scheme to keep in touch with 'members of General Baptist churches having been placed in districts where General Baptist Churches are not accessible' and who were accordingly working with 'Baptist churches outside our Association.'[23] Such were later invited to become personal members of the General Baptist Association.[24]

Underwood believed that it was 'no uncommon thing for our members, when they rise in worldly position, or when their comfort is disturbed, to retire from our communion to that of the other section, which is considered to be more respectable, or which has, perchance, a more able ministry or more attractive sanctuaries.'[25] There had also been too much unhealthy independence among the churches, failing to realise that 'when the individual unites with a church or the church with an association of churches, a portion of individual liberty is necessarily surrendered.' Too many churches had been founded by domineering figures who, unable to get

their own way in larger bodies, seceded to found congregations that they could dominate, and which were thus doomed to weakness by the very way in which they had been brought to birth. Such churches, schismatically founded, were in their debility a living testimony to the antithesis of the strength of unity.[26]

Proposals for amalgamations within other denominations also affected Baptist minds, as did secular celebrations. For example, J. Perry of Hitchin argued that 'a union of P.B.s and G.B.s' would be an excellent way of celebrating the Queen's Jubilee in 1887, especially since 'the union of various sections of the Wesleyan body is in the air'. This would represent a 'needful husbanding of our resources' and would help 'in the spread of the gospel in the villages.' His plea, articulated in January 1887, reinforced among the General Baptists the advocacy of a similar proposal by Charles Williams from the chair of the Baptist Union, and prompted John Clifford to support the proposal in the *General Baptist Magazine*.[27]

## LOCAL INITIATIVES

Growing together seems to have begun at the local level: practice was more advanced than theory.[28] In 1861, the London Baptist ministers, accustomed to meet in 'The Particular Baptist Board', 'after much prayer' agreed to strike through the word 'Particular' and admit John Clifford to their fellowship. Other forms of co-operation also developed. One was for associations to embrace members of both parts of the family. When the London Baptist Association was refounded in 1865, with Spurgeon presiding over the planning group, the *Freeman* recorded that those present represented 'well-nigh every shade of opinion amongst us, whilst if any party predominated, we should say it was that of our Strict-Communion brethren.' There was thankfulness 'that the basis of this new association is so broad. It does not rest in a creed, but simply with wide basis of evangelical sentiment.' John Clifford referred to London General Baptist Churches 'entering therein on perfectly equal terms without any question being raised as to theology, and expressly for the prosecution of chapel-building work.'[29] Granted such unity of concern about church extension, and the participation of both bodies in promoting new causes, how distinctive in loyalty would such newly founded churches be? Haven Green, Ealing, for example, was a New Connexion venture, but Particular Baptists, including Spurgeon, were involved with its establishment.[30] Ferme Park, Hornsey, opened in 1889, was another late New Connexion planting; but with Charles Brown, the first minister, trained at Bristol, it would be right to question whether within such churches any adjective could properly be put in front of Baptist.

Buckinghamshire provided another example of widened association life. The General Baptists, with a disused chapel in Aylesbury, deferred the attempt to reopen it as a preaching station because the Particulars had successfully inaugurated services in the Corn Exchange. In November 1868, it was reported 'that as the Buckinghamshire Association now gives the opportunity of membership to all evangelical Baptist churches in the district irrespective of the distinctions of "Particular" and "General",' the chapel should be made available to the new congregation at a nominal rent of £1 per annum. In 1868, the Midlands Conference discussed closer association with The Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire Association of Particular Baptists. Practical difficulties made complete immediate integration impossible, but a start was made with united autumnal meetings when the Baptist Union was not meeting in the midlands.[31]

In 1870 a Midlands Baptist Union was formed to bring together churches of the two traditions in joint evangelistic activity. Funds were raised and James Manning of Nottingham was appointed to work in alternate months with churches of the different traditions, an arrangement seemingly designed to overcome suspicion

amongst subscribers.[32] In 1879 a Mr Wallace from Scotland replaced him and reported that the state of the churches in the East Midlands was not encouraging, 'especially was this true of the General Baptist Churches.' Two years later the experiment came to an end. Meanwhile a similar experiment in Cheshire saw the founding of the Cheshire Baptist Union in 1879 to unite the Cheshire churches of both sections of the denomination, 'whilst retaining existing denominational ties', in order to promote evangelistic services. This outlived the Midland experiment. In North Staffordshire a similar body seems to have operated, with T. G. Head, funded by the British and Irish Home Missionary Society, serving a joint pastorate between the Particular church at Fenton and the General congregation meeting at Eastwood Vale, Hanley.[33] Another local strategy was for General Baptist District Conferences to affiliate with the Baptist Union on the same terms as other associations. The Northern Conference did this in 1885 and commended the procedure to the other conferences. In like manner, the Connexion determined always to take up its allotted place on the Baptist Union Council, whilst there was a call to churches not in membership with the Council to join, for as of 1885 two-thirds of the churches had not, while not all those in membership pulled their weight: in W. J. Avery's judgment, membership of the Union without giving support was meaningless.[34]

## BAPTISM, COMMUNION AND MEMBERSHIP

Both sections of the denomination moved on from the open-communion debate of the Hall-Kinghorn era to the issue of open membership. Whereas the General Baptists of the 1830s had been suspicious of the open table of an increasing number of Particular churches, by 1877 John Clifford could bear testimony that over the last fifty years their tables had become universally open.[35] The establishment of open-membership churches, which were not union churches in part because the ministry remained firmly committed to commending believer's baptism, derived from their reductionist and individualised theologies of that rite. John Clifford's view of baptism, constantly stated and soon taken up by others, was very clear. Baptism

> is associated in the closest way with man's spiritual welfare, with the remission of sins through repentance and faith; and with the gifts of the Holy Ghost. But in no part of the Gospels, Acts, or Epistles, is it described as a condition of admission to the church. Uniformly and exclusively it is prescribed as a solemn transaction between the soul and the Saviour - nowhere as a portion of church government, or as indispensable in order to entrance upon a church state.

Thus the church was not involved in approving candidates for baptism: 'No church is asked to approve the person as fit: the church is not taken into the question at all.' Clifford believed this was the view of the 'growing part of the denomination'. Westbourne Park was established as an open-membership church, and a small number of General Baptists adopted Clifford's position and practice. When baptism was so viewed, and when Congregational churches welcomed people into membership on the basis of a confession of faith, the argument for denominational unification was compelling.[36]

Advocating the establishment of open-membership churches in the General Baptist Association Letter for 1882, W. L. Jones of Spalding called for a

> union not of perfect uniformity in creed, not of absolute agreement in outward forms, not of mechanical attachment to a vast ecclesiastical confederation, whose members are held together by the iron hand of law; but rather the union of common life, the

> union of true affection, binding all in the silken cords of love to a Common Lord, the union of a common aim, the union of a common experience, a union so clearly visible, so striking and impressive, that an unbelieving world, allured and won by its fascinating and attractive power, will say, 'We will go with you, for we perceive that God is with you'.[37]

The implication of the letter provoked the calling of a special conference on Conditions of Church Membership. Such romantic revisionism was strenuously opposed by Joseph Fletcher, who perhaps did not help his case by conflating open-membership and Union churches. Article Six of the New Connexion was clear enough in requiring 'all who repent and believe the gospel, to be baptized by immersion in water, in order to be initiated into a church state: and that no person ought to be received into the church without submission to that ordinance.' Modern practice, Fletcher contended, stood that teaching on its head: baptism, no longer a duty, was but a privilege, and 'if it be deemed a privilege not worth having, he who so deems it is to be received into the church all the same and is to be accounted quite as good a Christian as one who hails it with unquestioning loyalty, and observes it with unfaltering fidelity.'[38] Clearly the real target of Fletcher's attack was Clifford rather than Jones, and it is significant that Fletcher and Clifford were to serve as two of the last presidents of the General Baptist Association, the one doing all he could to obstruct, the other all he could to aid, the process. Accordingly, in their persons they illustrate the inner tensions within the body, between the credal semi-presbyterianism of Fletcher and the functional congregationalism of Clifford.

For his part, Clifford called to witness the increase of open membership among Particular Baptists, naming Bloomsbury, Regent's Park, Hampstead, Clapton, and Camden Road, London; Broadmead and Tyndale, Bristol; St Mary's, Norwich, while all the Birmingham Churches, save the New Connexion congregation, were open membership, as were all the new churches founded by the London Baptist Association save one. His enquiries indicated that two out of every three of 'the leading churches of the Particular Baptist type' were open membership.[39] The toleration of differences on the terms of communion within both sides of the family necessarily raised questions as to why they should allow their historic differences over election to perpetuate separate identities.

## NEW LEADERS AND NEW INITIATIVES

John Clifford's conversion to amalgamation was crucial to the success of the whole operation, and added significantly to the patient advocacy of older leaders like Underwood. Nor must the contribution of less charismatic figures be ignored. W. J. Avery was appointed to head up the Baptist Union Department of the General Baptist Association, when an increasing conscience developed as to the very low level of support being given. The other architect of amalgamation was the last secretary of the General Baptist Association, Mr Foulkes Griffiths QC of Hornsey, barrister at the Temple, whose clear legal mind helped iron out the details of procedure, decision-making and institutional mergers in the final acts of amalgamation.

After the frustrated attempts to seek an amalgamation of General and Particular Baptists in the 1860s, the matter seems to have been removed from the agenda for fifteen years, in which the New Connexion recovered something of its self-confidence. When in 1884 Richard Glover, as President of the Union, visited the annual assembly of the New Connexion, he exhorted his hearers with the message that 'the more perfect denomination of the future will be when "P.B." and "G.B." are moulded into some other "B" nobler and larger.'[40] At the same time, there was renewed awareness of the slow growth within the churches of the New Connexion,

whilst the number of baptisms per annum was actually declining (1882:1542; 1883:1344; 1884:1291 - whether because of under-stress in open-membership churches or over-stress in closed-membership churches, the analyst was uncertain).

The issue of amalgamation was restored to the agenda by Charles Williams in his presidential address to the Baptist Union Assembly on May 10th, 1886. The focus for that assembly was rural evangelism; within that context Williams made his appeal, making two significant points. First, today's mission must not be fettered by yesterday's caution. Secondly, for true union to exist, faith and freedom must be harnessed together. The faith once delivered to the saints, and the freedom for the disciple to develop his own pattern of fidelity in active discipleship in the contemporary world, were not hostile to one another if both flowed from a fundamental allegiance to Christ. In this way liberty served to conserve truth: liberty and loyalty belonged together when the object of the exercise was not a union of coercion or cold logic but of spiritual reality.[41]

Arguing from John 17, he asked:

> Can we justify the division of our denomination into two sections? Particular and General Baptists belong to the same association in London. Why cannot then churches be similarly associated in Leicestershire and Derbyshire, in Lancashire and Yorkshire? We preach the same gospel. Why not unite in the same colleges and missionary societies? What hinders?

Whilst some might too quickly answer, 'Trust Deeds', W. H. Tetley of Derby, President of the General Baptist Association in 1888, was convinced it was not a universal want of inclination, not an indistinguishable passion for maintaining the distinction between Particulars and Generals, now recognized as a difference without a distinction. It certainly was not any want of General Baptist ministers serving in Particular Baptist churches, or Particular Baptists pastoring General Baptist churches, nor could it be attributed to any superfluity of resource and support for the denomination's institutions. The answer to 'What hinders?' remained an enigma. Perhaps more serious reflection was called for, coupled with more daring leadership, willing to take the necessary steps.[42]

The ensuing resolution was proposed by Alexander McLaren, seconded by Colonel Griffin, then Treasurer of the Home Mission Fund, and spoken to by Edward White, as Chairman of the Congregational Union:

> That this Assembly, deeply impressed with the importance of the evangelisation of our country and with the special needs of our village churches earnestly commends to the denomination the appeal made this morning from the Presidential Chair on behalf of the Home Mission of the Baptist Union.[43]

The strategic concerns of a president from Lancashire, intent upon improving the denomination's capacity for bold missionary endeavour at home and overseas, needed the determination of the Yorkshire Association Secretary, John Haslam, to give them shape and form at the autumnal meetings of the Baptist Union in Huddersfield in 1888. Even presidential pleas do not become denominational policy unless they are provided with effective institutional teeth.[44] There was the added complication that the affairs of the Baptist Union in the years 1887-88 were overshadowed by the threats inherent in the Downgrade Controversy, though Spurgeon made it clear that, as far as he was concerned, the free-will/predestination issue was to be left as an open question. Moreover, votes in councils had to be backed up by the education of affections. 'The union cannot be accomplished', affirmed J. C. Jones, 'by passing

resolutions at meetings and recording such resolutions with pen and ink.'[45]

## THE GENERAL BAPTISTS RESPOND: I THE WALSALL ASSOCIATION OF 1889

With this authority Booth wrote to the General Baptist Association, as did the Secretary of the Leicestershire Association. Foulkes Griffiths persuaded the executive to set up an investigative committee, which brought unanimously supported resolutions to the Association Meetings in Walsall in 1889, where the vital in-principle decision to proceed towards amalgamation was taken.[46] This was only done after rehearsing earlier pro-union decisions from the initial approach to Andrew Fuller to be allowed to nominate a General Baptist to serve under BMS direction in India. Most recently, when the New Connexion College had moved from Chilwell to Nottingham the opportunity had been taken to revise the trust to open it to all Evangelical Baptists. This historical consciousness was very important to the General Baptists. Thereafter, the delegates expressed 'a hearty desire for complete and thorough-going union - union not of fragments of one body but of all and the whole, and as far as may be, with all and the whole of the Particular Baptists.' Fifty-one delegates voted for the resolution, twelve against; the debate had not yet attracted the large numbers that were to participate in subsequent years. The Baptist Union was assured that, if it would take the necessary action to promote such a union, it could count on their support. The prospects seemed good, since, following Williams' initiative, some twenty General Baptist churches had joined the Union, and giving to Union funds had shown a significant increase. What was involved was not, of course, an amalgamation with the Baptist Union for the New Connexion had been a full member of that body from its commencement, and thus all its institutions were jointly owned. The union was with Particular Baptist brethren and their institutions, though again the difficulty was underlined that the Particular Baptists were without corporate identity.

The decision was not without dissent. The Reverend Joseph Fletcher of the historic Commercial Road Church in East London, one of the editors of the denominational journal, was President of the Association that year. A major opponent of the scheme, he used his address to express his disquiet. The issue was, he contended, 'a question which primarily concerns the Foreign Mission'. He was not convinced that the Particular Baptists were really committed to the proposal: even Charles Williams' plea occasioned 'no practical step . . . until the amalgamation question went forth from our own Foreign Mission Committee'. Even then, when the Secretary of the BMS was pressed to take a seat on the General Baptist Missionary Society Committee investigating the implications, he 'found reasons for not doing so.' Indeed, when the Report of the Council first came before the Baptist Union, the first proposal was that it should lie on the table, which he considered 'the same thing as throwing it into the waste paper basket'. There it would have lain, had not a General Baptist ex-president [John Clifford] not intervened to rescue it. The leadership of the Baptist Union, itself still but a lodger in the Mission House, was guilty of passing a resolution on union and then naively asking others to implement it. Further allegations were that the Baptist Union Council had judged it impractical to amalgamate the organization of the Colleges, whilst the fusion of the Building Funds was beyond contemplation.

The problem was in attempting amalgamation at a national level: locally, he was happy to be a full member of the London Baptist Association, to work harmoniously with Pastor's College men in East London, and to serve loyally on the Baptist Union Council. Spiritual union was what mattered, not a paper union. If there had been theological convergence well and good; if not, let not the divisions be papered over. He was not convinced that the Particular Baptists really wanted amalgamation:

reflecting on their failure to take up the initiative earlier, he confessed, 'I am too independent to knock a second time at any door where I have been repulsed once.' Whether amalgamation took place or not, the union most to be desired was the strengthening of existing organization. This, could be done 'by combining with it something of the essence of Methodism or Presbyterianism, or a judicious blend of both', in order to counter the ultra-congregationalism of the present day. Even General Baptists were suffering from 'independency run mad': city churches which did not work together; denominational institutions which secured only whimsical support; church schisms leading to rival congregations; ministerial invitations to men of no standing or approbation with disastrous consequences for the churches; denominational authorities which were either powerless or ignored.[47]

Fletcher sought first, for the good of the churches, a new standard of faith and practice. Dan Taylor's 'Six Articles' no longer met the needs of the time. A new statement was needed, based perhaps on John Clifford's three universals (the universality of the love of God to man; the universality of the redeeming work of the Son; the universality of the convincing work of the Spirit), coupled with a statement of Baptist convictions on polity, freedom and the ordinances. The over-vague non-credalism of earlier years required qualification. J.A. [whom Fletcher took to be Joseph Angus] had indicated that what Baptists objected to was creeds as human statements going beyond the limits of scriptural teaching, but Baptists had always required certain beliefs of those seeking their fellowship. 'We must have beliefs or we are not Christians. We must have beliefs - great principles of truth and life - or we cannot have Christian churches; and we must avow and proclaim them or we are useless Christians, if we be Christians at all.'[48] Such sentiments Fletcher endorsed with all his heart. In the context of Downgrade, it was not only the Spurgeonic School which was seeking some confession of faith: a committed General Baptist was of the same mind.

Where Spurgeon would have parted company with Fletcher was in his desire for a tighter denominational organization: a Model Trust Deed to protect the denomination's interests at a time when there was suspicion of trust deeds as inhibiting the development of new strategies; a Board of Reference to act like a Methodist Stationing Committee to examine candidates for training and to help place ministers (in the pioneer years of the New Connexion the mind of the whole association was from time to time sought on critical placements); and finally a Sustentation Fund to prevent churches creating ministerial penury, and to secure proper respect for the ministry. Such was the programme that Fletcher offered as an alternative to amalgamation.[49] In fact, when amalgamation took place, one of the major contributions of the General Baptists to the enrichment of the whole denomination was this well-developed sense of denominational cohesion and the development of appropriate instruments to secure it.

## BAPTIST UNION AND BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY PROCEEDINGS

For its part the Baptist Union Assembly, meeting in Birmingham in October 1889, received from the Council a resolution in favour of amalgamation, proposed by John Clifford, and unanimously agreed. For this to have meaning would require the integration of the various societies and institutions of both bodies and a reconstruction of association life on a geographical principle only. The Union was fortified in its decision by reports that the proposal was practical and did not encounter any major legal difficulties, and by securing a return from 32 out of the 34 Associations - all except Monmouthshire Welsh and the Bedfordshire Union of Christians, who may well have been recording a deliberate abstention, as the Huntingdonshire Association recorded that it could not discuss the question since it

comprised Independents as well as Baptists. Three other associations had deferred consideration, including the important Yorkshire Association which had arranged to meet representatives of the Northern Conference first. The Spurgeonic Surrey and Middlesex Association voted 'that no opinion on this subject be expressed by this Association'. This left 27 associations supporting the proposed action and none dissenting.[50]

The Council, on the recommendation of the President of the General Baptist Association and the Treasurer of the Union, again affirmed that the designations 'General' and 'Particular' should be discontinued as a means of identifying different Baptist churches, societies and institutions. All institutions denominationally promoted should be designated by the term 'Baptist' only, with the obvious requirement that all Baptists should be free to participate in their management and, as appropriate, their benefits. Of course, it was up to those societies, and critically the two missionary societies, to take independent action, since a resolution of the Baptist Union Council could in no way initiate or determine action in these independent bodies, though the General Baptist Missionary Society was by this time constitutionally integrated into their Association. In fact joint meetings of the two missionary societies took up the task as early as September 1888, with a number of joint meetings following. A special meeting of the BMS, held on April 29, 1890, to secure necessary action, devised the form of words which adopted the popular name of the society as its formal title with the explanation that the society embraced the 'Particular Baptist Missionary Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen' founded in 1792, and the 'General Baptist Missionary Society' formed in 1816. The proposal was unanimously and heartily adopted and the following were elected Honorary Members of the Society to perpetuate the Orissa interest: the Revd S. S. Allsop, the Revd T. Barrass, W. Bembridge, Thomas Cook, the Revd W. Orton, and Dr Underwood - twice the number initially suggested to guarantee the Orissa interest. Herbert Cozens-Hardy, QC, MP, had given legal advice on the feasibility of amalgamation, without charge. In due time the General Baptist Association and the subscribers' meeting of the General Baptist Missionary Society took reciprocal action.[51]

## THE GENERAL BAPTISTS RESPOND: II THE NOTTINGHAM ASSOCIATION OF 1890

The 1890 Association of General Baptists meeting in Nottingham began to engage with the issue in greater detail.[52] Three documents were tabled: the resolutions from the Baptist Union Joint Committee, the report of the Committee of Association and Conference Secretaries on boundaries and local affiliations, and the report of the Joint Committee of the two missionary societies. At last the General Baptists were convinced that the Particular Baptists meant business: 'the passing of the resolution last October in Birmingham' recorded the General Baptist Year Book, 'had completely changed the position of the question.'

The report of the joint committee was generally optimistic, though as yet there was no amalgamation of the two Building Funds because, it was said, of the strong opposition of the Secretary of the General Baptist Building Fund, who considered that the Particular Baptist Building Fund remained too much a private enterprise and lacked sufficient denominational security. On Home Missions, the General Baptist Association had yet to resolve, but the Baptist Union was prepared to take on existing liabilities if the previously sponsoring churches would commit their future donations to the Baptist Union. On the realignment of associational loyalties, the Northern Conference churches were to divide between the Yorkshire Association and the Lancashire and Cheshire Association, which was also to receive the churches of the

old Cheshire and North Staffordshire Conference. The Midlands Conference, in the General Baptist heartlands of the four counties of Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire was to join with the Particular Baptists in those counties to form a strong new East Midlands Baptist Association; the Warwickshire churches were advised to join the Midlands Association, now renamed the West Midlands Association. Churches of the Southern, and other Conferences not mentioned, were left free to realign as seemed best to them. The easy resolution of the boundary issue was a tribute to John Clifford's judgment that the churches were ahead of the leadership in their desire for unity, though Joseph Fletcher argued that it represented an abdication of responsibility by the leadership in permitting such most undesirable 'drifting'.

With 1892 and the centenary of Carey's great initiative in view, there was a growing desire that that celebration 'should find all Baptists united in proclaiming through one brotherly organization, that there was an 'atonement given', and 'hope' for 'all' the heathen, and that differences of declaring doctrines should not impair the enthusiasm of this long looked-for centenary, as Carey belongs to us all'. Alfred Baynes, the Secretary of the BMS, had recently visited Orissa and was able to bear ready and helpful testimony to the splendid work undertaken by the Orissa missionaries 'of whom any society might feel proud'. The report from the joint committee unanimously recommended complete amalgamation, but with proper provision for continuing the services of the missionaries and the present Secretary of the General Society; any unforeseen legal difficulties were to be resolved by referees; with the proposed amalgamation to be completed by June 1891.

Foulkes Griffiths, proposed that, whilst discussion might freely range over all three reports before the meeting, the first focus should be a general vote on the desirability of amalgamating the missionary societies, the executive action on which would be taken by the society itself, acting as a department of the association. The amalgamation of the missions was really the 'pith' of the matter, without which the other proposals would be robbed of significance, adding 'for about 50 years the question has always hinged on this - whether the larger society really wanted us.'

The resolution to adopt the report was proposed by Dr Underwood, who at the end of a long life recalled that the first proposal for joint missionary activity had been made four years after his birth, a proposal that the two strands of the family 'though separated in England . . . should be united in India'. He had lived with that possibility ever since, encouraged by the support that the Orissa missionaries had constantly received from their Particular brethren in India. He categorically denied that the union was motivated by the poverty of the General Society which would in fact inject significant capital into the combined society, which at last could properly be called by the popular title already in use: the Baptist Missionary Society. Maybe the financial situation was more complicated than Underwood admitted. R.P. Cook, who succeeded Dawson Burns at his church in the Edgware Road, admitted that the work of the mission had been adversely affected by the chronic depression which had unduly affected those parts of the nation where the General Baptists had their greatest strength. This had inhibited developments on the mission field, leading to calls for retrenchment. The same factor had also affected the raising of funds for student support at the College, and the resourcing of home mission, which would benefit from being able to appeal to 'a much wider and wealthy constituency'.[53]

Objections ranged around organization, theology and sentiment. Joseph Fletcher made the familiar point that whereas the General Baptist Missionary Society was a department of the Association, the Particular Baptist Missionary Society was an entirely independent body without denominational control. Foulkes Griffiths simply countered that by subscription to the new society General Baptists would earn

the right to full participation - the allegation that the Particular Society was London-dominated was untrue, some two-thirds of the committee being required to live more than twelve miles distant from St Paul's. One speaker indicated that he was so confident of the present leadership, he was happy to forego his part in management to such capable direction, and a former chairman of the association's Foreign Mission Committee confessed that the management of the General Society had been far from perfect, suffering from infrequent meetings and lack of continuity of membership, faults which would be easily overcome within the larger body. Indeed when William Hill, the Secretary of the General Society, became president of the Association, he opposed his thoughts on 'Our Denominational Disorganization' to Joseph Fletcher's earlier applause of 'Our Denominational Organization'.

Theologically, the supposed convergence to which many paid testimony was questioned by others. In particular, it was argued that Calvinism remained dogmatically strong in Yorkshire, with Calvinist articles printed in each yearbook.[54] Clifford interposed that he had it on the authority of two Yorkshire Particular Baptist leaders that two-thirds of their members were not in full accord with every clause there provided, which offered an historic manifesto rather than 'an expression of the living faith of the churches'. In fact, when the representatives of the two sides met, it was swiftly agreed that there be union in association in denominational work in Yorkshire, 'without reference to the declarations of faith set forth by either body'.[55] In so far as Hyper-Calvinism continued, it was not among those churches in membership with the Baptist Union, and neither that body nor the BMS imposed any binding creed on its members.

J. D. Godfrey, from the historic Barton church, expressed the significance of long-established sentiment, underlining the very well-developed ties between the churches and the Orissa field through generations of missionary service and support. More aggressively, Mr Weightman, an ex-Mayor of Boston, recalled that the GBMS had been founded in Boston and that the local congregation was unprepared for amalgamation: 'They objected', he said,'to subscribe to hyper-Calvinistic doctrine'. This intervention was neutralised by Weightman's minister indicating that neither Mr Weightman nor he were mandated by the deacons; some members of the congregation were in favour of amalgamation but the general sentiment was to trust the missionary committee of the association.

The debate was long. John Clifford clearly threw his weight behind the new initiative: 'the attitude he had already taken had been, never to have resting upon his shoulders the responsibility for separation, when union could be secured on terms honourable alike to members of the union and to the Christ who was their supreme Master and Lord.' He confessed that at an earlier stage he had devoted his energies to perfecting General Baptist organization but he believed that Charles Williams' invitation had created a new situation, 'and that the man who was loyal to Christ must not only understand the past but must be ready to face the new future.' The exchange ranged widely, some voices were combatant or suspicious, others reconciliatory, speaking of an honourable union. Carey Hood, minister in Halifax, regretted that amalgamation was on the agenda for he believed it to be an invitation to denominational suicide. When some attempted to rule Hood out of order, he became disinclined to continue, and only did so after a personal appeal from Clifford. His one concern was the implacable Calvinism of the Yorkshire Association, but a Bradford minister thought his fears unduly exaggerated; in Bradford the two parts of the family worked together harmoniously and were anxious to get on with the joint meeting proposed by the Chairman of the Yorkshire Association. Many still wanted to speak when the vote was called. An amendment to receive rather than adopt the report, advanced by Fletcher, was lost and the resolution carried.

After a well-earned break the delegates returned to vote through a series of resolutions on the various aspects of the scheme, with minorities on each of less than twelve out of some 200 present, votes which *The Freeman* characterised as embracing just sufficient dissent to indicate that the consideration had been exhaustive and that the conclusions were well-considered and intelligent. Dr Booth, replying to an invitation to speak on home missions, argued that, whereas in time past dogmatic groupings may have been helpful, the climate of the late nineteenth century invited the cultivation of the gentler graces and characteristics of Christian life. Some in the debate had perhaps exaggerated differences, but with good faith, kind feeling and Christian affection, he believed that amalgamation was an effective strategy and that 'improbable difficulties' ought not to be put in its way. William Hill, in his presidential address, contended that in the context of a general concern for the promotion of Christian unity, and when the evils of sectarianism were recognised for what they were, for General and Particular Baptists not to unite would be totally misunderstood and interpreted as sheer bigotry.

Bigotry notwithstanding, the end of the Nottingham Conference still left powerful voices campaigning against amalgamation, principally those of Joseph Fletcher who, from W. R. Stevenson's death in July 1889, had sole charge of the magazine, and another London ministerial heavyweight, Dawson Burns, to whom ready access to the paper was given. Discussion in the magazine, it was argued, would 'prevent the catastrophe coming unexpectedly and abruptly.' Between Burns and Fletcher, some nine major articles attacking the amalgamation proposals, not to mention minor examples of negative reporting, were written between February 1890 and July 1891, with titles such as 'The Proposed Extinction of the General Baptist Connexion', 'Shall the General Baptist Connexion be sacrificed to an Illusion?', 'The Coming Association: will it save the Connexion?' The debate was not without personal insinuation between Burns and Clifford, 'so much the main mover and the mainstay of the attempt to bring the Connexion to nothing'. Clifford argued that Burns' record of attendance at association meetings was such that, if all had behaved like him, the association would have died years ago. Mostly, the arguments were the old ones of sentiment, theological differences and disparity in organization. Ironically, Dawson Burns had already written in *The Baptist Magazine* in favour of 'the closest possible union between General and other Baptists' but there was the difficulty that the General Baptists were 'a denomination in a sense not applicable to the Baptists who were formerly called Particular but who are now in the main as "General" in their doctrine as the General Baptists themselves.' This he judged was true of five-sixths of such churches and their ministers. The designation 'Particular' was now only used by those Baptists who would not join with anybody.[56] He soon became less certain of this when he began to search for arguments to oppose amalgamation. There was also an economic dimension: 'Dr Clifford', asserted Dawson Burns, '. . . knows that the comparative facility with which those resolutions (at Walsall and Nottingham) were adopted, arose more from financial considerations than any other'.[57] As author of the leading article in the *General Baptist Magazine* for September 1890, Burns argued, 'I freely avow that I attach greater importance to the truths implied in the word "General" than to those indicated by the designation "Baptist". I am a Baptist because I believe that a personal profession of faith in baptism, is according to the will of Christ; but I am a *General* Baptist because I believe that the heart of Christ yearns for the salvation of all mankind.' Significantly, he concluded his article by inviting those interested in opposing amalgamation or in securing a continuing General Baptist Association if such tactics failed, to write to him. Clifford, responding, suggested that Burns' temperance work had kept him in recent years from close involvement in the work of the association,

and, therefore, he was out of touch with the enthusiasm of the churches for amalgamation - apparently a correct judgment as less than ten churches voted against the Burnley resolution.

## THE GENERAL BAPTISTS RESPOND: III THE BURNLEY ASSOCIATION OF 1891

As the date for the final association meetings drew near, there was a change of tactic. The opposition accepted amalgamation as unstoppable, and campaigned instead for the maintenance of the name, General Baptist, and for the continuity of the Association, in addition to the new geographical alignments. Thus already, before the delegates met at Burnley, the minority had significantly moved their ground. The 'Via Media' that Fletcher began crusading for in 1891, was, he argued, the only amalgamation sanctioned by the earlier votes. The counter-argument was firstly that the speeches of those opposing the Walsall resolution had clearly reflected the mind of those reluctant to disband the association. If they were not speaking appropriately, they should have been told so by Fletcher who chaired the association that year, and had been a member of most of the special committees investigating amalgamation. G. Howard James, a Regent's Park graduate and minister of Woodborough Road, Nottingham, defended amalgamation, even though the conservatives asked 'those who had come into the Association from outside' to refrain from attempting to influence opinion on amalgamation. 'An interpretation', argued James, 'which is not heard of until twenty months after the resolution has been passed, can only be regarded as an untrustworthy gloss.' Secondly, the association in the earlier stages had clearly set itself against piecemeal amalgamation in favour of a more total action. Thirdly, the Nottingham resolutions had also involved dismantling several Particular Baptist Associations, so it would be exceptionally difficult to concede that only the General Baptist Association should be exempt.

The forthcoming vote, Fletcher contended, should not be on amalgamation or not, the choice was now 'amalgamation or annihilation': 'cannot we have a marriage without a funeral?'. The issue was whether the churches wanted 'to mutilate their banners by voluntarily picking out the golden letters G-E-N-E-R-A-L, the letters we care for most, so that our title shall henceforth be _____ Baptist, and whether they want the ancient and beloved Association of General Baptists to dig its own grave and go to its own funeral', thus destroying 'the most united body of Baptists in the kingdom.' Clifford had suggested that the annual meeting of the Midland College could be the focus for the continuation of old sympathies, using language which subsequently proved unwise, for he had written, he 'should most deeply deplore not only the entire cessation but the gradual decay of our Annual Meetings. But so far as I have heard no such thing has been named among us. *On the contrary it is expected and proposed that we shall gather as of old, year by year, having our chief centre of interest in the College . . .*' The words italicised indicate clearly what Clifford had in mind, but Fletcher chose a year later to quote the earlier words with the omission of those italicised in favour of a continuation of the association. Focus on the College meetings seems later to have been unhelpfully transposed to the meetings of the East Midland Baptist Association, as if they would represent a continuation of the General Baptist Association.

The final step in the decision-making came during the Association Meeting at Burnley in June 1891 under the presidency of John Clifford.[58] One of its first acts was to set up a special committee to confer with representatives of those churches which were encountering special difficulties in proceeding with the Walsall resolution. Interestingly the committee included most of those who themselves were leaders of the unhappy minority: Dawson Burns, formerly of Church Street,

Paddington; Joseph Fletcher of Commercial Road; John Godfrey of Barton-in-the-Beans, Carey Hood of Halifax, and four Yorkshire laymen from the historic churches at Heptonstall Slack and Birchcliffe. When the reports from the churches were received only a few churches recorded contra votes: from Yorkshire, three, Heptonstall Slack, Birchcliffe, and either Lydgate or Halifax; from the East Midlands, four churches including Barton; from the Southern Conference, two churches, Commercial Road and one other (which was not Dawson Burns' old church in Paddington which expressly voted in favour of amalgamation). One church in the West Midlands was initially hostile, but, seeing the weight of the majority, swiftly realigned itself so that the Warwickshire Conference, like the Cheshire Conference, offered unanimous support. In the Eastern Conference some individuals were opposed but no churches. Opposition then was very limited but significant in representing the sentiment of many of the most historic churches who, by votes in church meetings and conferences and letters to the magazine had made their position quite clear.

A resolution, which recorded thanks to God for a tradition which embraced the names of John Smyth and Dan Taylor, and expressed gratitude for increasing unity, whilst recognizing some reluctance to break association with a religious past, accepted the invitation to unify with the Particular Baptists. Attention was drawn to the plea from the chair of the Union in 1886, the hearty and unanimous vote forthcoming from the associations, and the 'courteous and grace-filled endeavours of the officers of the BMS and the BU to facilitate such a fusion.' Delegates were asked to take cognizance of the practical view of the unity of the Baptist family endorsed by the churches in their elections to the pastoral office over the last thirty years, the reported unanimity of the churches in favour of the proposals, the degree of sharing in association life already accomplished, the previous actions of the General Baptist association in favour of union, and, above all, the promise of greater efficiency in home and foreign missions, and the other advantages of real Christian unity. Clifford was convinced 'that the unity of Christians should be an evangelizing ministry into the world'.[59]

Not all was to be sweetness and light, even though the *General Baptist Magazine* recorded that the debate was conducted in the most admirable spirit with the fullest liberty of speech. At this late stage, Dawson Burns proposed (seconded by J. R. Godfrey), as an amendment to the main resolution, wording which suggested that the amalgamation proposals did not require as either necessary or desirable the dissolution of the General Baptist Association. A four-hour debate ensued, with John Clifford temporarily vacating the chair to participate. Burns was resolute in not withdrawing his amendment, which secured the support of four Yorkshire churches - Heptonstall Slack, Birchcliffe, Lydgate and Halifax - and Commercial Road, London, with the Barton and Chesham churches splitting their votes, amounting to a total of 39 votes in all. There was some difficulty in counting the opposition to the amendment, because of the numbers involved: tallies varied from 150 to 170.[60] After the failure of a second attempt at an amendment, the original resolution was passed overwhelmingly. Dawson Burns rose to his feet, waving in his hand a number of protests, each duly signed by two deacons, requiring that they be recorded in the minutes. After a fierce dispute, a compromise was reached whereby the protests were read out by the chairman.

Amalgamation had been secured, but only after five years of careful negotiations and consultations, and against a background of some sixty years of consideration. Fletcher now turned to reconciliation, recording 'To some I know the grief at the loss of the old Association is so fresh and keen that for the time they refuse to be comforted. It is useless to talk to them of finding new happiness in new

relationships. At present the sense of bereavement shuts out all thoughts and feelings. Still in time they may not love the Baptist Union less because they loved the General Baptist Association more.' As a footnote it may be recorded that Dawson Burns reconciled himself sufficiently to become a personal member of the Baptist Union that same year, whilst Fletcher became one of the editors of the Union's Annual Almanac. The amalgamation of General and Particular Baptists still left the larger possibility of a Baptist-Congregational Union on the table in the last decade of the nineteenth century, recognized by the denominational journal as 'one of the pressing questions upon which the Baptist denomination should make up its mind without delay.' In the event it proved too difficult, and the Congregationalists were to find union with the Presbyterians on the basis of a common confession rather than with Baptists on the basis of a common polity.[61]

Entwined within this process have been many themes: changed theological priorities which made old divisions obsolete. It was no time to debate general or particular atonement, claimed Alexander Maclaren, when 'the whole world was asking is there any atonement at all.'[62] Nostalgic sentiment lived in tension with simple economic indigence, and all that flowed from it. Concern to balance reckless congregational independence with respect for denominational authority was necessary for the development of a strategy for sustaining and developing Baptist witness, which itself required a more specific nurturing of Baptist identity. Increasingly it was realised that talk about spiritual unity could all too easily become an argument for taking no action, and that spiritual aspirations needed to be realised in concrete institutional machinery for prosecuting the interests of the kingdom. As at the beginning, so at the end, unity was essentially a means to mission, both overseas and in the cities and villages of these islands. Where there was consent about the urgency of that task, broad agreement on Evangelical doctrine,[63] and the experience of a common life, where in fact so much unity had already been given, to perpetuate division became intolerable.

By contrast, where that unity of outlook and experience was lacking, to attempt union might represent a dangerous betrayal. For that reason, whilst the merging of the two bodies of Baptists was possible, the Baptist Union, though grateful for the initative which itself betokened a change in outlook, was not able to respond positively to Archbishop Benson's invitation in 1888 to share in a conference to discuss a possible basis on which corporate reunion or intercommunion amongst the English Churches might take place. Such a basis was to be found in the so-called Lambeth Quadrilateral of the Scriptures as standards of faith, the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds, the two dominical sacraments, and the Historic Episcopate. Upholding the Supremacy of Scripture, the Baptist Union claimed that its churches already experienced the 'Historic Episcopate' which they were unprepared to identify with the Diocesan Episcopate of the Anglican Communion, nor were they prepared to sacrifice their view of Baptism, nor accept the compromise of state control of the Church, whose government had been entrusted to 'the professed servants of the Saviour', for New Testament Christianity 'was essentially the introduction of a spiritual, personal, and non-sacerdotal religion.' At the same time a working relationship in common outreach with other Free Churches was beginning to emerge, with the convening of the first National Free Church Congress in Manchester in Novemeber 1892, where some 30 of the 370 participants were Baptists, with John Clifford and Alexander Maclaren taking leading parts. Again the prognosis was good, for the work was to be developed upon the basis of shared experience and commitment to mission, which proved to be the essential fundamentals for operational ecumenism.[64]

## NOTES

1 W. Underwood, **Past History**, 1864, p.23; W. Underwood, **Centennial Survey**, 1870, pp.14,16.
2 See J. H. Philpot, **The Seceders, 1829-69**, 2 vols, 1931-2.
3 Geoffrey Breed, **The Baptist Evangelical Society - An Early Victorian Episode**, 1989.
4 John Lea, 'The North Western Association of Baptist Churches, 1860-76' **BQ 23**, pp.77-90.
5 **General Baptist Magazine (GBM)**, October 1868, p.289.
6 **GBM**, July 1869, p.222.
7 The last four paragraphs, where no other reference is indicated, derive from Dr Sellers account of 'The Old General Baptists, 1811-1915', **BQ 24**, pp.30-41,74-88. However, Dr Sellers is not wholly correct in suggesting that 1888 was the last year in which delegates were exchanged. In 1889 accident prevented the Old Connexion representatives coming to Walsall, but in 1890 two fraternal delegates - Messrs Brinkworth and Watmough - were once more present. **GBM** January 1890, p.21.
8 **GBM**, January 1868, pp.18-19; April 1868, pp.97-100; June 1868, p.178.
9 W. Underwood, **Past History**, 1864, pp.8-9.
10 **Minutes of the Ninety-Ninth Annual Association of the New Connexion of General Baptists**, 1868, p.49.
11 **Ibid.**, pp.49-53.
12 **GBM**, July 1869, p.198.
13 **GBM**, April 1868, p.100.
14 W. Underwood, **Centennial Survey**, 1870,
15 **GBM**, January 1877, pp.1-2.
16 **GBM**, June 1859, p.232.
17 **Minutes of the Ninety-Fourth Annual Association of the New Connexion of General Baptists**, 1863, p.43.
18 **Minutes of the Ninety-Fifth Annual Association of the New Connexion of General Baptists**, 1864, p.37.
19 **Minutes of the Ninety-Sixth Annual Association of the New Connexion of General Baptists**, 1865, pp.34-7. Dr Payne is thus accurate in talking of the assets of the General Baptist Building Fund being fused with the older body in 1891, though in the debate on amalgamation many speakers used the older, deliberately irenic title. Payne, **Baptist Union**, p.147; **GBM**, 1876, cf. pp.182,217, with pp.311,440; **Ibid**, March 1877 p.104.
20 Payne, **Baptist Union**, p.123.
21 Sir John Marchant, **Dr John Clifford, CH**, 1924, pp.220-1 where a number of features are listed, including the founding of a denominational college for training women to serve in the churches, and a denominational Hymn Book.
22 **GBM**, June 1868, pp.165-9.
23 **GBM**, July 1873, p.271.
24 **GBM**, May 1876, p.187.
25 Underwood, **Centennial History**, 1870, p.6.
26. **GBM** June 1868, p.165ff.
27 **GBM**, February 1887, p.63, and March 1887.
28 W. Underwood, **Past History**, 1864, p.23.
29 **The Freeman** cited in W. Y. Fullerton, **C. H. Spurgeon**, 1920, p.309; **GBM**, August 1881, p.284.
30 **GBM**, July 1880, p.242; September, p.326.
31 **GBM**, October 1868, p.306.
32 **GBM**, August 1877, p.315; October 1877, p.396.
33 **GBM**, July 1879, p.291; September, pp.413-4; The Midland Baptist Union 'departed this life at Burton, 12 September 1881', October 1881, p.389; November 1879, p.454; October 1881, p.388. **General Baptist Year Book (GBYB)**, 1888, p.43.
34 **GBYB**, 1885, p.36; 1888, p.33.
35 **GBM**, December 1877, p.448.
36 **GBM**, December 1877, pp.448-9; April 1881, p.122; March 1883, p.89. Clifford's teaching lay behind the Revd W. L. Jones' controversial Association Letter of 1882 on **Conditions of Church Membership**, p.9.
37 J. L. Jones, **Conditions of Church Membership**, p.13 in **GBYB**, 1882.
38 **GBM**, February 1883, p.49. Clifford added that from 1870 he had appended a note each year in the **GBYB** that not all New Connexion Churches believed the Sixth article and this had gone unchallenged until 1882. **Ibid.** p.54.
39 **GBM**, February 1883, pp.53-4.
40 **GBM**, August 1884, p.292.
41 **Baptist Union Handbook (BUH)**, 1887, Presidential Address: 'A Plea for Union Among Baptists', pp.21-9.
42 **BUH**, 1887, Presidential Address: 'A Plea for Union', **GBYB**, 1888, 'Church Rest', Presidential Address by Revd. W. H. Tetley, pp.15ff.
43 **BUH**, 1887, pp.21-29.
44 Payne, **Baptist Union**, p.146, refers to Haslam's resolution without referring to Williams' presidential initiative.
45 **The Baptist Magazine**, March 1889, pp.107,105-6.
46 This analysis of the Walsall Association has been reconstructed principally from the **GBYB**, 1889, pp.21-31, and the President's Address, 'Your Denominational Organisation', supplemented by additional references from the **GBM** for that year.
47 Joseph Fletcher, President's Address, **GBYB**, 1889, pp.1-13.
48 **The Freeman**, 13 April 1888.
49 Joseph Fletcher, President's Address, **GBYB**, 1889.
50 **BUH**, 1890, pp.46,70-72. Clifford called the Birmingham resolution 'the first business transaction in connection with the question of fusion', **GBYB**, 1890, p.25
51 **Missionary Observer**, June 1891, pp.237-240. Charles Williams who was to have proposed the motion was late, arriving only in time to second it. Thus the motion was proposed by Dr Underhill who referred to his joy at seeing amalgamation taking place in his lifetime and in time for the centenary of Carey's initiative. William Hill, the Secretary of the GBMS, in fact, became 'Secretary at the Bible Translation Society', dividing his time between that task and undertaking deputation work for the joint society.
52 The account of the Nottingham Meeting is

principally taken from the GBYB for 1890 pp.22-47, supplemented by references to the GBM for that year.

53 The Baptist Magazine, March 1889, pp.103-5.

54 John Clifford suggested that this obstacle could simply be overcome by appending a note that these doctrinal statements were historical expressions of belief, a device he had used with regard to the reprinting of Dan Taylor's Six Articles in the GBYB when he was editor, and may suggest who was the author of a similar footnote appended to the final clause of the Union's Declaratory Statement of 1888. [vide Payne, Short History, p.140, for the text.

55 GBM, April 1890, p.149.

56 The Baptist Magazine, March 1889, pp.102-3.

57 There seems to be some evidence that economic constraint existed amongst the General Baptists. For example in the GBM for August 1890, R. P. Cook, in 'The Limit of Our Supplies', his address to the Home Mission Meeting at Nottingham passionately appealed to the General Baptists not to take their debts into amalgamation. p.287. Elsewhere it was suggested that the profits on the Hymnal be used to pay off a number of debts.

58 This reconstruction of the Burnley Association of 1891 mainly derives from the GBYB, 1891, pp.55-68, with the support of the appropriate issues of the GBM.' The GBM for June, 1891, p.229, refers to Dr Booth's account of the process leading to amalgamation in his History on the movement for the fusion of the two sections of our body, but unfortunately no copy of this publication has been traced.

59 GBM, January 1891, p.5.

60 Joseph Fletcher in the GBM, August 1891, p.286, gives the voting as 39 to 155.

61 The Baptist Magazine, Novemeber 1892, p.505.

62 Missionary Observer, August 1891, p.320.

63 I would therefore question Leon McBeth's glosses upon the events of 1891 when he falls to the temptation of the summary judgment that 'the 1891 merger left the Baptist Union with a Particular Baptist organization infused with a General Baptist theology', and adds, 'With the merger of Particular and New Connection Baptists in 1891, the exchange of ministers and members spread General Baptist Christology throughout the denomination', using this to lead into his discussion of the Christological debate of 1971. First, the exchange of members and ministers long predated 1891; secondly, New Connexion organisation contributed much to the life of the Union post 1891; thirdly, there was no New Connexion Christology as such. H. L. McBeth, The Baptist Heritage, Nashville TN, 1987, p.510 & 517.

64 Payne, Baptist Union, pp.145-6 and Appx VII, S. C. Carpenter, Church And People, 1933, pp.424-6, and E. K. H. Jordan, Free Church Unity, 1956, pp.25-34.

J. H. Y. BRIGGS

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**Geoffrey Cantor**, *Michael Faraday, Sandemanian and Scientist*, 1991, 359pp, £40.00, Macmillan, ISBN 0 333 55077 3.

Scientists are human, and most have a life apart from their science. When that life is centred in a small Christian sect then a biography which examines that life has an interest for all concerned with church history. Michael Faraday (1791-1867), the best-known scientist in nineteenth-century Britain, made major discoveries in chemistry and in electricity, and was pre-eminent as a scientific lecturer. Rising from laboratory assistant to Director at the Royal Institution in London, he started the Friday Evening Discourses and also the Christmas Lectures for young people that are now televised each year. Dickens and Spurgeon both commended Faraday's exposition of science to laymen, and all should be interested in the man whose work underlies nearly everything electrical we use today. Most biographers mention that his father was a blacksmith and the family were Sandemanians: Faraday became a leading member of the sect. Cantor interprets Faraday's work and thought against the background of Sandemanian ideas. The first part of this book is especially commended to *Quarterly* readers. Cantor has made a detailed study of the small, Calvinist sect which, when Faraday joined, had only six hundred members and seventeen meeting houses scattered across Scotland and England. They did not have formal contacts with other churches, though were not exclusive in day-to-day affairs. He gives a picture of a close-knit and mutually supportive community who maintained a very strict discipline amongst themselves. The life of some small Baptist churches would have been similar, and this study by a writer who, though sympathetic, is not a Christian may give fresh insights into the life of our own churches in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. **Brian Bowers**