

# The Early Years of the Baptist Union.

## I.

A DEQUATE minutes of the Baptist Board meetings in 1810 and 1811 would be of the greatest interest, as it was in those years that the London ministers had "frequent conversations at the coffee house" concerning the "General Union of Particular Baptist Churches" that had long been mooted. Unfortunately, the scribe of that period was not a Boswell. On the 27th March, 1810, he records the annual appointment of three to represent the Board on the committee of The General Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations: his next minute, twelve months later, is similar. Except for two or three matters with which this paper is not concerned, nothing further is minuted until the 26th March, 1812, when the General Body appointments are recorded once more. The animated debates on union; the fears lest the blessed independency of the local church, "which we hope will always continue independent," would be imperilled; the communications from the country; the important resolutions to convene the gatherings which eventuated in the Baptist Union: all are unrecorded. The writer lacked vision, or he would have given us a vivid picture of those days of small beginnings, when, amid the convivialities of the Jamaica Coffee Rooms, some "of the pastors of seventeen churches, and other ministering brethren" made their far-reaching decisions.

The earliest printed record of the proposal to form the Union is Joseph Ivimey's "Union essential to Prosperity" in the *Baptist Magazine* of June, 1811. This paper has been admirably summarized by C. M. Hardy in "Former Secretaries of the Baptist Union" (*Baptist Quarterly*, ii, 217). In the following August, the *Baptist Magazine* reverted to the subject in "An Address to the Baptist Denomination," by B. D., who lamented that, having no annual assembly, the Baptists were "a rope of sand, without cement, and consequently without strength." In October, a correspondent drew attention to a resolution of the Association of the Baptist Churches in North Wales, "That a closer union and connexion among the Baptists throughout England and Wales, Ireland and America,<sup>1</sup> would be a glorious thing, and we resolve to do all in our power to promote it" . . . The same Magazine in January, 1812, gives a "Welsh Speech in favour of Union" delivered in the preceding June at Newport,

<sup>1</sup> America! Did this Association foresee the Baptist World Alliance? Rippon had given much information of America in his *Register*.

Pembrokeshire, at the meetings of the Western Baptist Association in Wales, where, with Celtic fervour, the speaker declaimed "it appears that every consideration of importance calls on us in the most impressive manner, to cry out, till all our brethren hear, UNION, UNION, yes Union of the most extensive, firm, and durable nature." Three months later, in April, another article "On a general Union of the Baptists" appeared, and in June further support was given in a letter that occasions a smile. It is addressed "The Fathers of the Particular Baptist Churches in England, to their Sons, in the year 1812," and purports to be signed by William Collins, Andrew Gifford, Henry Forty, William Kiffin, Hansard Knollys and Benjamin Keach. It commences: "It is now more than a Century since we left the vale of tears which you inhabit, and became the residents of this celestial country," and later declares their knowledge "that our God has put it into the hearts of many to promote the good of your churches, and his own glory, by a more general union of exertion and christian fellowship than at present exists among you. This we too attempted, and for a time we prospered. But the 'Accuser of the Brethren' succeeded in filling the minds of many with evil surmisings, and unholy censures, till he at last defeated the good design." Fortified by this earthly communication from the heavenly regions, the London ministers, in the same number of the Magazine, gave notice that, following the Missionary Services on the 24th June, 1812, "The next Morning at eight o'clock, precisely, a meeting will be held at Dr. Rippon's Meeting house, Carter Lane, to take into consideration the proposed measure for an annual general Association of the Particular Baptist Churches."

In calling this meeting, the Particular Baptists re-entered a path they had not trodden for over one hundred and twenty years. They held a national Convention in London in September, 1689, but from that date local Associations represented their only organized expression. What "union" precedents influenced their decision? Obviously the fine Assembly life of the General Baptists and the New Connexion ought to have been the outstanding precedent and possibly it had some influence, but, officially and ostensibly, the Particulars were unaware of the existence of the Generals. Remembering the inadequate means of communication in the eighteenth century, it is fairly certain that the rank and file had little or no knowledge of them, but this can hardly be true of the leaders. It is impossible to believe that Joseph Ivimey's library lacked a set of the General Baptist minutes. We know that correspondence passed between him and Adam Taylor, as the latter in the preface to his *History of the English General Baptists*, acknowledges his obligations "to

. . . and the Rev. J. Ivimey for the loan of whatever they had collected in print or manuscript that would assist his design."

Movements in the Calvinistic world were doubtless noted with more sympathy. The Countess of Huntingdon's churches, after her death in 1791, became crystallized in a Connexion which influenced, and was influenced by, the Wesleyans. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, at their Association meeting at Bala in June, 1811, took the crucial step of ordaining eight persons, and, at a similar gathering at Llandilo two months later, they ordained thirteen more. This decisive action led to the consolidation of their ranks in a Union distinct from the Established Church, and, at the London meeting, J. H. Hinton referred to it as an example worthy to follow.

Furthermore, the age was prolific in religious societies. Baptist organisations recently constituted included the Missionary Society in 1792, which, according to Ivimey, had "already done more towards uniting our denomination than any plan that was ever devised," and the Home Missionary Society in 1797. Outside organizations, with which Baptists were closely associated, were the Religious Tract Society in 1799, the Sunday School Union in 1803, and the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804. Unquestionably, also, the steps of the slow moving ministers of the Baptist Board were quickened by the action of the London Board of Congregational Ministers, who, in 1806, passed a resolution approving the formation of a Congregational Union. A committee drew up a scheme defining its constitution and objects, and, shortly after, the Union was actually established, and, in 1808, a sermon preached on its behalf. This Union promised to be of considerable importance, but in its working it failed to justify the hopes of its founders. It lacked vital force, possessing "but an anaemic frame," and, in less than twenty years, it was merged in the Congregational Home Missionary Society which was founded in 1819. Later, in 1831, the present Congregational Union of England and Wales was established.

Happily the early minutes of the Baptist Union until 1817 are available. They are contained in a small volume, pott 4to, originally containing 150 pages. The front parchment cover, somewhat soiled with age, is endorsed in bold handwriting "Minutes of the General Union, 1812." The book does not appear to have been seen by recent historians, and it will, therefore, be of service to let the minutes tell their own story in the permanent form of this Quarterly, *verbatim, literatim et punctatim*, with needful annotations. The first leaf is blank and not numbered: the minutes thus commence on page three, which is numbered page one.

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Minutes of the Meetings held in London on Wednesday and Thursday the 24th and 25th of June 1812.

An Union of the particular or Calvinistic Baptist Churches in Town and Country, having for several years past been considered as an object of considerable importance; the subject had been recently revived through the *Baptist Magazine*, and frequent conversations at the Coffee house. It was at length agreed to have two sermons preached on a Wednesday for the benefit of the Mission, and that on the next day a Meeting should be held to take into consideration the proposed measure of a General Union.

The Sermons were accordingly preached by brethren Fuller, and Ryland, at the Dutch Church Austin Friars, on the 24th of June, and 320 Pounds collected

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for the Mission in India.<sup>2</sup> A full account of these Meetings was published in the Baptist Magazine for August 1813. [An error for 1812.]

The next Morning at 8 o'clock a meeting for the purpose of promoting a Union was held at Dr. Rippons Vestry, Carter Lane.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Rippon was called to the Chair.

Dr. Ryland opened the Meeting by prayer.

The Chairman gave a general view of the many objects likely to engage the attention of a United Association, and the many advantages resulting from it.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>The B.M.S. was still considered almost a Northants organisation, where it was somewhat autocratically and exclusively run by Fuller and his local friends. The amount of this collection occasioned surprise to Fuller, who wrote the following cryptic note to Ivimey: "I thank you for your diligence in increasing the subscriptions. Go on, only let it be gently, without pressing anyone, without puffing or boasting, which are such common things in London, that Londoners are in danger of doing them without being conscious of it!" One suspects there is something more than thankfulness and a plea for humility in this.

<sup>3</sup>Carter Lane chapel was demolished in 1830 for making the approaches to London Bridge.

<sup>4</sup>The "objects" and "advantages" included: Prayer; Support of the B.M.S.; Reports from the churches; Support of Academies and students; Catechising; Superannuation; Education of the children of deceased ministers; Village Preaching; Sunday Schools; Pence Societies; Literature; New buildings; which, Dr. Rippon added, "presented but a few articles, out of a vast multitude, which would press themselves on the consideration of such an Assembly, in which *whatever* relates to the real interests of the denomination at home and abroad, would engage the general attention."

The following resolutions were then adopted.

i. Resolved that a more general Union of the Particular (or calvinistic) Baptist churches in the United Kingdom is very desirable.

ii. Resolved that an annual meeting be held in London or elsewhere on the last Wednesday and Thursday in June.

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iii. Resolved that the first meeting be held in London, (by divine permission) the 23rd of June 1813, when two sermons shall be preached and collections made in aid of the Mission.

iv. Resolved that a respectful invitation be given to our Churches, and Associations,<sup>5</sup> in the Country; to appoint Messengers to meet their brethren in London at that time.

v. Resolved that the objects of the Association be the promotion of the cause of Christ in general; and the interests of the denomination in particular; with a primary view to the encouragement and support of the Baptist Mission.

vi. That the Associated Ministers in London,<sup>6</sup> be a Committee for the present

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year, to manage the concerns of the Association; and that all communications relative thereto be addressed (free of expence) to their Secretaries, Mr. Button No. 24 Paternoster Row, and Mr. Ivimey No. 56, Red Lion Street Holborn.

vii. Resolved that brethren Sutcliff and Hall be requested to preach the sermons next year; and in case of failure brethren Hinton and Steadman.

viii. Resolved that the thanks of this meeting be respectfully presented to the Elders of the Dutch Church, for their friendly attention in lending us their place of worship.

ix. Resolved that brethren Fuller and Ryland be requested to print their Sermons for the use of the Mission.

<sup>5</sup> The English Associations then in existence were: Western, Midland, Lancs. and Yorks., Northern, Northants., Norfolk & Suffolk, Kent & Sussex, Essex, Oxford, Salop, Hants. & Wilts., and the newly established Norfolk and Bucks. & Herts. Welsh Associations also were in existence.

<sup>6</sup> The associated ministers were: Abraham Austin, William Bradley, Robert Burnside, William Button, Francis Augustus Cox, James Dore, John J. Douglas, Joseph Hughes, Thomas Hutchings, Joseph Ivimey, Joseph Jenkins, William Newman, John Ovington, John Penny, Thomas Powell, John Rippon, John Brittain Shenston, William Shenston, Thomas Sowerby, Thomas Thomas, Timothy Thomas, James Upton and Thomas Waters.

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A prayer meeting was afterwards held. Mr. Hinton of Oxford prayed and delivered an animated impressive, and appropriate address on the Nature and Advantages of Christian Union.<sup>7</sup> Bro. Stanger of Bessels Green Kent, concluded. The following Pastors gave their names to the Secretary as favouring the proposed plan of Union.<sup>8</sup>

Berkshire.			
Abingdon	John Evans	Rayleigh	Jas. Pilkington
		Langham	Zenas Trivett
Buckinghamshire.			
		Potter's Bar,	Saml. Bligh
Olney,	John Sutcliff	Gloucestershire.	
Goldhill,	Daniel Dorsett	Tewksbury,	Danl. Trotman
Chenies,	William Lewis	Horsley,	Wm. Winterbotham
Chesham,	Wm. Tomlin	Bristol	} John Ryland
Luton [Beds]	Ebenezer Daniel	Broadmead	
		Pithay,	
Cornwall.			
Penzance	Geo. C. Smith	Hertfordshire.	
Falmouth	Thomas Griffin	St. Albans,	John Carter
		Hertford,	Wm. James
Devonshire.			
Tiverton	Thomas Smith	Hampshire.	
		Forton,	Thos. Tilly
Harlow	John Bain	Lymington,	Wm. Giles.
Saffron	} Josiah Wilkinson		
Waldron			

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Romsey,	[William] Yarnold	Wild Street	Thos. Waters
Swannick,	Jas. Chapman	Bow	Wm. Newman
[near Southampton]		Hackney	F. A. Cox
Huntingdonshire.			
		Southwark,	
		Church St.	James Upton
Hale Weston,	Jas. Farley	Carter Lane,	John Rippon
		Dean Street,	Wm. Button
Kent.			
		Lyon St. Walworth,	John Chin
Chatham,	John Knott	Harlington,	Edward Torlin
Lessness-Heath,	Wm. Coleman	Staines,	Thos. Silvester
Woolwich,	Wm. Culver	Hammersmith	Thos. Uppadine
Crayford,	John Rowe		

<sup>7</sup> The address is printed in the *Baptist Magazine*, October 1812.

<sup>8</sup> The list comprises about one-seventh of the Particular Baptist Ministers in England.

Seven Oaks,	Thos. Shirley	Norfolk.
Bessels Green,	John Stanger	Norwich, Mark Wilks
Eyethorn,	John Giles	
Eynsford,	John Rogers	Northamptonshire.
Margate	Geo. Atkinson	Kettering, Andrew Fuller
Ryegate	Reynold Hogg	
	Middlesex.	Oxford Oxfordshire.
		James Hinton
London,		
Devonshire Square	Tim Thomas	Somersetshire.
Eagle Street,	Jos. Ivimey	Frome, Saml. Saunders
Alie Street,	Wm. Shenston	
	Tho. Thomas	Sussex.
Fetter Lane,	Abr. Austin	Lewes, Moses Fisher
		Suffolk.
		Walton, Abr. Kersey Cowell

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Shropshire.  
Shrewsbury, John Palmer

Wiltshire.  
Salisbury, John Saffery  
Westbury Liegh, Geo. Phillips  
Melksham, Thos. Ward

Worcestershire.  
Worcester, Wm. Belsher

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Meeting of the Committee at the Jamaica Coffee house  
Cornhill Jan<sup>ry</sup> 12, 1813.

Present Rippon, Button, Thos. Thomas, Newman, [William]  
Shenstone, Powell, Waters, Cox, Douglas, Ivimey and Austin.

Resolved, that a Sub-committee of five persons, with power  
to add to their number, be appointed; to prepare a plan for  
conducting the next Annual Meeting.

Resolved, that brethren Rippon, Timy. Thomas; Thomas  
Thomas; Button, and Ivimey be that Committee.

Meeting of the Sub-committee at Bro. Buttons Paternoster  
Row, Janry. 19, 1813. Dr. Rippon in the Chair.

It was proposed, and agreed, that our brother Newman be  
added to the Sub-committee.

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Meeting of the Committee at the Jamaica Coffee house Febry 16 1812. [An error for 1813.]

Present Newman, Thos. Thomas, Wm Shenstone, Douglas, Hutchings and Ivimey.

Bro Cox in the Chair.

The report of the Sub-committee was read by the Secretary and after some alterations was adopted, viz.

1. Agreed that the Secretaries write to brethren Hall and Sutcliff requesting them to preach at the next Annual Meeting.
2. Agreed that the invitation to the Churches and County Associations be given through the medium of the *Baptist Magazine* for April next, and that the Messengers appointed be in Town by Tuesday the 23rd of June to meet the Committee at Dr. Rippon's Vestry at 3 o'clock in the Afternoon precisely, to prepare a Report to be read to the General Assembly.

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3. Agreed that brethren Rippon and Ivimey be appointed to look out a suitable place of worship for the annual meeting, and report the next meeting.

4. Agreed to request Dr. Rippon to draw up an address of invitation to our brethren in the Country agreeable to the second Resolution.

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[*To be continued.*]

SEYMOUR J. PRICE.

## Bunyan as a Lover of Music.

THE preparation of a Cantata on "Bunyan, the Dreamer" has made needful a further and fuller study of his works. This study has clearly revealed Bunyan to be both a music-lover and child-lover; two phases of his character that have not received much attention from his biographers. Here, I deal only with the former of the two characteristics.

As to music—it is but natural that its charm should be felt by one who was, in spirit, a poet, and whose being was so dominated by imagination. In early boyhood he was fascinated by the bell-chimes of Elstow Church. As a young man, he tells us he had "taken much delight" in ringing, and this delight led him, for a time, to ally himself with the band of village bell-ringers. His confessed love of dancing also brought him under the sway of other forms of instrumental music; and, doubtless,