

man and his work and that at his birthplace, Malton in Yorkshire, a Commemoration service will be held in the Baptist church on 13th April. We are grateful to Sir Geoffrey Shakespeare and to the editor of the St. Mary's, Norwich, *Messenger*, for permission to reprint in our pages Sir Geoffrey's tribute to the memory of his father, whose genius made upon Baptist life and work in this country an unparalleled impact.

## John Howard Shakespeare

*The centenary of Dr. Shakespeare's birth falls on 16th April of this year. His son, Sir Geoffrey Shakespeare, Bart., P.C., here gives a short appreciation of his father's life and influence.*

MY father was born at Malton in Yorkshire on 16th April, 1857. He was minister of St. Mary's, Norwich, from 1883 to 1898. St. Mary's was his only church. He went there in 1883 as a stop-gap preacher, while still a student of Regent's Park College, and made such a profound impression that he was invited to be their minister, though not yet ordained. Towards the end of that same year he married my mother. When she introduced my father to a friend, the latter exclaimed, "John Howard Shakespeare—love, philanthropy and genius—what a happy combination!"

My father's ministry at St. Mary's was brilliantly successful and fruitful, and St. Mary's was the centre of great influence and activity in the city and county.

My mother now lives at Cambridge. She is in her 96th year, and still retains her wonderful memory. She lately recounted to me how with the late Mr. Richard Jewson she started the first night-school for illiterate men in Norwich. She and Mr. Jewson visited public-houses and many dwelling houses in the neighbourhood of St. Mary's, and announced that classes in reading and writing would start in St. Mary's school-room at six o'clock on the following Tuesday. At this first session sixteen elderly pupils turned up. Within a few months there were sixty. Many a citizen who later played a prominent part in the civic life of the city learnt to read and write in my mother's night-school. But she would not let the class disperse until Mr. Jewson, or some other suitable person, had given them a ten-minute talk on a religious topic. She stood by the

door and prevented anyone slipping out. To one man who pleaded that his wife was ill and he ought to go home at once, my mother replied: "If she is really ill you should never have left her. As you have done so, another ten minutes won't do any harm." Courageous for a new minister's wife, aged twenty-two!

When I asked her to name some of the members of the Church in those days, she replied: "George White, J. W. Jewson, George Jewson, J. G. Howlett, Holmes, Blyth, Willis, Culley, and Gould." A roll call of Church members today would include several with the same surnames, even if initials are different!

My father was a powerful preacher, but it is as a great organiser and administrator, visionary and statesman that his name will live. After leaving St. Mary's in 1898 he became General Secretary of the Baptist Union, and in that post until his retirement through illness in 1924, his genius and gifts had full scope. He welded the churches into a real and living union. He initiated and organised the collection of three great appeals for funds: The Twentieth Century Fund in 1899, The Sustentation Fund in 1912, and The United Fund in 1920. Over three-quarters of a million pounds were raised by these appeals. The Baptist Church House stands as a monument to his foresight. He fortified and sustained the finances of poorer churches; increased minister's stipends and placed their superannuation on a surer basis. He raised the status of the ministry by initiating scholarships, by improved methods of selection, and by requiring higher qualifications and culture. The Baptist Union under his leadership became a force in the religious life of this country. Indeed, the story of the growth and rising influence of the Denomination since the turn of the century is largely the story of my father's life and work.

He was also one of the founders of the Baptist World Alliance, and became its European secretary in 1905. Towards the end of his life he was a fervent advocate of Christian Unity, and in 1919 he was chosen as the first Moderator of the Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches.

He died at the early age of 73, worn out by his exertions. But his fame lives on, and his name is already linked with those of the great leaders in the history of our denomination.

GEOFFREY SHAKESPEARE