

# Former Secretaries of the Baptist Union.

## II.

**I**NCLUDED within the forty-seven years of Dr. Steane's nominal secretariat, were the twenty-two or more years secretariat of John Howard Hinton, M.A. He was born in Oxford seven years earlier than Steane, where his father was pastor and schoolmaster. He was named after the great prison reformer, John Howard, at the latter's request—a request made to his friend, James Hinton, on the eve of his journey to Russia, whence he never returned. Hinton's mother, a Miss Taylor of Ongar, largely influenced his religious life, and it was her influence which finally diverted him from a medical career to the ministry, and sent him, like Steane afterwards, first to Bristol and then to Edinburgh University. Four years at Haverfordwest, where he married the daughter of Isaiah Birt, of Birmingham, and then to King's Road, Reading, where he was drawn, on the one side, into the agitation for the abolition of slavery, and on the other into personal effort to evangelise the villages of England. In 1837 he came to London as the pastor of Devonshire Square, Bishopsgate Street. His ministry had become more and more a teaching ministry, and the books that flowed from his pen were in the main a reproduction of his pulpit work. He had a most acute mind, and his powers of work were unrivalled. He took a large part in "The Voluntary Church Society" ("The Liberation Society" of later days), and fought for equitable national education. The Missionary Society's affairs occupied a large share of his attention, while the Baptist Union largely owed its preservation, its development, and its fuller organisation to his untiring efforts. In 1863 he resigned his church, shortly before its removal to Stoke Newington, and left London for Reading, where he founded a new church, and in 1868 retired to Bristol for life's quiet eventide, occupying his leisure with the collection and publication of his theological works, in seven volumes, cr. 8vo. In the Mission House in Furnival Street, in their portraits, Hinton and Charles Stovel still seem almost to glare at each other, as tradition says they actually often did in "the days of the flesh." From the chair of the Union Stovel, referring to his deceased colleague, said, "We were more than most compelled to feel

each other's personal peculiarities." But he went on generously to add, "He brought into the service of the Union a penetration which reached the nature of passing events, and often provided against future emergencies. . . . He promoted the attainment of religious liberty in Denmark, Germany, and Sweden. . . . Few have ever possessed his power of pleading for special objects. Whatever he engaged to support he sustained with intellect and skill that made him valued as a helper and feared in opposition. . . . He has left the mark of his services where truth and righteousness in their advance were made to contend successfully with open sin, political artifices, and infidelity."

He spoke of himself as a moderate Calvinist, a follower of Andrew Fuller. By his ministry many were recovered from infidelity, and many more to increased reverence for the authority of the Word of God. At times bitter and passionate in his attacks on the base and the false, as he conceived them, he was yet full of tenderness and sympathy for the penitent and truth-seeking. I never saw him, but I know now with pleasure that when as a lad in the city I watched the crowds of worshippers that passed up the great steps into St. Paul's Cathedral at the Public Thanksgiving for the recovery of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, John Howard Hinton went by, having travelled to London at seventy-two, to form part of the Baptist Union Delegation, his last public duty and service.

John Henry Millard, B.A., born at Lymington in 1819, was at twenty-one a student at Stepney for four years; he settled at Huntingdon, and was its pastor till he removed to Maze Pond in 1858. In 1863 he returned to Huntingdon, and for fourteen years maintained his work there, and the oversight of eight village churches concurrently with the secretaryship of the Baptist Union. It was during these years that the magnificent "Trinity Church" was built, largely by the munificence of Mr. Munt Brown, as was also the "Free Church" at St. Ives; the spires of both churches, and the too lofty ridge of the former providing conspicuous and pleasing landmarks in the fen landscape for many a mile.

Great hopes were felt by Baptist leaders on the appointment of William Sampson, in 1880, after the resignation of Samuel Harris Booth at the close of his first brief term of office. Born at Bristol, trained for accountancy "in a merchant's office," with great business aptitude and a "love of figures," he was also a born preacher and came to be fired with the call and the message of the Christian missionary. After four years training at Bristol in 1854, he left for India under the B.M.S., and at Alipore and Serampore for some ten years he taught and preached in English and evangelised in the villages in the vernacular. Returning home in 1864, his health broke, and he was forbidden by the medical

experts to think of going back. He settled at Folkestone, where his health improved, and fine work was done, and the new chapel was built. He was induced to go as a deputation to the North West Provinces of India with John Aldis. On his return he yielded to an earnest request to take the joint secretaryship of the Union and of the Home and Irish Mission. After a few months his strength suddenly failed, and though for a time there was hope of recovery, he passed away on November 11th, 1882, after three weeks of severe illness.

Samuel Harris Booth, born in 1824, was the son of a London publisher, but owing to the latter's early death, he spent most of his childhood and youth on his mother's inheritance, "Evans' Farm," Sandridge, near St. Albans. His experiences of rural life and industry, and of church and school life in the neighbouring country town will account not a little for his wise and enthusiastic advocacy of village churches in later years. In the century-old chapel, and under the ministry of William Upton, God met with him and he heard the call which took him from the farm into the Baptist ministry. His comrade was the minister's son, William Carey Upton, and having proved their evangelistic fervour and mental fitness in village barns and on village heaths, they entered Stepney College together under the presidency of Dr. Benjamin Davies, a saint of God, who "combined the simplicity of a child with the culture of a scholar, and had a rare delight and faith in young men." After College he was at Birkenhead for four years, and then, for health's sake, at Falmouth for five—but where, alas, he lost the dear mother of his children (Elizabeth Peppercorn, of St. Albans)—and then back to Birkenhead once more. In a little while he became secretary to the Lancashire and Cheshire Association, and carried through the Baptist Union Autumn Meetings at Liverpool in 1866. And now came the call to Upper Holloway, the first London Baptist Association venture in chapel building and church forming, and here he laid the foundations of a fellowship which, under the Divine blessing, has been and is one of the most fruitful of all our London churches. Eight years strenuous pioneer service led him to seek a lighter task at Roehampton till, in 1877 he was called to the secretariat of the Baptist Union, which he filled, save for a brief interval, for twenty-one years. In the spring of 1880 William Sampson was hardly established in his official duties before he was overtaken by illness, and for nearly a year most of his work was done by Dr. Booth without fee or reward. Dr. Booth was, in practice, the first whole-time secretary, and the years were full of difficult and responsible work. The constitution was thoroughly revised. The Annuity Fund, just started on its beneficent way, raised many anxious problems for wise and

immediate settlement, and its very success led to the inevitable demand for the doubling of its capital. Home Mission work and "The Rural Churches Scheme," for the grouping of small neighbouring churches under one pastor, absorbed much secretarial time, and many long and out-of-the-way journeys were taken to ensure suitable and harmonious groups. The success of the Council's proposals in this direction, with the cheering results which have followed in later years, were largely due to Dr. Booth's assiduous labours and gracious personal efforts. He played a most important part in the negotiations which resulted in the union of General and Particular Baptists in the Union, in the Associations, and in the Missionary Society. So completely has this union been accomplished that the very meaning of the terms Particular and General is not known by five per cent. of our Church members, and only by umpteen per cent. of our ministers. The Irish Mission, for long associated with the Union and forming one with the Home Mission, was separated again and, greatly to the advantage of Ireland, granted the full measure of Home Rule. The heaviest burden of all that came upon Dr. Booth's mind and heart was the Down Grade Controversy, between the years 1883 and 1888, when accusations of heresy were aimed against certain unnamed ministers who were members of the Union. Like many of the most prominent and responsible ministers of this period, who had enjoyed friendship and the warmest fellowship with Mr. Spurgeon, Dr. Booth suffered from many conflicting emotions, hesitating on the one hand to take action that might wound the great preacher whose work he appreciated beyond all measure, and on the other hand deeply concerned for the unity of the denomination, the influence of which had been gradually increasing throughout the country, and whose very existence seemed to be threatened. It has to be said now that the writer, having attended all the Council and Committee Meetings during this most trying period, cannot recall a single instance when any hint or accusation of bias was directed against the secretary's action. On the contrary, his management of the Union ship of state evoked frequent expressions of gratitude and approval from all concerned. "An even keel" was a phrase that in those times of stress and storm was frequently on his lips, and no man of all the ship's crew strove more earnestly to live up to all that the phrase involved. A more masterful, or even an abler man, might easily have wrecked or crippled the vessel which, under Dr. Booth's captaincy, was at length steered into calmer seas. The highest qualities of leadership, sound judgment, a fine temper, a heart sensitive to the difficulties of others, and an ear ever ready to listen to their complaints, were united to faith that did not shrink when faced by the severest

trials or the sorest discouragement. These higher qualities were matched with a stately and massive physique, which gave dignity of bearing and made him a conspicuous figure in any company. To these must be added a gracious countenance and a mellow-toned voice which commanded attention among all sorts and conditions of men. Man of affairs as he inevitably was, first things were always first. Alike in prosperity and adversity—and he knew both intimately—he bore himself as a brave and true Christian gentleman. In later life, when he had lost his private fortune and his health was seriously impaired, “he stepped down to a humbler style of life, without a grudge against God or man,” and grateful and trustful to the last, he entered the true home for which he had been so long preparing.

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