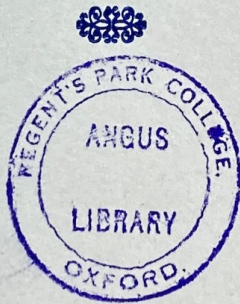


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# BAPTIST DEACONESSES



DORIS M. ROSE, M.B.E.

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by

**DORIS M. ROSE, M.B.E.**

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## FOREWORD

Miss Doris Rose has placed us all under a debt by preparing this account of the work of Baptist Deaconesses. To most readers much of the story will be new; to all it will be full of interest and challenge.

The past sixty years have seen many changes, not the least important of which has been the enlargement of the opportunities given to women for public service of all kinds. This record is a valuable minor contribution to social and religious history, and in particular to the history of our own denomination. Through their work as deaconesses, first in somewhat restricted ways, but later with wider functions and more serious responsibilities, Baptist women have shown a devotion, courage and capacity which cannot but excite admiration and gratitude.

That Baptists have not always found it easy to be generous or consistent, either in theory or practice, regarding the status of those they designate deaconesses will be obvious to those who peruse these pages. The denomination has only slowly realized the importance of adequate training. It has been hesitant and undecided about other matters. But in this we are not alone.

The place of women in the ministry and service of the Church is one of the urgent issues which face Christians in all parts of the world. Writing of the important book on "The Service and Status of Women in the Churches", by Dr. Kathleen Bliss, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches suggested that it would make many Christians 'wonder whether we may not expect a great deal of new light and new strength in the life of the Church, if we begin to ask seriously what the will of God is concerning the diversity of gifts of men and women, and concerning the one spirit in which they are to serve together their common Lord'. In its own way, and in relation to a particular form of service in one denomination, I hope that this book will have a similar result.

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## I

### *The Beginning of the Work*

FROM earliest days it is evident that women played a prominent part in the life of the Christian Church. They shared the common meals, which doubtless they had helped to prepare; they met with the fellowship for worship and for prayer; they distributed 'to the necessity of saints' and were 'given to hospitality'. Some of them suffered martyrdom.

The question arises: Did women hold any distinctive office in the New Testament churches? In his Epistle to the Romans the Apostle Paul commends 'Our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrae' (16: 1. R.S.V.). The word in its non-technical usage simply means 'helper', and in the case of Phoebe may signify no more than that she was an honoured helper in a church, which, in those early days, still lacked any special ecclesiastical organization.

In his First Epistle to Timothy, however, Paul clearly recognizes bishops and deacons as officers of the Church (3: 8-12). In verse 11, where 'wives' (A.V.) should be 'women' (as in R.V.) there is good reason to think that his reference is to those women who were singled out for appointment to the office of deaconess. That, at any rate, was what Chrysostom and most ancient expositors affirmed to be Paul's meaning. Early in the second century the Roman Proconsul Pliny, in his famous letter to the Emperor Trajan, distinctly alludes to Christian deaconesses.

It is certain that by the fourth century there existed in the Eastern Church an order of deaconesses, whose functions included assisting at the baptism of women and visiting the sick and afflicted. There was a lofty conception of their service which appears to have been inspired by the ministration of women to Christ during His earthly life. All trace of these ancient orders disappeared in the Middle Ages, their place being taken by nuns and abbesses, who, at a time when women felt driven to seek the protection of the cloister, were afforded a career and an outlet for religious enthusiasm and intellectual ability.

The office was revived in the nineteenth century, when Protestant Sisterhoods began to appear in Europe. The revival of the Deaconess Order in the Church of England dates from 1862. To-day in our country both Anglican and Free Churches have their trained deaconesses.

The need for a wider ministry on the part of women became

apparent in our denomination towards the close of the last century.\* Moral and social conditions were causing the Christian conscience grave concern when Dr. F. B. Meyer and the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes called the London churches to take action, making it clear that the help of Christian women was essential if an impact was to be made upon the homes of the people. Mrs. Hugh Price Hughes is still to be seen in the West London Methodist Mission. In response to a similar impulse a small group of well-educated gentlemen in the Baptist Denomination left their sheltered homes to enter an entirely new field of service which led to the formation of the Baptist Deaconesses' Home and Mission. These consecrated women became known as Sisters and rendered a ministry of comfort and consolation to the underprivileged and poverty-stricken people in the crowded and disreputable slums of those days. An early record thus defines the object of the Sisterhood: 'To help and brighten the lives of men, women and children, and most of all to win them to Jesus Christ.'

Dr. Meyer was at this time the Honorary Superintendent of the London Baptist Association Forward Movement, and it was under its auspices that our deaconess work began in 1890. An extract from Dr. Meyer's first report upon the work of the L.B.A. Extension Fund Committee reveals how a beginning was made:—

'A house was taken at 59 Doughty Street. . . . Accommodation is at present provided for ten ladies, with facility of increase for three more. Four Sisters, with a Lady Superintendent, are now in permanent residence there. . . .

'The work of the Sisters lies principally in the neighbourhood of Leather Lane, and that vast and densely populated district bounded by Holborn and Gray's Inn Road, and stretching down towards the Meat Market. There is ample scope here for not three or four, but for many devoted women in dealing with the sin, and sorrow, and sickness, which abound on all sides.

'In the heart of this district, and in connection with the Lodging House . . . we have opened a Mission Room in which, every Friday afternoon, Dr. (Percy) Lush conducts a Medical Mission, at present attended by between 30 and 40 patients, with every prospect of its growing into a very large and important

\* A contemporary movement took place in the Methodist Church. Two Orders of Deaconesses came into existence in Methodism. One was founded in 1890, by Dr. T. B. Stephenson, in the Wesleyan Church; the other, a year later, by the Rev. T. J. Cope, in the United Methodist Free Church. When Methodist Union was consummated in 1932, deaconesses came from each of the uniting churches into one fellowship.'

work. We wish warmly to acknowledge the great kindness of Dr. Lush, in thus serving the denomination. . . . He is becoming very popular in the neighbourhood, the poor people saying that no one ever took so much pains with them before.

'The Sisters are always in attendance on these occasions, one, Sister Louise, a properly qualified nurse, assisting the Doctor where necessary, whilst the others read and speak to the patients as they are waiting for their turn. Many of these cases need careful attention during the week and give the Sisters not only plenty of work but many opportunities of entering the houses of the people. In this way also, the younger Sisters gain valuable experience and knowledge of the elements of nursing.

'In the same room a large Mothers' Meeting is conducted, with some 50 poor women in attendance, who are engaged in making clothing for themselves and their children, and are paying in money towards their Christmas dinners. The Plum-pudding Club has met with great approval, about 80 puddings having been subscribed for, and are being made. We are happy to report that the women of the immediate neighbourhood are extremely well disposed towards us, in spite of the fact that the police informed us at the beginning that the women were worse than the men. But the friendly unassuming demeanour of the Sisters, who never shrink from doing anything to promote the well-being of the people, scrubbing their floors, cleaning their grates, nursing their children, tending their sick, has disarmed opposition, where it existed, and has won faith and love. The neighbourhood is much quieter, and the public-house less noisy than when we first came.

'The Sisters are devoted to their work, and we cannot but think that for those who have no home ties, there are few conditions which furnish a better training for wider service, or offer greater opportunities for usefulness, than those presented by our Deaconesses' Home.'

The Deaconesses' Home was dedicated to the service of God on the 6th June, 1890, but the inaugural meeting of the Home and Mission, at which Dr. Meyer presided, was not held until the 26th February, 1892, the semi-Jubilee being celebrated in 1915.

The report of the L.B.A. for 1891 includes this reference to the work:—

'The Deaconesses' Home . . . has had time to develop and manifest its exceedingly valuable agency. A sufficient number of ladies have been trained in the work of visiting and nursing

the sick poor to enable your Committee to invite applications from Churches for their services; and Deaconesses have thus been appointed to labour in connection with Abbey Street, Bermondsey; Shoreditch Tabernacle; Upton Chapel, Lambeth; and Hammersmith; while several other appointments are nearly completed. The Medical Mission work in Dorrington Street . . . and the necessities of the terribly poor district round Leather Lane absorb the energies of the Deaconesses remaining in the Home and train them for future service in the Church when their places may be taken by others.'

An interesting side-light is thrown upon the drear conditions prevailing in those days in a letter to *The Freeman*, dated the 22nd April, 1892, wherein the Rev. E. Henderson appealed for 'a light wicker bath-chair by means of which they (the Sisters) may be able to take out into the open air the cripples, the invalids, and the aged, some of whom for months, and even for years, have been cooped up in their poor wretched homes'.

At the close of 1893 the L.B.A. Extension Committee considered that the deaconess work could be carried on more successfully on an independent basis and 'requested a number of gentlemen, deeply interested, to kindly form themselves into a provisional committee, for the purpose of taking over the management of the Deaconesses' Home and Medical Mission'.

The first meeting of the newly-constituted committee of the Deaconesses' Home and Mission was held on 26th January, 1894, with Mr. A. Towers in the chair. Dr. Percy Lush and Dr. Gould were also present. The Rev. W. Brock was elected as Superintendent, Mr. A. Towers as Honorary Treasurer, and the Rev. E. Henderson as Honorary Secretary. Mr. Towers had previously served as convenor of the L.B.A. Extension Sub-Committee and he continued to take an active interest in the Home and Mission until his death in 1897.

The work thus ceased to be a department of the London Baptist Association but the interest and support of the London churches continued.

The Medical Mission was first established in Dorrington Street, but in December 1896 it was transferred to a new Mission Hall in Cross Street, Leather Lane, where other departments of the work were also carried on.

The ground floor of the building was used for meetings with the doctor's consulting room, the Sisters' room and the dispensary on the first floor. The weekly time-table of the Mission was as follows:—

Sunday afternoon . . . . .	School
Sunday evening . . . . .	Gospel Service
Monday afternoon . . . . .	Mothers' Meeting
Monday evening . . . . .	Bible Reading
Tuesday . . . . .	Boys' Class
Wednesday . . . . .	Girls' Class
Thursday evening . . . . .	Gospel Service
Friday . . . . .	Medical Mission

Later, a Band of Hope, a Young Women's Guild and a Men's Bible Class were introduced. There were also meetings for testimonies and for prayer. Open-air services were held at the corner of Cross Street, and the Sisters were occasionally supported in these services by students from Pastors' and Regents Park Colleges.

Dr. Percy Lush was the Honorary Medical Officer for many years, and under his direction the Sisters dressed wounds and distributed food, fuel and clothing to the needy and nourishment to the sick. They also visited the patients in their homes, where they often undertook duties as night nurses, for district nurses were few at this period.

Mr. Samuel Thompson was closely associated with the Sisterhood from 1894, and his genial personality seemed to embody the spirit of the work. He was invited to become one of the auditors in December that year and the following month gave the Treasurer's report at the Annual Meeting in the unavoidable absence of Mr. Towers. In March 1895 he undertook the Treasurer's duties temporarily during Mr. Towers' illness and was elected Honorary Treasurer of the Home and Mission in 1896. He was said to "live for the Sisterhood" until his death in 1917.

In 1901 the Rev. E. Henderson was appointed to the Honorary Superintendency of the Mission and the Rev. A. B. Middleditch to the Honorary Secretaryship. The Rev. Edward Barlow, B.A., became the Honorary Secretary in 1906 and served in this capacity until 1915. In 1912 Dr. Bumsted joined Dr. Lush at the Dispensary.

The Rev. F. C. Spurr served as Honorary Superintendent for the years 1915 to 1917, and the Rev. P. T. Thomson took over the Honorary Secretaryship for a year or so about this time, Mr. A. W. E. Wort having first filled the vacancy created by Mr. Barlow's resignation.

In September 1903 the Deaconesses' Home was removed to 98 Guilford Street, from whence nine years later it was transferred to 37 Mecklenburgh Square. It was not in any sense a luxurious place and many of the devoted women who lived there received

no remuneration for their services, but it afforded, in addition to training facilities, protection and refreshment in days when women were unaccustomed to living away from home.

Each deaconess was required to take a three to six months' nursing course and she usually served as a holiday probationer in a hospital. Practical experience was gained by visiting homes and by speaking at meetings both indoors and in the open air. The course of training widened as opportunities for service increased and included theology, Bible study, elocution and the cultivation of the spiritual life.

A senior deaconess was appointed Lady Superintendent of the Home. The earliest names traced in this connection are those of Sister Winifred (who retired upon her marriage); Sister Grace (who served from July 1892 until February 1894); and Sister Gwendoline (who was appointed in 1897). The name of Sister Constance (Miss Margaret Constantine) is still remembered with deep affection. She was a woman of unusual ability and exerted a gracious and stimulating influence upon the Sisters. On the termination of her appointment in 1917, after eighteen years service, it is recorded that eighty-six deaconesses had come under her care.

Miss Hettie Bannister, who later became Mrs. R. Rowntree Clifford, entered the Deaconesses' Home in 1903 or 1904. Her forceful and radiant personality won her an honoured place in the Home and in the hearts of the Sisters. Sister Hettie, as she was called, retained a deep interest in the work throughout her life. She was instrumental in bringing the Sisters' Union into being and was its President for some years (see Appendix 1); later Mrs. Clifford served as Chairman of the Deaconess Committee (see page 19).

In 1905 the Central Mission and Medical Dispensary was removed to Havelock Hall, Gough Street, Leather Lane. At the zenith of this work approximately 27,000 patients were treated annually, or an average of 75 a day. On leaving the Dispensary for the Hall, doctors, deaconess-nurses and patients knelt together in prayer 'to seek the cleansing of the heart as well as the healing of the body'.

Dr. F. B. Meyer regarded the Mission as an open doorway 'through which some of the saintliest women in our churches can descend into the slums carrying the lamp of the Gospel'. In their simple uniform, the deaconesses fearlessly visited notorious haunts of vice and crime where they were respected and welcomed. Sir Montague Lush, K.C., referred to them as 'Florence Nightingales of the slums'.

Bloomsbury Central Church was the spiritual home of the deaconesses while they were in London. For many years six or seven Sisters were stationed at the church, some of whom only stayed long enough to gain a year's experience to qualify them for work elsewhere. A Sisters' At-Home was held at 'Bloomsbury', and in the vestry the Sisters received callers of all kinds—the sad and the sick; distracted mothers seeking advice regarding recalcitrant children; women who were fighting intoxicating drink; the out-of-work and the sinner'.

'Bloomsbury' was concerned at this period with the welfare of the thousands of young people who resided in hostels established by large Drapery Houses in the West End of London. Deaconesses conducted Bible classes in the evening for the girl employees, who, with many of the young men, came to look upon 'Bloomsbury' as their 'home from home'; they also took their full share of responsibility for the Clubs and other activities that were arranged for these young people.

At first deaconess work was confined to London but, after a time, the field of service was enlarged. Sisters were posted to churches in the provinces and also in South Wales. Others went abroad as missionaries.

The Baptist Union, through the evangelistic section of the Home Work Fund, appointed a Caravan Missioner in 1907 in an endeavour to evangelize those villages and hamlets which were almost wholly untouched by the churches. Each Mission was preceded by house-to-house visitation. For several years deaconesses served the Caravan Mission in the summer months. Two of them at a time lived in the Caravan and, in addition to visiting, conducted children's services, open-air meetings and meetings for women. It was not unusual for an Association to ask for the services of a deaconess to be retained in a district which had shown signs of new life as a result of the Caravan Mission.

With the introduction of the National Health Scheme, the number of patients attending the Medical Mission in Leather Lane diminished and the nature of deaconess service gradually underwent a change. Improved social conditions lifted from the Church some of the responsibility she had assumed for the relief of poverty and the care of the sick, but, while national allowances and district nurses rendered physical and material help less necessary, the deaconesses still found that much of their most valuable work was both intimate and personal.

The work had become many-sided by 1913. The Sisters were taking services, running Life Brigade companies for the children, visiting prisons, workhouses and infirmaries, and conducting women's meetings and anniversary services. They were also giving assistance to unemployed persons, for whom they procured work whenever possible.

Occasionally deaconesses were seconded for service outside the normal church sphere: one Sister took up evangelistic work for a local Free Church Council, another became warden of a hostel for young women in the midlands.

During the 1914-18 war, "The Sisters of the People" won fresh honour for the title which had been affectionately bestowed upon them. They administered relief to those impoverished by unemployment and undertook extensive preventive and moral rescue work which had been made vitally necessary by war-time conditions. They tended those stricken or bereaved in the influenza scourge, and in London displayed great courage in zeppelin raids, spending hours by day and night helping terrified or homeless people.

They assumed, too, heavier responsibilities on the administrative side of the Church's life. Frequently deaconesses took the place of church officers who had enlisted in the Forces, and at times they deputized for ministers absent on chaplaincy duties. Their willingness to step aside when the men returned was a mark of 'God's distinguishing grace', although it should be noted that they were not invariably called upon to vacate offices which had hitherto been reserved for men.

A new conception of women's work was gradually emerging, and Baptist leaders were questioning the Church's right to deny women the opportunity to enlarge their sphere of influence. In *The Baptist Times and Freeman* dated 5th March, 1915, Dr. Charles Brown is reported to have said: 'The Sisters of the Mission are as truly ministers of Christ as the men ordained to the ministry of the Word'. At the Annual Meeting of the Baptist Women's League in May of that year the Rev. F. C. Spurr said he gloried in the fact that at last woman was coming into her inheritance. 'Nevertheless,' he continued, 'there is still among us—and in the churches too—a good deal of the old Roman tyranny over women, mixed with much of the Greek contempt. We have never applied our own principles of liberty to our own women. It is true we have deaconesses, but not as they were in New Testament times; then they were administrators. If Philip's four preaching daughters came along to-day, we should be very uneasy about them.'

For years it had been assumed that a deaconess' work was almost exclusively among the underprivileged and the sick (an idea which was not entirely founded upon fact as these pages have shown) but World War I, and even more World War II, brought about the further emancipation of women, and this had a marked effect upon the Church. In factories and in workshops women proved their ability. They took a large share in the production of war materials; they entered the realms of industry and assumed positions of leadership in education and politics; they helped, too, to build up the new social structure of this country. Doubtless the churches lost many of their finest and best equipped women at this period, for, denied scope for the use of their gifts within the Church, they entered other fields of service where vast opportunities awaited them.

At length the Church began to realize that consecrated and trained women could make a valuable contribution to her life and witness. Many, who had been reluctant to acknowledge women's gifts and abilities, were compelled to appreciate them and some came to realize women were part of God's gift to the ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ. Thus, gradually, but certainly, a new conception of deaconess service was born, although prejudice was slow to die in some quarters.

The following extract from an article on the work of Baptist Sisters in *The Baptist Times and Freeman* dated the 12th January, 1917, is of interest here:—

'No piece of work in the denomination is more effective than that which these forty-eight ladies are doing in the various churches. The story of the commencement and of the development of the work borders on the romantic, but there is little of romance in their actual work. Their training ground is the hospital, the slum, and the Deaconesses' Home. In the hospital they learn nursing, in the slum they encounter life at its worst, in the Home they receive training for the various branches of their after-work—so that they can help churches in women's services, brigades, visiting, guilds and the like. The universal testimony of the ministers with whom they work is that the Sisters are invaluable. Our Baptist folk are not yet awake to the possibilities of women's work in this direction; five hundred deaconesses at work in the churches of the denomination would make an enormous difference to our annual statistics. Since the year 1890 more than one hundred Sisters have passed through the Home and gone out to serve in the churches.'



'The present Superintendent (the Rev. F. C. Spurr), the Secretary (the Rev. P. T. Thomson) and the Committee are determined to do all they can to increase the scope of influence of the Sisters, believing that the churches would gain immeasurably thereby. They would like to see the work on a denominational basis—as similar work is in other churches, that is, the work encouraged and supported by the entire denomination—meanwhile, it is wholly supported by private subscriptions.'

## II

### *The Baptist Women's Training College and Sisterhood*

THE Committee of the Deaconesses' Home and Mission had for some time been feeling its way towards the reorganization of the work on a wider basis, and in 1917 requested that some form of co-operation between the Council of the Baptist Union and the Committee might be considered in the hope that ultimately 'this Movement with its vast potentialities may become a department of the Baptist Union'. Representatives of the Baptist Union and the Baptist Women's League were invited to join the committee of the Home and Mission for the purpose of pursuing this inquiry.

In the spring of 1919 the Baptist Union assumed responsibility for the work which had been carried on by the Baptist Deaconesses' Home and Mission and decided to endeavour to enlarge its scope. It was agreed to found a college in London with the primary object in view 'to call out and train Baptist women who were qualified and ready to devote themselves to some specialized form of ministry in the Church and more particularly to the work of deaconesses among the poor, to missionary work in heathen lands and in positions of leadership in Church, Institute, Sunday School and Christian social work.'

The Training College was established at Havelock Hall, 66 Fitzjohn's Avenue, Hampstead, and the first students were admitted on the 2nd October, 1920. The first principal, Miss Kathleen Dunn, resigned owing to ill-health and was succeeded by Miss J. J. Arthur, M.A., in 1923. The enlarged curriculum included the study of Holy Scripture, Biblical Theology, New Testament Greek, Apologetics, Homiletics, Church History, Elocution, Psychology, English Literature, Hygiene, Social Science, Home Nursing and First-Aid, Housecraft and Swedish Drill. Special training was also

given in modern methods of Sunday school work, including primary work and the conduct of Teachers' Preparation Classes. Practical training was gained in churches or settlements and comprised 'addressing and managing Women's Meetings, Young People's Meetings, Visitation, Child Welfare Work, Girls' Clubs, Camp Fire Girls' Organization and Medical Mission Work.'

A small chapel was the centre of College life. Here was a quiet room to which students had access and where prayers were conducted morning and evening. Brief services were held in the chapel on Sunday mornings and the Communion of the Lord's Supper was observed there once or twice each term.

Students who devoted themselves to the work of the Church were set apart at a session of the Baptist Union Assembly. The course of training for the Sisterhood varied according to the work contemplated. Usually it covered a period of two to three years. There was no entrance examination in those days.

Havelock Hall was essentially a training centre, whereas the Deaconesses' Home of earlier years had been a true home for the Sisters, including those stationed in the provinces who had habitually returned there for periods of rest and spiritual renewal. The loss of the Home was keenly felt at the time.

Dr. J. H. Shakespeare, M.A., the Secretary of the Baptist Union, was a keen advocate of women's place in the ministry of the Church and saw the value of enlisting the interest of Baptist women by inviting them to share responsibility with the Council for the maintenance of the work. The organizing secretary of the Baptist Women's League, Mrs. C. S. Rose, was appointed also to the organizing secretaryship of the Women's Training College and Sisterhood. Mrs. Rose set out to win the interest of the women of the churches and soon the branches of the League were generously supporting the college and taking a practical and energetic interest in the welfare of individual members of the Sisterhood. Mrs. Rose served the College and Sisterhood Committee with outstanding ability for fifteen years, and many deaconesses testify to her sane judgment and practical help in their settlements and to her prayerful sympathy and wise counsel in time of difficulty.

Mrs. Russell James became the first chairman of the first Sisterhood Committee and has retained a deep interest in the work ever since. The Rev. F. C. Spurr was elected vice-chairman. Mrs. James, Mrs. Herbert Marnham, the chairman of the College House Committee, and those associated with them, placed the Council under a deep obligation by the devotion with which they carried through

the strenuous work inseparable from the establishment of such an important enterprise. Mr. Thomas Horton, M.D., accepted the position of Honorary Medical Officer.

In the 1920s it became evident that the Sisters were reaching the masses and bringing young people in the great centres of population into vital touch with the Christian Church. At this period it is recorded that a Sister received eighteen young people into church membership and that another instituted a Children's Church. It was apparent, too, that 'conditions of overcrowding and unemployment had increased the need for Sisterhood work and added to its effectiveness'.

Deaconesses in dockland had the satisfaction of seeing members of their churches and settlements exerting a stabilizing Christian influence, as trade union leaders, at a time when the morale of the district was gravely imperilled. They were concerned, too, with the unique temperance campaign launched at the Old Five Bells, Poplar.

Deaconesses were now called upon to build up causes rendered weak through lack of leadership. The first appointment of the kind was probably made in 1923 when two members of the Sisterhood temporarily undertook charge of a 'derelict' church. This type of deaconess service came to be recognized as one solution of the problem of the down-town church.

Dr. M. E. Aubrey, C.H., M.A., became the General Secretary of the Baptist Union at the 1925 Assembly and, until his retirement twenty-six years later, he sought to win fuller appreciation of the deaconess' ministry. Dr. Aubrey's personal zeal for evangelism and his deep concern for the spiritual welfare of the churches led him to sympathize with all who sought entry to the homes of the people and who felt called to proclaim the Gospel.

In 1925, and later at intervals, a deputation Sister was appointed by the Baptist Women's League to make the work better known in the denomination. In 1928 the Lancashire and Cheshire Baptist Women's League appointed their first itinerant Sister to work in the weaker churches of that Association—an appointment which was kept open until 1954. The Northampton Association set aside a Sister as an itinerant worker five years later.

Mr. Arthur Newton accepted the chairmanship of the Women's Training College and Sisterhood Committee in 1924 and rendered distinguished service until his resignation in 1938. Mr. Newton had joined the Committee of the Deaconesses' Home and Mission nine years earlier and was deeply interested in the work.

The services of a Sister were secured for a church by the Baptist Union Council until May 1923 when the church served became responsible for appointing a deaconess. Thus she became a 'servant of the church' to which she was called in an economic as well as a spiritual sense. It was often impossible for the churches whose need was greatest to secure the services of a deaconess without help from outside. By 1924 the Baptist Women's League was contributing regularly to the support of Sisters in specified churches.

The Baptist Union, mindful of the meagre stipend paid to deaconesses, undertook to make some small provision for the future. A scheme of superannuation was adopted in March 1923 which allowed for an annuity of £30 per annum to be paid to deaconesses on their retirement at sixty years of age. (In 1938 a second superannuation scheme was introduced to provide an annuity of £26 per annum, upon retirement at the age of sixty-three, for fifteen deaconesses who were ineligible for the 1923 scheme). A benevolent fund was also established to assist in cases of special need.

In 1928 the Baptist Union Council was concerned because the number of Sisterhood students admitted to Havelock Hall had proved to be disappointing and the deficiency was not made up by missionary or other candidates for higher education. It is said that the cost of maintaining so large an establishment for so few students brought the Council under some criticism and this possibly interfered with the flow of support.

A special committee was set up to consider the selection and training of deaconesses and their work. This committee contended that there was practically no demand for women pastors or for the training of women in other spheres but that there was a distinct demand for deaconesses. It noted that nursing duties in slum areas were now rarely necessary but that opportunities awaited Sisters who could take their place as leaders of the churches. The need for a high standard of education was emphasized.

Inquiries were pursued as to the possibility of placing Havelock Hall on an inter-denominational basis, which would make a larger staff possible yet reduce financial liabilities, but it was found that other denominations could not co-operate.

Finally the committee recommended:—

- (a) that Havelock Hall should be closed;
- (b) that a college should be established in London in connection with a church in a suitable district; and
- (c) that training facilities should be confined to deaconesses but

that provision should be made for the training of applicants for other spheres as the need arose.

With reluctance the Baptist Union Council endorsed the recommendation and Havelock Hall was closed at the end of the session in June 1929.

In the spring of 1930 the training centre was transferred to Hillside, Camden Road, under the wardenship of Sister Gertrude Kendall. The curriculum was enlarged to include the study of Christian doctrine and church organization, while greater emphasis was laid upon modern Sunday school methods and youth work. The warden was assisted by visiting lecturers; and the denomination is greatly indebted to those ministers and others who have served as members of the teaching faculty through the years. Vernon Church, King's Cross, became the main centre for practical experience, although students were given opportunities to gain an insight into the work of other selected churches. The influence of the Rev. J. Willis Humphreys of Vernon is gratefully remembered in this connection. The ministers of other churches to which students were sent also rendered valuable assistance. Vernon Church later opened a Medical Mission and here deaconess students undertook dispensary duties and conducted the services.

During 1930 the Baptist Women's League embarked upon a Home Mission enterprise at Wood Lane, Dagenham, appointing Sister Margaret Evans to take charge of a new church there. Sister Margaret is still the leader of this church. By 1932 eleven Sisters were in charge of churches, mostly situated in new districts. Deaconesses were also serving in rural communities and in down-town churches.

Mrs. C. S. Rose retired in 1934 after twenty-six years' memorable service, and on the 1st April that year the writer was appointed as Organizing and Deputation Secretary. A Settlement Committee was now set up to introduce deaconesses to churches desiring their help and to effect transfers from one sphere to another.

### III

#### *Baptist Deaconesses and Women's Training College*

THE title of the Women's Training College and Sisterhood was changed in 1935 to 'The Order of Baptist Deaconesses and Women's Training College'. 'Order' is a much-used term in the



SISTERS OF THE PEOPLE



*A Deaconess leading a Bible Study Group*

*Personal Work*



Church to denote bodies of devoted women who are committed to professional service within the Church. To deaconesses the word embodies ideas and conceptions of service and of chivalry. It engenders, too, a sense of community and comradeship and denotes a committal and commission. The new name, which had come into use gradually, eliminated the confusion which existed between the work of the denominational Sisters and that being done by the large inter-denominational society for women known as 'The Sisterhood.' It did not, however, find universal favour, and it obviously raises a number of theological issues.

The denomination launched a Forward Movement in 1936 following upon the Discipleship Campaign. The main object of the Movement was evangelistic; and church extension in the rapidly developing areas of population was its chief concern. (It is estimated that one-fifth of the total population of Britain, or eight million persons, had removed to new housing areas). Deaconesses were appointed to establish and build up work in many new districts and were peculiarly successful in reaching the homes of the people on these vast estates.

Later that year the college was moved to 12 Carlton Drive, Putney, and each student was attached to a church in South-West London for practical experience. Sunday afternoons and evenings were spent at the church, and the student was required to acquaint herself with the youth and women's work and to do some visitation. After a time the student was moved to a church of a different type at the discretion of the Principal.

On Mrs. Rose's death, the same year, a Katherine Rose Memorial Fund was opened to help those Sisters who, upon retirement, did not qualify for superannuation benefit. (See page 17.) The late Mrs. F. W. Tanner raised £500 for this purpose during her presidency of the Baptist Women's League.

In January 1938, the Training College became a part of the work of the Women's Department of the Baptist Union. In November that year, Mrs. Rowntree Clifford, O.B.E., was elected to the chairmanship of the committee, an office which she held with distinction for six years—years which were clouded by a second World War and which brought unforeseen problems and undreamed of possibilities.

At the close of 1938, the Council of the Union set up a special committee, with wide terms of reference, to survey the organization and the function of the Order and the college. The difficulty of maintaining the college for a limited number of students had

again become acute. This was not merely a financial problem, for opinion was divided as to the value of specialized training given in a small group rather than in a larger setting where courses would be provided for those preparing for other spheres of service also. Then, an attempt had to be made to arrive at a balance between the supply of candidates and the demands of Christian for trained workers. Consideration, too, was given to the churches' changing attitude towards women's work; the whole question of the ministry of women in the denomination; and particularly of the status and function of deaconesses. No longer was it generally expected that a deaconess should spend most of her time in visiting (for years it had been taken for granted that a Sister would spend at least five hours a day in this way) for it was recognized that a Sister's service was infinitely varied.

The work of the special committee led to a thorough investigation, in which the ministers of the churches served had their share, and it was not completed until 1941.

Meanwhile, war-time conditions brought new opportunities which deaconesses were quick to seize. They conducted brief services of family worship in air raid shelters and accompanied distressed people to rest centres. Many of these centres were set up on church premises and the Sisters ministered regularly there. They also distributed vast quantities of blankets, clothing and food, donated mainly by Canadian Baptists. While Church officers were absent on active service, deaconesses of necessity undertook administrative and clerical duties which greatly increased the already heavy burden of work laid upon them. They gave special attention to the moral and social welfare of girls, and to women and children evacuated from London and other dangerous areas. Recreational centres were opened where the women, with their young children, could meet other evacuees in a friendly way and be free of their billets for a while. This work led to useful contacts being made for the church.

One deaconess took up an appointment as a Lay Church Worker, and one as a Chaplain's Assistant, in the Auxiliary Territorial Service. Each was responsible to a committee, composed of representatives of all the churches, set up to provide religious education for women in the Forces. Deaconesses stationed near service camps undertook voluntary duties under the same committee. Another deaconess accepted a post as Welfare Officer in the Ministry of Supply with special oversight at a mixed hostel for war workers in the north of England.

The great demand for labour in connection with all kinds of war-work led to a far-reaching 'call up' of women, and this had a serious effect upon the College. Ministry of Labour restrictions hindered many accepted candidates from beginning their training, and the number of students fell. (The Ministry later granted a concession by allowing exemption to a certain number of women in the registration age group in order that they might train for pastoral and social work under Church auspices. Applications for release were conveyed through the British Council of Churches.)

Learning of the committee's concern to maintain the full complement of students, the London deaconesses offered the full-time services of Sister Helen Britton for deputation work, assuming responsibility for her stipend for the year 1939. A number of recruits came forward as a result of Sister Helen's visits to the churches.

Abnormal conditions prevailing during the war seriously affected the churches in London and other large centres. Congregations became smaller and Sunday school and youth groups were sadly depleted by the large scale evacuation of women and children from specially dangerous areas. The members who remained made valiant efforts to maintain the Church's life and witness but some curtailment was inevitable and in many places it was well-nigh impossible for financial obligations to be met. In such circumstances the need for the services of the deaconesses was urgent and rich blessing attended their ministry. Short term appointments, however, became the rule rather than the exception, imposing additional strain upon the workers and creating difficulties for the Settlement Committee. At this period a few deaconesses were called upon to accept part-time appointments.

A B.W.L. Settlement Fund had been established, during Mrs. Grey Griffith's Presidency of the Baptist Women's League in 1936, to assist churches to support deaconesses in some of the neediest and most crowded areas. The fund was energetically sponsored by Mrs. Ernest Brown through many difficult years, until in 1948 it became merged in the Home Work Scheme. B.W.L. Federations and Branches pledged themselves to raise a given sum annually and £300 was donated by friends in America in response to Mrs. F. John Scroggie's appeal. Grants were voted towards the support of nineteen deaconesses in the churches in 1942.

Dr. Aubrey's Crown Fund gave grants-in-aid to churches from time to time and to some deaconesses whose stipends were inadequate. A Bursary Fund to help candidates of exceptional promise to obtain training was re-established in 1940 with the aid of a sum

from the '39 Collection raised by Mrs. J. A. Froggatt. Mrs. J. N. Britton augmented this Fund during her presidency of the B.W.L. the following year.

After nine years' faithful service, the warden of the college, Sister Gertrude Kendall, resigned in 1939 owing to prolonged ill-health. Sister Gertrude is still remembered with affection and gratitude by the deaconesses who were trained under her leadership.

For a few months Miss Dorothy Knights served as acting superintendent until in September Miss E. Webb Samuel, a daughter of the late Rev. G. Samuel of Birmingham, was appointed principal of the Women's Training College. Miss Samuel's personality, qualities and gifts proved invaluable and her wise administration raised the college to a new place of esteem. The principal offered the facilities of the college to ministers' fiancées and other women intending to take up Christian service, but the response was disappointing. Miss Samuel resigned at the close of the summer term in 1944 in view of her forthcoming marriage.

The relationship between the members of the Deaconess Committee and the deaconesses has become stronger through the years. Two deaconesses are elected annually, by ballot, to membership of the Committee (three are also nominated for membership of the College Committee). In 1940 a Deaconess Council was set up at the request of the Committee (see Appendix 1) and even closer co-operation exists between the central body and the deaconesses since constitutional access became available. Sister Elsie Chapple has served as honorary secretary of the Deaconess Council since its inception, and her wise handling of problems raised in the Committee on the one hand, and in the Deaconess Council on the other hand, has been of the utmost value.

The findings of the special committee appointed in 1938 were presented to the Baptist Union Council in March 1941. This Committee expressed the opinion that under normal conditions the denomination could absorb five new deaconesses every year but that funds would need to be continually available to help some churches to maintain them. It was noted that the supply of candidates had undoubtedly been affected by war conditions. Several promising candidates withdrew their applications when war broke out and the claims of National Service in its varying forms prevented many others from coming forward.

Attention was drawn to the variety of work the deaconess was called upon to do: 'We do not aim,' reads the report, 'at training

women ministers, but some deaconesses have been virtually put in the position of ministers and given the responsibility of organizing and maintaining churches. Others act as assistants to ministers, with special responsibility for the conduct of women's meetings, for Sunday school work and the care of young women and children.

'The emphasis is not always the same. In some cases it is the work among women that is regarded as most important. In other cases the Sunday school work and the care of the young appear to have first place. In still others the demand is primarily for a deaconess who shall be a good visitor, keeping in touch especially with poorer members of the congregation and with poor homes in the neighbourhood of the church, doing work of an evangelistic as well as of a social kind. Some of our deaconesses again are doing exceedingly useful work in connection with institutions as, for example, homes for young girls or settlement work. In some cases deaconesses are expected to do a good deal of speaking, occasionally even in the open air; while in others the opportunity for that kind of work is restricted.

'The truth seems to be that to a large extent the deaconess makes her own task. Wherever she begins, if she has special gifts and aptitude for a larger work, she finds her opportunity. A particularly valuable work has been done by some deaconesses who have been stationed in districts where churches have recently been formed or are about to be formed, to visit homes and gather people together and so to create the nuclei of new congregations and churches.

'We desire that all our deaconesses, for their own sakes and for their work's sake, should be held in high regard and affection by the people among whom they work, in view of their calling and the experience they have gained in their training, and that they should be regarded as exercising a ministry of Christ in His Church.

'But if our deaconesses are to have that place in the churches and the denomination that the Committee desiderates, too great stress cannot possibly be laid upon the need of a fine type of consecrated personality and intellectual and moral gifts of a high order. It is fundamental to the whole of our work that we should be able to attract women who by their gifts and consecration will win for themselves the confidence and the appreciation of the members of our churches. Only in that way can the Order find the place in the life of the denomination which we desire for it.'

The special committee had given careful consideration to the question of training and particularly as to whether it would be advantageous to the students, and more economical, to transfer

candidates to an interdenominational college. On a majority vote it recommended the continuance of a Baptist college in London and invited the Council to consider maintaining the college as a separate entity, with its own committee and appeal.

The Council accepted the Special committee's report but referred back the suggestion that the college should work separately so that a detailed scheme could be put forward.

In the meantime the work went on. Repeatedly deaconesses were called upon to specialize in youth work and some took intensive training courses dealing with modern methods of approach; others took courses in sex education in view of the grave moral conditions then prevailing.

'Pioneer work on housing estates, establishing and fostering new churches, moral reclamation and welfare, and other special tasks beside the usual labour of visitation, care of children's work, all come within the scope of deaconesses,' states the 1942 report of the Baptist Union. 'Their work is of a real missionary character, but the denomination appears slow to appreciate the vital need and importance of this work that is being done in the field at their very gates.'

At the close of 1944 a plan was approved to set up a college committee directly responsible to the Council, the first meeting of the new committee being held on the 17th January, 1945. The chairmanship was accepted by Mr. Seymour J. Price, and when, some three years later, Mr. Price found it necessary to resign deep appreciation was expressed for the guidance and help he had given at a time when important decisions had to be made.

This change in administration lifted from the Women's Department the responsibility it had held for the Women's Training College but the women's interest in the college and its students remained unshaken and their practical support continued.

During the period 1943 to 1945 it was impossible to meet all the requests that came from churches needing deaconess help. The Baptist Union Council Report for 1945 stated: 'That so many churches desire their services is in part due to the fact that it is very difficult to find enough ministers for a certain kind of church, but more probably to the gradual breaking down of prejudices and the record of the work done by our Baptist Order of Deaconesses during a quarter of a century, and especially during the last six years, in maintaining work already begun and in opening up new work.'

The call for more trained workers led the College Committee to

endeavour to recruit a greater number of candidates. The response was so large that a sub-committee was appointed to select those who should be invited, as likely to be suitable students, to meet the Candidates' Board.

The denomination had never refused an otherwise suitable candidate because she was not in a position to meet the cost of her training, but the Bursary Fund was sorely depleted. Mrs. D. Christy Davies who was then the National President of the Baptist Women's League, secured promises of financial help from a number of churches. For three years the Fund was substantially augmented as a result of Mrs. Davies' appeal and happy links of fellowship were forged between individual students and the donating churches. Mrs. Henry Cook, M.A., was elected to the chair of the Deaconess Committee on the 7th December, 1945, and still continues to serve the denomination in this office. Mrs. Cook came during an important transition period in the history of the work and her leadership is greatly valued.

An increasing number of deaconesses were now being called to accept full charge of small churches in town or country while others were invited to establish and build up churches in new districts. The emphasis laid upon the needs of youth gave some deaconesses an opportunity to undertake leadership in Young People's groups and in various uniformed organizations. Again, some Sisters underwent a course of training in physical and cultural activities so as to adapt themselves to the changes which were taking place in youth work. Many assumed civic responsibilities particularly in relation to education and moral and social welfare.

While the course of world history was being altered many changes were taking place in the realm of Christian service. On the cessation of hostilities the Church faced a critical situation; members were weary after the struggle of the war years and disinclined for further effort. A sense of frustration and disappointment prevailed, while the gravity of the international scene robbed victory of a jubilant note. As Christian leaders deaconesses set about reorganizing their work to meet the new conditions with initiative, patience and ability. They revised women's meeting programmes to cater for both afternoon and evening groups; some held brief lunch-hour services to prepare the way for Christian Commando Campaigns in towns where spiritual life was at an exceptionally low ebb; others specialized in young mothers' clubs and engaged in adolescent work with the purpose of proving to young people that Christianity is relevant to the whole of life.

The nation-wide neglect of Bible study, and the lack of Christian influence in the home, had by now produced a generation which was almost totally ignorant of the Scriptures and the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Many deaconesses formed discipleship and study classes to provide a comprehensive course in Christian education.

#### IV

#### *The Present Régime*

MANY changes in administration, some of which have affected policy, must now be recorded.

Through the generosity of the late Mr. R. Wilson Black and Mrs. Black, who had liberally supported the work for some time, the college moved to larger and more suitable premises at "Struan", Augustus Road, Wimbledon Park, in the autumn of 1945. On the 5th October the Rev. H. H. Sutton, B.A., who for several years had acted as honorary tutor and had always taken a deep interest in the work, was inducted as principal, and he and Mrs. Sutton were appointed joint wardens. A Board of Studies was set up, and for a time students attended King's College (University of London) for lectures in Church History. To give the College a wider usefulness, Principal Sutton conducted evening classes for ministers' wives and the fiancées of ministerial students.

Deaconesses first became representative members of the Baptist Union Assembly in 1946.

In 1947 legislative measures were introduced to allow for the recognition, on certain conditions, of women trained in colleges other than the Women's Training College.

The demand for deaconesses had somewhat modified by 1947, chiefly because the churches whose need was greatest could not provide the minimum stipend required. The Home Work Fund, which by now embraced the B.W.L. Settlement Fund, had become the central fund of the denomination, but the Union's resources were limited.

Dr. Aubrey wrote: 'The very success of our deaconesses in their consecrated labours and the consequent desire for their services means that this work is likely to constitute a growing financial obligation, but the Council are convinced that it is money well spent. Even at the new figure the stipend is too low. The Council are not happy about it, for it means economic stringency for many

an able woman who in other vocations would receive a much larger salary without having to face the charges and constant calls that fall to the lot of our deaconesses, whom we would assure of our appreciation and admiration, sympathy and prayers, and of our earnest desire to help them in their noble work to the utmost of our capacity.' (A table showing stipend rates over the years will be found in Appendix 2.)

Bye-laws were drawn up and approved by the Council in 1948 setting forth rules to govern the relationship of deaconesses to the Union on the one hand and to the churches on the other. In effect these regulations gave a new status to deaconesses, bringing them more nearly into line with ministers in regard to recognition, settlement and sustenance. To facilitate settlements the names of deaconesses requiring spheres were now submitted for the Superintendents' List, although responsibility for placing deaconesses was still held by the Deaconess Committee. Arrangements were made in 1949 by which, under certain conditions, a deaconess temporarily without an appointment might receive a maintenance or out-of-sphere grant for a limited period.

The Rt. Hon. Ernest Brown, C.H., M.C., succeeded Mr. Price as chairman of the College Committee in 1948 and retained this office until the 1954 Assembly. His forceful sponsoring of the work resulted in further support and a renewed effort to increase the efficiency and maintain the strength of the College.

In February 1948 the Deaconess Committee gave serious attention to the anxiety which from time to time arose regarding settlements. A conference was called to consider policy, bearing in mind the number of students to be trained, the somewhat limited demand for deaconess service and the financial difficulties of many churches. It was felt that the larger place occupied by deaconesses in church life and leadership was not fully appreciated in the denomination and that matters relating to status and function and theological issues, connected with the part these women were taking in the ministry of the Church, required careful thought. The hope was expressed that deaconess work might become the direct concern of the Baptist Union through its Council and no longer be relegated to a department of the Union. The Women's Training College Committee took these matters up some three weeks later and representatives of both committees met together in April. Subsequently the General Purposes and Finance Executive set up a sub-committee with similar terms of reference and reported to the Council two years later.



By 1949 the situation had completely changed once more and again there was an insufficient number of trained workers available to fill existing vacancies.

The Deaconess Committee became a standing committee of the Council in 1949—a step indicative of the growing appreciation of the importance of the service rendered to the churches by the deaconesses. The committee was directly concerned with the settlement of the Sisters in the churches and with their welfare, also with the endorsement of applications received from churches requiring financial help. It was responsible, too, for recommending deaconesses for recognition and for keeping the Accredited List up to date. Matters of policy and questions of status were included in its terms of reference.

The writer had been the organizing secretary of the women's work of the denomination since 1934 and joint organizing secretary of the Women's Department with Miss E. Lois Chapple from 1946 to 1949. In this year she ceased to be one of the organizing secretaries of the Women's Department but continued responsibility as organizing secretary for the work of the Baptist Deaconesses and the Women's Training College.

It was agreed in 1949 that deaconesses who accept an invitation to whole-time Christian service outside the denomination, with the approval of the Baptist Union Council through its Deaconess Committee, may retain their names on the Handbook List. Approval would not normally be given until at least five years' service had been rendered and each case would be subject to revision every three years.

At the November 1950 Council Meeting the General Purposes and Finance Executive submitted its report upon the whole subject of deaconesses in the denomination, and lengthy discussion took place. Opinion was sharply divided as to whether the Baptist Union should continue to maintain its own College, 'owing to the fewness at times of the students and the difficulties of guaranteeing spheres for a greater number at the end of their training, in view of financial stress.' It was finally decided 'to authorize the Women's Training College to maintain the College in London and to do everything possible to strengthen the work and to make it and the service of deaconesses better known in order to attract recruits and to interest churches which might benefit by their services but which did not yet realise their value.' The Council called for a further report in November 1951 when the position would be reviewed.

At the close of the summer term in 1951 the Rev. H. H. Sutton, B.A., retired after six years as principal of the Women's Training College, and Mrs. Sutton relinquished the wardenship. A few months later Mr. Sutton underwent a serious operation and died on the 1st March, 1952. The denomination is deeply indebted to Mr. Sutton, who took up office at a critical moment in the history of the College when inevitably the strain imposed upon the principal was exceptionally heavy.

The Rev. Harold M. Angus, B.A., B.D., and Mrs. Angus, formerly of the Baptist Missionary Society, most fortunately were willing to undertake temporary service as principal and warden for the session 1951-52. Mrs. B. Grey Griffith was elected to the chair of the House Sub-Committee.

The future of the College was duly reconsidered by the Baptist Union Council in November 1951. The report of the special Committee revealed that new interest had been aroused and many inquiries had been received from prospective candidates regarding training, and from churches regarding deaconess appointments. A number of girls under twenty-one years of age were studying with a view to making application for training later on.

The Council members were still not all of one mind as to whether it was in the best interests of the students to retain a Baptist College, however small, or to link up with a wider student fellowship in another college. It was agreed, however, that training should be continued, if possible at "Struan", for a further three years, and Mr. and Mrs. Angus consented to remain in office for this period.

Of recent years a great number of inquiries have reached the Church House from girls under age. Advice is given regarding preparatory studies and many of them are following the Baptist Union Diploma course. Some have been able to gain at first-hand an insight into a deaconess' life and work.

Occasionally applications from young women are deferred for twelve months so that they may continue their education and gain further experience and thus become better equipped to take advantage of the curriculum provided at the college. Every effort is made to assist unsuccessful candidates to face their disappointment and sometimes it is possible to introduce them to other avocations.

Candidates are interviewed by their Association Ministerial Recognition Committee and only upon that Committee's recommendation are they called for interview by the College Committee. A written entrance examination in Biblical and general subjects

is conducted at the Church House, and the candidate must pass a medical test made by the Baptist Union Medical Adviser, as a high standard of physical fitness is essential for the demanding life of a deaconess. (On the death of Dr. Horton in 1934, Dr. R. Fletcher Moorshead undertook the responsibility for the medical examination of deaconess candidates. A year later Dr. Stanley E. Bethell temporarily took over this duty when Dr. Moorshead died. In 1936, on his return from the Congo, Dr. C. Clement Chesterman, O.B.E., consented to become the Honorary Medical Officer, and he has rendered distinguished service ever since).

Students are accepted for a six months trial period, at the end of which they again appear before the College Committee. If approved they acquire the status of full students and proceed to the completion of their course when they are valedicted for service.

Since 1930 the normal course of training has covered two years, each of three terms, the session beginning in September and ending in the middle of July, with holidays at Christmas and Easter.

Students leaving college are required upon settlement to serve for a probationary period of two years. Thereafter, if reports as to their general competence and health are satisfactory, probationers are given full recognition as accredited Deaconesses. During probation a course of directed reading is pursued under the guidance of the college principal. (The names of accredited deaconesses were first published in the Handbook in 1926).

The initiation of the young deaconess is ratified on three occasions. Firstly, on completing her training, she is set apart to the office and work of a deaconess in the Church; secondly, an Induction Service is arranged by the local Church; and thirdly, a service of dedication is held during the Baptist Union Assembly when she is publicly recognized on the satisfactory completion of two years' probationary service. In former years deaconesses were dedicated at the Annual Public Meeting of the Baptist Women's League.

The Deaconess Committee introduces the deaconess to her appointment in close consultation with the Superintendent of the Area concerned. Every possible care is taken to effect a settlement suitable to individual temperaments and abilities. The Committee has issued notes for the guidance of churches seeking deaconess help.

From the beginning, the Sisters wore a distinctive form of dress which at first served not merely as a mark of office but also as a protection in days when it was unwise for a woman to be about

the streets of London alone once darkness had fallen. When the Baptist Union assumed responsibility for the work, an official uniform was approved which comprised a tailored navy-blue coat, or coat and skirt, worn with a close fitting navy-blue bonnet from which hung a grey veil. A navy-blue hat with a distinctive badge was adopted as an alternative to the veil twelve years ago, and since 1949 the hat has become the regulation head-dress for new members.

For many years, apparently since 1924, deaconesses have met in conference for mutual help and inspiration. Normally such gatherings were held in London in conjunction with an Annual Public Meeting and were of special value to those stationed in somewhat isolated districts. Since 1946 the Conference has been a residential one with a programme designed to serve as a mental as well as a spiritual stimulus. In London monthly gatherings are held for prayer and fellowship while smaller groups of deaconesses meet from time to time in the various areas. A Reunion is held in Assembly Week.

With the authority of the Council, Baptist deaconesses affiliated with the International Federation of the Union of Deaconess Associations (Diakonia) in 1951. They were completely unanimous in their desire to link up with this world movement among dedicated women for they firmly believe 'that just as the urgency of the times calls for a World Council of Churches so there is a need for ecumenicity among women servants of the Church, while the importance of the value of international friendship in the face of the menace of Communism can scarcely be exaggerated.' They regard as valuable 'the mutual interchange of ideas affecting the conception of deaconess work with, on the one hand, the continental insistence on personal renunciation resulting in a quality of life of rare beauty which is of special significance in this materialistic age, and, on the other hand, the British orders with their privilege in their greater freedom for developing individual gifts and for service according to their differing capacity. One of the impressive features of these international contacts has been the variety and scope of deaconess work.'

The aim of the Federation is:—

- (a) To further the Ecumenical unity of deaconess work in the several countries.
- (b) To strengthen the different associations.
- (c) To increase the sense of the significance of the ministry (*Dienst*) of women and their tasks.

(d) To develop mutual aid.

(e) To unite in common tasks.

'In these days when politically men are divided, the Church seeks every opportunity to show the world that in Christ there is unity and harmony of spirit. In this confidence the deaconesses representing many church traditions but with a keen allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord, believe the aims of the Federation for the furtherance and greater effectiveness of women's work in the service of Christ deserve full support.'

## V

### *In Conclusion*

EACH decade has seen crises occur that have caused grave concern to the Union and have brought a sense of insecurity, and in some instances a sense of frustration, to the deaconesses.

In 1918 the Union was preparing to include within its operations the work formerly done under the auspices of an independent committee.

In 1928 a special committee was set up to consider the selection and training of deaconesses and the work they were called upon to do, as difficulties had arisen because the number of students in training had proved disappointing and training costs were relatively high.

In 1938 another special committee was set up to face a similar situation. Again in 1948 the General Purposes and Finance Executive set up a committee in an endeavour to solve almost identical problems. What of 1958?

Had it been possible for the denomination as a whole to define the function and status of these women whom they had recruited, trained and used, some of these difficulties at any rate might have been avoided, yet serious attempts to do so have been made and doubtless will continue to be made.

The Committee has been faced with an uneven demand from the churches for deaconess help. Periodically there have been insufficient trained workers available to meet the urgent needs of the churches; at other times one or two deaconesses have been out of a sphere for a few months. The situation has fluctuated with embarrassing rapidity, without obvious cause, apart from financial stringency on the part of the churches, and it has baffled those who have sought to legislate for the Council.

When the Rev. Ernest A. Payne, M.A., D.D., was appointed to the general secretaryship of the Baptist Union, upon Dr. Aubrey's retirement at the 1951 Assembly, he set himself to study these problems and other perplexities and inconsistencies which have arisen through the years.

Dr. Payne invited the Deaconess Council to discuss with him some of the issues involved in the changed situation, and the Deaconess Council members have taken a careful survey dealing mainly with the relationship between ministers and deaconesses and the administration of the sacraments. The survey makes it clear that the experience of deaconesses varies very considerably, and geographical positions seem to have a bearing upon practice as distinct from theory in these matters. In all areas deaconesses enjoy most cordial relations with ministers generally, and helpful comradeship. In many districts they are invited, and even expected, to attend fraternal (more than one deaconess has served as secretary of her ministers' fraternal). On the whole the provinces provide more opportunities for organized fellowship between ministers and deaconesses than London offers, indeed the majority of London deaconesses do not attend ministers' fraternal.

Deaconesses in pastoral charge of churches are almost invariably expected to exercise the pastoral function in all its implications. They conduct the communion service regularly, and many of them conduct dedication, marriage and funeral services at the express wish of their people. A limited number of deaconesses have administered the rite of baptism, again at the request of their people, but the general opinion of the deaconesses is that the preparation and presentation of candidates is so rewarding an experience that they seek nothing further and that, while it is 'lawful' for them to baptize, it is not usually expedient for them to do so.

One or two deaconesses have occupied the presidential chair of County Baptist Associations; and one has served as Free Church Chaplain at a cemetery.

It is generally agreed by the deaconesses that a longer course of training is desirable with a somewhat different curriculum for present day demands when a considerable amount of preaching is required. Deaconesses have never conceived of their work as being that of women ministers and many have never expected to be called upon to preach frequently. They have been thrust into situations that have demanded the fulfilment of a wider ministry and their great concern is that they may acquit themselves worthily.

Dr. Payne is generous in his praise of the service our deaconesses are rendering to the denomination. In his first report to the Council in 1952 he wrote: 'There are still many unresolved issues as to the status of deaconesses, their relation to the regular ministry and the work they should be asked to undertake. At the present time not a few of them are placed in some of our most difficult spheres, and the remuneration they receive is even less adequate and worthy than that given to ministers who receive only the standard stipend. Many deaconesses can report a most encouraging response to their efforts.' There is, he believes, 'a growing recognition of the deaconesses and the importance of their service by the denomination as a whole.' It is at his request that this brief history has been prepared.

In conclusion, the foregoing pages have revealed that deaconess service is much more varied than it used to be. To-day deaconess work will normally find expression in one of the following spheres:—

- (i) As colleague to a minister in the general work of the church.
- (ii) As minister's assistant in charge of a mission attached to the church, or in charge of some special work in the church.
- (iii) As deaconess in charge of some small church (or churches) or Mission.
- (iv) In pioneering in new districts and in laying foundations for the future Church.
- (v) In reviving causes that have lost vitality and interest.
- (vi) In specializing in women's work, or youth leadership, or Sunday school work, or moral and social welfare.
- (vii) Special emphasis has been laid on the value of the work of a deaconess in general and house-to-house visitation

It has been the writer's privilege to interview and advise hundreds of young women who, conscious of a sense of vocation, have been led to consider offering themselves for this specialized ministry within the churches of their own denomination. Some have had much to offer by way of scholarship, others have had fewer educational advantages. Many have sacrificed remunerative positions, holding the promise of greater advancement and a far larger pension than the Baptist Union can provide. Some have had to face serious opposition from their home-folk who coveted for them security and a more normal and less lonely walk in life. Those who have come forward and been accepted have found that the life and work of a deaconess demands all they have to

give of mental, physical and spiritual power. The record of their achievement in terms of lives redeemed socially and spiritually, and of churches established or revived, is only briefly touched upon in these historical notes but fervent praise is due to God for what He has achieved and is achieving through these women whom He has called apart to serve Him as deaconesses.

## APPENDIX 1

### *Deaconesses in Fellowship*

As their numbers increased the Sisters felt the need of co-operation with one another and monthly conferences and prayer meetings were arranged in London. Similar groups met in other areas wherever a number of Sisters were stationed. Later a Sisters' Union was formed which met annually in conference. Mrs. R. Rowntree Clifford, O.B.E., who was herself a deaconess known as Sister Hettie, was president of the Sisters' Union for some years.

Upon the suggestion of the Deaconess Committee a Deaconess Council was formed in the spring of 1940. The purpose of the Council was 'to gather up suggestions made by the Sisters.' The Deaconess Council is a truly representative body. Its chairman, secretary and treasurer are elected annually. Sister Rose Amber served as honorary treasurer from 1940 until she was succeeded, upon her retirement in the autumn of 1949, by Sister Blodwen Rees. Sister Elsie Chapple has been the honorary secretary from the beginning and now has the help of Sister Joan Magill, who was appointed honorary minute secretary in 1951. Regional groups have been set up in geographical areas where deaconesses are at work and each group elects, by ballot, a representative to serve on the Council. There are at present six regional groups which meet periodically in their own areas for fellowship, discussion and mutual help. The retired deaconesses form a seventh group and keep in touch with one another and with the main body through their corresponding member.

The Deaconess Council has forged a valuable link between the Deaconess Committee and the individual deaconesses. From time to time it has been invited to submit opinions and comments upon matters concerning the training, settlement and welfare of deaconesses and has assisted with propaganda.

Since 1946 the Annual Deaconesses' Conference has been a residential one covering a period of two to three days. The

Deaconess Council plans the programme, which includes lectures by a guest-speaker on theological or pastoral themes. The annual Business Session is held during Conference. The first Reunion of Deaconesses was held during the 1947 Baptist Union Assembly Week and for some years the students who are completing their college training have met the members of the Deaconess Council at their summer meeting so that they may be welcomed into the fellowship.

These various opportunities for fellowship and the consideration of problems peculiar to their ministry enable the deaconesses to feel their united strength and are of special value to those who are serving in isolated or exceptionally difficult spheres.

## APPENDIX 2

### *Stipends*

IN the beginning the Sisters residing in the Home received an annual allowance of £15 for dress and pocket money. Out-stationed Sisters received £45 per annum, and this sum was increased to £60 in 1893 on the understanding that they were to be entirely self-supporting.

Towards the close of 1925 an attempt was made to secure a minimum stipend of £120 per annum and grants were voted to assist local churches which could not raise this sum. The standard stipend remained at this incredibly low figure until June 1941. The stipend was increased to £140 in June 1941 and a war-time minimum of £156 was introduced in June 1942. Those deaconesses receiving less than this amount were assisted from the War Emergency Fund. The following scale of basic stipends is of interest:—

1925 to June 1941	...	...	£120 per annum
June 1941 to June 1942	...	...	£140 „ „
June 1942 to 1944	...	...	£156 „ „
1944 to 1947	...	...	£182 „ „
1947 to 1948	...	...	£200 „ „
1948 to 1949	...	...	£208 „ „
1949 to 1952	...	...	£221 „ „
1953	...	...	£250 „ „
1954	...	...	£275 „ „

During the two years' probationary service deaconesses receive an even lower stipend.