

**Rev. C. H. Spurgeon:
Twelve Realistic Sketches**

Quinta Press, Meadow View, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire, England,
SY10 7RN

The format of this volume is copyright
© 2011 Quinta Press

For proof-reading purposes the line breaks are in the same place as the
original, hence the stretched text

THE
REV. C. H. SPURGEON
Twelve Realistic Sketches
TAKEN AT HOME AND ON THE ROAD.
BY
A TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT.

“And I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall
feed you with
knowledge and understanding.”

Jeremiah hi. 15.

JAMES CLARKE & CO., 13, FLEET STREET.
1877.

PREFACE

From time to time I have supplied the newspapers with articles, descriptive of festivals and special services, in which Mr Spurgeon has been a leading attraction. Many of these pieces have been reproduced, after careful revision; but other portions of the book—the sketch of Waterbeach, for example—appear now for the first time.

THE AUTHOR.

London, December, 1876.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. MR. SPURGEON'S EARLY DAYS	1
II. MR. SPURGEON'S FRIENDS AT WATERBEACH	19
III. MR. SPURGEON'S COMING TO LONDON	33
IV. MR. SPURGEON VIEWED FROM THE DEACONS' SEATS	43
V. MR. SPURGEON AT A WHITSUNTIDE FESTIVAL	57
VI. WITH MR. SPURGEON ON CHRISTMAS DAY	65
VII. MR. SPURGEON AT A SPELLING-BEE	75
VIII. MR. SPURGEON WITH HIS STUDENTS	85
IX. MR. SPURGEON AT MR. PHILLIPS' SUPPER	105
X. MR. SPURGEON AT THE TOLLER CENTENARY	119
XI. MR. SPURGEON AND THE MAID-SERVANTS	133
XII. MR. SPURGEON AS A LITTERATEUR	143
CONCLUSION: THE POPULAR MINISTER AND THE BORES	163

I.

Mr. Spurgeon's Early Days.

MR. SPURGEON'S EARLY DAYS.

MANY hands have tried to do what I shall certainly not attempt in this little volume—to write the life of Mr. Spurgeon. To accomplish such a task would be as impossible to-day as it will be in the future. No great man can be worthily preserved on paper—not even by the most perfect Boswellian mode of treatment; and what the pastor has been heard to threaten he will do, should he ever be approached by a first cousin of Johnson's biographer, may well intimidate the boldest member of that inquisitive tribe. I am not a Boswell; I am not a biographer. I shall not impertinently pry behind the scenes of private life to annoy a worthy family on the one hand, and to gratify a morbid public curiosity on the other hand. All that is purposed to be done is, to produce a series of sketches different from anything which has, as yet, been put together in a volume, and which shall be sufficiently true to life not to mislead outsiders, and not to shock the sensibilities of friends.

4

In case any reader should need them for reference, I shall, in this opening chapter, put down a few common-place facts such as are widely known and are everybody's property. Mr. Spurgeon was born at Kelvedon, in Essex,

on the 19th of June, 1834; and, as the world is fond of comparing the events in the life of one great man with those belonging to the course of another great man, it may be remarked that on that auspicious day Thomas Babington Macaulay "crossed the frontier of Mysore." It was in that year, moreover, that the Houses of Parliament were destroyed by fire.

During several generations, the Spurgeons have been engaged in the Christian ministry. The pastor's grandfather spent half a century among a flock at Stambourne, and this old worthy's son is a valued minister of the Independent denomination at the present time. One of the earliest custodians of the popular preacher was an affectionate maiden aunt, who, with others, could not fail to detect a precocious talent in her youthful charge. We have all heard how Richard Knill looked upon the boy with admiration to express hopes in regard to the future which have not been disappointed.

It is generally understood that Mr. Spurgeon showed his ministerial proclivities almost as

5

soon as he could walk and speak. His earliest recollections are of reading religious books; and in childish days he would address an audience, corresponding in age to his own years, with more force than some adults can command in the pulpit. Very strong tendencies in a certain direction in childhood are always interesting; they must have been doubly so in a case where the subject was endowed with one of the finest voices of which we have any example. Though thus piously brought up, he was not converted until he was sixteen, and the great change occurred at Colchester, in which

town he purposed to visit one sanctuary after another in search of saving light. He turned into one of the humblest of chapels, and there heard a thin, pale man preach from the words, "Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." The manner in which the preacher cried, "Look! *Look!* LOOK!" was peculiarly striking, and, what is better, relief came instantly, the simplicity of the Gospel being at once appreciated.

On a recent occasion, Mr. Spurgeon's father, in speaking of his family to Dr. Ford, of America, is reported to have remarked:—"I had been from home a great deal, trying to build up weak congregations, and felt that I was neglecting the religious training of my own children while I

6

toiled for the good of others. I returned home with these feelings. I opened the door, and was surprised to find none of the children about the hall. Going quietly up the stairs, I heard my wife's voice. She was engaged in prayer with the children. I heard her pray for them one by one by name. She came to Charles, and specially prayed for him, for he was of high spirit and daring temper. I listened till she had ended her prayer, and I felt and said, 'Lord, I will go on with Thy work. The children will be cared for.'

Of his education after this date, little needs to be said. He plodded as a schoolboy at Colchester. He studied for a time at Maidstone, in an agricultural college of that town. He subsequently accepted an appointment in a school at Newmarket, the principal of which was a Baptist; but I am not aware that this fact in any way accounts for the change of sentiment—the transition from Pædobaptist to Bap-

tist views—which about this time occurred. That change was brought about by a close study of the Bible; for Mr. Spurgeon’s mind is of an independent cast that would not brook the interference of any lower authority than Scripture. Thus early his mind was active, while his industry was great. A slight *brochure* of those days, called “Antichrist and her Brood,”

7

has, I believe, never been recovered; but a boyish production, “The Fall of Jericho,” was printed, and afterwards republished in the first number of *The Sword and Trowel*. I will now briefly allude to the pastor’s first sermon, and then return to some other things which were providentially overruled to produce the best results in after days.

On a certain day, between twenty and thirty years ago, two young men might have been seen walking out of Cambridge towards a village lying in the suburbs of that town, for the purpose of holding a cottage service. Neither of the two pedestrians had ever preached a sermon in his life; but more singular was the fact that each marched forward along the green level lanes while harbouring the comfortable mistake that the other was the preacher for the day. They talked as they travelled, and, after a time, the younger ventured to intimate to his companion that he hoped the Lord would bless his—the companion’s—labours. Those words as they fell appear to have produced something akin to an electric shock. “Oh, dear!” cried the elder youth, eagerly, desirous of correcting an inconvenient error, “Oh, dear, I never preached in my life. I never thought of doing such a thing. I was asked to walk with you, and I sincerely hope God will bless *you* in *your* preaching.” “Nay,”

8

cried the younger, apparently growing nervous, "but I never preached, and I don't know that I could do anything of the sort." The elder had thrown off the burden; the younger walked on, filled with fear and trembling. There was the cottage, there were the people assembled, and a sermon would have to be preached to them. The effort was made; the younger of the two novices made that effort, succeeded beyond his expectations, and his name was Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

For years before this eventful day in his history he had shown himself to be of a strongly inquisitive mind. Having once set his heart on knowing a thing, he would persevere until he came at the truth, nor would he allow his reasonable curiosity to be evaded either by the friendly "Pooh, pooh," or by sterner rebuke. In an autobiographical article, published more than ten years ago, we are supplied with some juvenile reminiscences far too characteristic to be overlooked. When as a child he was living with his grandfather, it was the custom for Charles Haddon to read the Scriptures at family worship, and on every occasion he was allowed the licence of asking any question he chose on the portion for the day. On a certain morning the inconveniently-inquisitive reader came to the "bottomless pit" of the Revelation, and immediately

9

asked, "Grandpa, what can this mean?" "Pooh, pooh, child, go on," replied the old man, regarding the question as too trivial to call for serious reply. To a child, however, every subject of interest is important; and in this instance Charles determined to read the same chapter morning after morning until a satisfactory explanation should

be offered. "Well, dear, what is it that puzzles you?" asked the grandfather, after he had heard about the Beast, the Mother of Harlots, &c, &c, &c, as often as he thought desirable, or perhaps profitable. The question was then put in a more definite form, "If the pit aforesaid had no bottom, where would all those people fall to who dropped out at its lower end?" The query was too deep to be answered at once; it seems to have disturbed the gravity of the little circle, and to have been a sample of the "difficulties" that were propounded for elucidation at family worship.

The late sainted Mr. Knill, of Chester, was a friend of the family in those early days, and he happened to be drawn in an extraordinary manner towards the child whose singularities were sufficiently marked to make him an object of more than ordinary interest. One fine morning Mr. Knill awoke his *protégé* at an early hour, and for some time they walked together in the garden. They conversed about books and reading, and about the privilege of winning souls for Christ.

10

Then they knelt together in the arbour, where the elder prayed for the younger, and did so in a manner that brought a blessing and left a life-long impression. Afterwards, in the midst of the family circle, Mr. Knill placed the child on his knee, and remarked, "I do not know how it is, but I feel a solemn presentiment this child will preach the Gospel to thousands, and God will bless him to many souls. So sure am I of this, that when my little man preaches in Rowland Hill's Chapel—as he will do one day—I should like him to promise me that he will give out the hymn beginning

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform."

That rather striking prophecy was completely fulfilled; but Mr. Spurgeon is of opinion that the words themselves were instrumental in bringing about their own fulfilment.

The "first sermon" has been already mentioned. When the ice was once broken, the neighbourhood of Cambridge was the scene of the young Christian's evangelistic efforts. On arriving at a village on an unpropitious wintery night he has found the chapel empty, and his lantern in hand, gone round to the houses to collect a congregation. It is quite a mistake to suppose that he was not popular before coming to London; for he was a favourite with the Cambridgeshire

11

peasantry before he became so conspicuous a figure in the outer world and the leading member of his denomination. When stationed at Waterbeach, his services began to be in excessive demand, and invitations to preach were cordially responded to. The more shrewd even among the common people must have perceived that one who was something more than a rising man was in their midst.

In youth he did not altogether set his face against going to college, though in later life he has "a thousand times thanked the Lord very heartily for the strange providence which forced his steps into another and far better path." Truth to say, Mr. Spurgeon missed a collegiate training consequent on one of those singular mishaps which, at the time, are as annoying as they are unavoidable. While he was carrying all before him at Waterbeach his judicious seniors thought that the pastor would never become all he was capable of becoming unless he went to London and sat the prescribed number of times at the feet of a duly-

qualified professor. This advice was listened to, and arrangements were made for a meeting of Dr. Angus on the one part and Mr. Spurgeon on the other part, the rendezvous appointed having been the house of the well-known publisher, Mr. Macmillan, of Cambridge. The young pastor

12

arrived at the time specified, was ushered into a drawing-room by the maid, and, after waiting for two hours, he rang the bell to learn the reason of the protracted delay. In the meantime, Dr. Angus had arrived, had been shown into another room, but not being so well able to exemplify the virtue of patience as his younger friend, the learned doctor departed for London, doubtless wondering why young aspirants to the ministry were not more eager to seize fleeting opportunities. Thus the two sat in adjoining rooms until patience had "had her perfect work," neither suspecting that the other was near. What momentous consequences sometimes hang on small matters; how much may occasionally depend on the remissness of a half-witted servant-maid! Still, the Church would have gained nothing by C. H. Spurgeon's admission into Regent's Park College. While taking a retrospect of a quarter of a century of work, we become conscious of feeling unwontedly curious about the youthful associations of one whom we may pronounce to be the first preacher of this age without fear of contradiction. What signs of unusual genius, of future distinction, were visible during youth? Who were his friends? where may we trace the footprints of his first travels as a preacher? Feeling more than ordinary interest in these *minutiæ*, I some time ago asked a friend, whose fortune it

13

was to reside near "Ouse's silent tide," if he would collect such *ana* as he could relating to Mr. Spurgeon's early days in that vicinity.

I believe there are about a score of Houghtons in the British Empire; but to myself the one interesting member of a numerous family is that Houghton which lies low and snug among the tall trees luxuriating on the banks of the broad, slow-rolling Ouse, midway between Huntingdon and St. Ives. It is not a spot whereon one would at first expect to find any religious memories of more than common interest; but in this case appearances are, happily, deceptive. Near Houghton, Dr. Brooke, an able preacher, and father of the well-known Chaplain to Her Majesty, was lately stationed. Here also laboured Mr. Edward Cressell, a minister of the Independent denomination, and whose ministrations were heartily appreciated by the homely village folk of the neighbourhood, and by lovers of good preaching farther away. Above all, it was at Houghton in his early days that Mr. Spurgeon became the guest of the eccentric Potto Brown, called by Elihu Burritt, in one of his books, "The Miller of Houghton." Mr. Brown was thoroughly eccentric, but he was still a kind-hearted man, who grew hot-house grapes for the sick poor, and who could commend the Wesleyans for saving souls at a cheaper rate than was done by any other deno-

14

mination. On this question, as well as on others, the youth and the veteran were far from being agreed, and consequently some lively discussions came off between the two which for smartness would not have disgraced the Literary Club in its palmyest days.

I will now give what my Ouse-side friend says about Houghton, its famous miller, and the youthful preacher, C. H. Spurgeon:—

“It has been with much interest that I have traced by the aid of the memories of my acquaintances, the early teachings and appearance of one who has taken and maintained an honoured place in the vineyard of Jesus Christ, and one who has well borne the burden and heat of the day. A gentleman, whom I took to be a relative, informed me that he heard Mr. Spurgeon preach his first sermon when about fourteen years of age, and he then read, prayed, and expounded the Word, being attired in a round jacket and broad, turn-down collar, such as I remember to have seen in fashion at that period.

“Mr. C. D. tells me that he remembers C. H. Spurgeon preaching at Somersham about twenty-six years ago, and when he would be about seventeen years of age. He was then wearing a round jacket and turn-down collar. He remembers the words of the text, though not

15

their place—‘Fear not, thou worm Jacob.’ The boyish voice of the preacher afforded a striking and impressive contrast to the tones of the aged minister who was accustomed to occupy the pulpit.

“Mr. Spurgeon was then living at some place near Cambridge, and his mode of preaching afforded promise that he would become a powerful and popular speaker. One old man, who was a Particular Baptist, and, I believe, difficult to please, went to hear him, and was careful to repeat the visit.

“One old minister, for whom Mr. Spurgeon preached, was plagued with a bad wife, and she

must needs go to America; but with great patience the husband waited for her return, never fastening the door of the house nor suffering others to do so till she came back to him.

“Mrs. J. A. remembers Mr. Spurgeon preaching at Houghton when quite a lad. She remembers the sermon was a very impressive one, and could it have been heard without seeing the boyish preacher, any one would have taken it to be the discourse of a staid and experienced Christian. She believes this was one thing that led Mr. Potto Brown to look upon the youthful orator with less favour than he might otherwise have done, because he thought that the sermon could not have been his own composition.

16

“Mrs. B. appears to me to have a more vivid recollection of the impression of what Mrs. J. A. felt at the time above stated. There was much conversation between the youthful preacher and Mr. Potto Brown, and evidently much contention, too; for each would hold firmly to his own opinion.

“Mrs. C. tells me that her husband, who was the schoolmaster at the time, was struck by the precocious talent of the young preacher, and with his general style of preaching.”

Here we may properly halt; the next stage, after leaving Waterbeach, will take us from the country to London.

II.

Mr. Spurgeon's Friends at Waterbeach.

II.

MR. SPURGEON'S FRIENDS AT WATERBEACH.

As the village in which Mr. Spurgeon commenced his pastoral career, Waterbeach seemed to be worthy of a special visit, so that when the opportunity occurred I undertook the journey. The parish lies about five miles north of Cambridge, the soil is remarkably rich, and on leaving the station, the tourist will not fail to observe the tokens of general prosperity everywhere manifest; while the magnificent dome of sky presents that aspect of immensity which is particularly noticeable on great level areas such as the Cambridgeshire flats and the neighbouring fens. At the last census the population was sixteen hundred and nineteen, and one might despair of finding a more comfortable agricultural settlement. The inhabitants eat the fruits of their luxuriant marshes while sitting beneath their own vines and fig trees; for, instead of belonging to one domineering autocrat, the land is divided into small proprietorships. The people are, consequently, as remarkable for their inde-

20

pendence in religious matters as they are for their Liberalism in politics. They are an honest, hospitable folk, always ready to entertain a stranger, and while characterised by hereditary

prejudices, know only of two hemispheres—Waterbeach and Mark Lane. Their prejudices are going one by one. The open sewer, for example, which formerly crossed and fumigated the village, has been covered over, though the older “Conservatives” battled bravely on behalf of a venerable institution; and a smithy, black and begrimed, still defiling the middle of the “Green,” is already doomed. Nonconformity is everywhere in the ascendant, and the vicar, who is a decided Evangelical, appears to lead the pleasantest existence possible by simply preaching the Gospel instead of fighting the sects. Were his procedure less judicious he would wage unequal war, and would, besides, risk changing present friends into ecclesiastical wasps. Fully to realise the anomaly, remember that we are just ten minutes’ ride from the University, and that though Waterbeach Church attracts one of the best congregations in the vicinity, yet the parish, as I understood, contained only one large farmer, and a few small ones, who are Churchmen; and then commend a vicar who, under such conditions, can command the loving esteem of every parishioner.

21

Such being the character of Waterbeach, we cannot wonder that in his youth Mr. Spurgeon found the village to be a congenial sphere, that he did his share in confirming the Puritan-like faith and politics of the people, while his own character may have taken a colouring from his associations. In a strain, which the *Athenæum* judges to be worthy of *The Complete Letter Writer*, he referred to his charge, at the age of nineteen, as a “little Garden of Eden,” and only poverty obliged him to sever the tie of union. Had Mr. Spurgeon’s ministry commenced in these times,

instead of at the date it did, Waterbeach would, undoubtedly, have held its own a year or two longer, in spite of the call to London. The people are immensely proud of their old connection; and still, in a manner, regarding their late pastor as one of themselves, always welcome him back into their midst with fervent enthusiasm. This regard would appear to be pretty general among high and low. At the best tables no guest would be allowed to speak words of detraction unchallenged; and no one, who is nice as regards consequences, would impugn Spurgeon's orthodoxy or good nature among the peasants at any one of the village lounges.

After alighting from the train, I had scarce advanced a hundred yards towards the village when it was my good fortune to encounter Mr.

22

James Toller, of Winfold Farm. Mr. Toller is a pillar of the Nonconformist interest in Waterbeach, he is a liberal contributor to the institutions at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and Mr. Spurgeon himself has, more than once, been a guest at the worthy yeoman's house. One piece of luck—the word is used by the compilers of the Prayer-Book—was soon followed by another; for the clouds, which had threatened rain, broke and lightened, so that we were even privileged to see Waterbeach in the autumn sunshine.

After paying our respects at the manse of Mr. Blake, and looking in at the village news-room, we find ourselves on that eminently interesting site—the scene of Mr. Spurgeon's first pastorate. The old thatched chapel has, however, disappeared—we feel a sort of selfish regret that it should be so—it has given place to a handsome and more commodious meeting-house, the corner-stones of which were respectively laid by Mr. Spurgeon and

Mr. Toller. Still, the site is the same, and that is enough for our present purpose. On this very ground, twenty-three years ago, many honest country folk assembled for worship who already began to wonder whereunto the thing would grow. The then boy-preacher not only edified and surprised the people who crowded the little chapel; there were some hearers there who, though poor and unlettered, were yet sufficiently discern-

23

ing to know that an uncommon genius was in their midst. "He astonished everybody at that time?" I inquired of an elderly deacon who well remembers every circumstance. "Of course he did!" was the quick, curt reply. "How, then, did he preach?" "Why," continued the old man, looking straight at me, as though I ought to know all about it, "like a man a hundred years old in experience!" That honest old deacon lately visited London for the first time; he went the countryman's usual round of inspection in the capital, saw the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and sat down as a guest of the pastor in his house at Clapham. On his return he tried to tell the people what he had really seen; but memory grew confused. His unsophisticated mind seemed to retain but one thing, the lustre of which darkened everything else—"Mr. Spurgeon was very glad to see me."

Winfold Farm covers an area of nearly six hundred acres, and the residence is a mile from the village. The proprietor of this fertile inheritance is Mr. Toller's eldest son, a young gentleman who has just come of age, and who resides with his father. In the opinion of Mr. Toller no man can be a landlord and tenant at the same time, and earn a competence—the shortest

road to bankruptcy is over your own land as a gentleman farmer. There is more philo-

24

sophy in this reasoning than a townsman can gainsay.

The admirer of fine breeds will find enough of entertainment at Winfold Farm; and by a little judicious selection from the bullocks in the straw-yard, and the sheep in the turnip-field, a very taking cattle-show might be put together—especially if the thing were supplemented with a few choice pigs, and with some more than admirable specimens of horse-flesh which would be available. But more akin to our subject is the acre of land which is annually set apart for the orphans of Stockwell, the produce of flour and potatoes being despatched to London every autumn. The best things on the estate are not deemed too good to bestow freely upon Mr. Spurgeon's Institutions; to be but a friend of the pastor is to carry a passport to liberal entertainment. Only a day or two before, a well-known gentleman, in high repute at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, had been down to Winfold for the purpose of enjoying "a little sport." Provided with the most perfect of breech-loaders, he started forth to bang and blaze away his powder at a prodigal rate, though from morn to dusk he did not even ruffle the feathers of a single coveted bird. Any stray rambler at whom this amateur might have directly aimed would have risked no bodily harm, the general

25

opinion, as Mr. Toller explained, being that the marksman would not have hit the house had he levelled and fired with that intention. But still, ramblers abroad were seriously threatened by the stray shots which, for the time, whizzed hither and

thither in wild irregularity. Such is the account Mr. Toller gave of his sporting guest, who, it scarce need be said, was not that ready marksman—but not with firearms—Mr. Spurgeon himself. A walk before dinner being proposed, Mr. Toller conducts my companion and myself to Denney Abbey Farm, the estate adjoining his own, the dwelling-house and outbuildings being the remains of a pre-Reformation monastery, of which Mr. Richard Toller is now the master. Everything here is weird and antiquated to a degree which is sufficiently pleasing on a summer day, when the objects of interest can be seen and enjoyed; but the effect is less pleasing when the shades of night are falling, and the winter wind, moaning around the tall, stout chimneys, seems to be Old Nature's funeral requiem over monks and nuns whose bones are thickly packed beneath the garden soil. It is as strange as true, that owls, bats, and other night-birds find at Denney a congenial retreat wherein to screech and croak away the midnight hour. When the business of the day is hushed, one might easily associate the clanking of a horse's halter chain with the creaking of a Tem-

26

plar's armour, as he would once have ridden from the court-yard to join the First Crusade; or the pattering of a cat's feet on the garden-walk might remind one of those light-treading maidens, whose lives were consecrated to God and St. Clare. But as we are not superstitious, and the sun is shining, let us deal with sober fact.

In the year one thousand one hundred and sixty, Robert Chamberlain, Earl of Richmond, became a monk at Ely, some ten miles distant, and being a man of enterprising piety, he gave an island in the surrounding mere for holy purposes. A cell for a few hardy brethren was accordingly erected;

but when repeated floods obliged them to remove they encamped on higher ground, bestowed by Aubrey Picot, at Denney. After they had held the site for a few years, the Ely monks were superseded by those daring foes of Moslem infidels, the Knights Templars, to whose wealthy order the manor of Waterbeach belonged. In the fourteenth century the society of Templars was abolished, when their forsaken cells were occupied by the nuns of St. Clare, twenty-five of whom resided here on an income of £172 a-year. After the dissolution of the religious houses, at the era of the Reformation, Denney passed from one owner to another; and in the reign of Elizabeth the farm was rented by Hobson, the celebrated carrier of Cambridge, the first master who let out

27

hired horses, and in whose stables the familiar proverb "Hobson's choice" is known to have originated. It is not probable that the property has undergone any great changes during the last century. The dwelling-house is a portion of the original church, founded in 1160, and rebuilt by the Countess of Pembroke, in the reign of Edward III. Some of the outbuildings appear to have been removed, or to have gradually fallen into decay, though for several generations the ancient refectory has served as a convenient barn. When the convent was in its prime a double entrenchment encircled its towers, and instead of traversing the country on foot, or by horse, as in after years, the monks plied their oars across the mere, which then spread its broad smooth surface between Denney and Ely.

We now return to Winfold to dine and to rest away the afternoon. When at last we finally take leave of our friends, we are conscious of having been entertained in a worthy Old English style,

and also of having spent an agreeable holiday, on ground which will still be visited by summer tourists for its own sake, and also on account of its happy association with the first pastorate of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

III.

Mr. Spurgeon's Coming to London

III.

MR. SPURGEON'S COMING TO LONDON.

There can be no doubt that Waterbeach was a very comfortable sphere of labour for a young man like Mr. Spurgeon. Though the people were homely they had warm hearts, and they cordially appreciated their pastor's energy and eloquence. It is not impossible that some among the good farmers and simple peasants who crowded the chapel may have reckoned on a life-long union. At any rate, it is unreasonable to suppose that everybody detected in their accomplished pastor the surprising talents that he really possessed. Others were more far-sighted; they were happy; their church flourished; but, alas! it was contrary to the ordinary run of things for the great outside world—a selfish world, as it must have appeared to the Baptists of Waterbeach—to allow so unequal a union to exist for lack of a suitable opening being found elsewhere.

The fact was, that an ancient church, and formerly a congregation of some importance in the capital, was in great straits for want of a

32

pastor. Two centuries before that church had been formed by a band of Puritan Baptists, the first pastor of whom we have any account being William Rider. The divines who afterwards suc-

cessively held the pastorate, during a great number of years, were all men of power and celebrity: Benjamin Keach is still kept in remembrance by his *Metaphors*; Benjamin Stinton was equally worthy; John Gill was a celebrated commentator; John Rippon was the compiler of the hymn-book named after him; Joseph Angus is a successful tutor and author of our own times; James Smith was an uneducated genius of fervent piety. In the chequered history of this old church it has been a favourable omen for the pastor to be chosen at the age of nineteen. It was so with John Gill, and also with his successor, John Rippon, who were the only pastors during the unusually long period of one hundred and seventeen years. Mr. Spurgeon was of this same auspicious age of nineteen when some one carried word to the despairing deacons at New Park Street Chapel that there was a young man making some stir at Waterbeach, and it was just possible he might resuscitate their cause.

The church at this date was slowly dying a natural death, and it was worth while to grasp at a straw if, thereby, the threatened death could be averted. The people were few, the majority were

33

poor, and partial to old-fashioned ways. Could they only get another Rippon all might yet be well—the tide of prosperity would return; but what could be made of the bold Essex youth of nineteen, whose daring originality was shocking to people who had beheld the propriety reflected in the portraits of Gill and Rippon?

It is an interesting question, What did the preacher appear like at this time? The query is thus answered by an American Quarterly, for the year 1859: “He was unpractised in either the art of oratory or of preaching, his public efforts having

consisted of addresses before Sunday-schools, and a very brief but successful pastorate over an obscure Baptist church at Waterbeach. In personal appearance he was not prepossessing; in style he was plain, practical, simple; in manner, rude, bold, egotistical, approaching to the bigoted; in theology, a deep-dyed Calvinist; in Church relations, an uncompromising Baptist. We could scarcely imagine a more unpromising list of qualifications, or father disqualifications, for public favour."

Such was the man, as viewed by a discriminating judge at a distance; what were his associations at home and his prospects in the metropolis? The chapel in New Park Street seated twelve hundred persons, and for some time past a sixth part of that number made an average

34

congregation. The revival was, of course, immediate. The good souls who were present at the first scantily-attended service, and who, according to their nervous temperament, professed to be shocked or edified, carried the news of the morning to others, and thus brought about a marked improvement in the evening congregation. Ever after this day of small things the aforesaid good souls were sorely inconvenienced by having less elbow-room, and a more limited supply of pure air, than they had been accustomed to enjoy in olden time. The chapel became suddenly crowded as no other London chapel had ever been known to be—that is to say, the throng, which weekly filled aisles and pews, manifested a determined sort of eagerness to see and hear the preacher.. This was the aspect of affairs in London when the deacons said, "Come amongst us for six months." Waterbeach was, at least, a sufficient contrast to afl this excitement and popularity for Mr. Spur-

geon to call it, on his return, "this little Garden of Eden." He loved his people; he experienced uncomfortable sensations in being called upon to leave them; and, had not poverty denied him freedom of action, he would "have turned a deaf ear to any request to leave them." As, however, the little church was unable to afford him adequate support, he was impelled forward by necessity. The engagement at Waterbeach could be

35

terminated at any time by either party after the expiration of a three-months' notice; but pastor and people were bound together in closer union than could ever have been effected by legal forms. At the outset, he showed no symptoms of being carried away by that amazing popularity which immediately confronted him. In a letter to Mr. Lowe, he commended the people on account of their prudence in allotting an ample term of probation, while at the same time he declined to bind himself for longer than three months. If all progressed well, the engagement could easily be prolonged; if otherwise, he "would only be a 'supply'—liable to a fortnight's dismissal or resignation." The deacons at London said, "Come at once;" those at Waterbeach were quite averse to so sudden a termination of their connection, and in this respect carried their point. The regular pastorate of Mr. Spurgeon in London may be said to have begun on the 27th of April, 1854. He immediately achieved an unexampled popularity for one so young; but neither pastor nor people could have had even a faint idea as to what lay before them in the future.

As this is not a complete history, it will not be necessary to give a connected account of subsequent events. These are told by Mr. Spurgeon

himself in his recent book on the Tabernacle, and anything which is included in that volume is not

36

likely to be news to readers of these lines. How the old chapel at New Park Street became crowded so as to warrant an adjournment to Exeter Hall, and subsequently to the Music Hall at the Royal Surrey Gardens, where an appalling accident saddened the church and prostrated the preacher, are things too well known to need recapitulation.

In "The Treasury of David," under Psalm xci., there is a less-known reminiscence of the eventful first year in London, which is too characteristic to be omitted. The country, it will be remembered, was stricken with the fever engendered by the Russian war, when the sickness referred to was raging:—

"In the year 1854, when I had scarcely been in London twelve months, the neighbourhood in which I laboured was visited by Asiatic cholera, and my congregation suffered from its inroads. Family after family summoned me to the bedsides of the smitten, and almost every day I was called to visit the grave. I gave myself up with youthful ardour to the visitation of the sick, and was sent for from all corners of the district by persons of all ranks and religions. I became weary in body and sick at heart. My friends seemed falling one by one, and I felt or fancied that I was sickening like those around me. A little more work and weeping would have laid me low among

37

the rest. I felt that my burden was heavier than I could bear, and I was ready to sink under it. As God would have it, I was returning mournfully home from a funeral, when my curiosity led me to read a paper which was wafered up in a

shoemaker's window in the Dover Road. It did not look like a trade announcement, nor was it; for it bore in a good bold handwriting these words:—*'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.'* The effect upon my heart was immediate. Faith appropriated the passage as her own. I felt secure, refreshed, girt with immortality. I went on with my visitation of the dying in a calm and peaceful spirit; I felt no fear of evil, and I suffered no harm. The Providence which moved the tradesman to place those verses in his window I gratefully acknowledge, and in the remembrance of its marvellous power I adore the Lord my God."

That a special Providence watched over the youthful pastor during the trials of that first terrible summer in London, no one will doubt after reading of the above adventure. Only a man with a large admixture of heroism in his nature could have faced the ordeal to come off in the end a conqueror.

IV.

Mr. Spurgeon Viewed From The Deacons' Seats.

IV.

MR. SPURGEON VIEWED FROM THE DEACONS' SEATS.

THERE are several ways of passing into the Metropolitan Tabernacle on the Sabbath; and these are tolerably familiar to country visitors, as well as to knowing Londoners. It is also a fact generally acknowledged by the public, as well as by the police, that London crowds are dangerous, unless carefully managed by suitable regulations. If a crowd be regularly attracted to one building, and each individual be visibly anxious to secure a good place, not hesitating to use hands and elbows in working towards the front, the specified regulations must include locked gates, as well as carefully-guarded side-entrances, which are only available for ticket-holders. The regular attendant at the Metropolitan Tabernacle has necessarily to have his seat reserved; otherwise he would find himself an unequal competitor with the casual hearer, especially if the said casual hearer happened to be an early riser on Sunday morning. Thus there are three ways of going to

42

hear Mr. Spurgeon. We may be one of the favoured few—few, comparatively, when the irre-

gular hearers number so large a proportion of the weekly congregation—who, as seatholders, walk directly into the building, while the impatient crowd of the court is kept at bay by doors securely bolted and barred. Secondly, should we not rank among pew-holders, and still feel painfully conscious of not possessing strength, either of muscle or of nerve, to hold our own in the column besieging the entrance, we take care and provide ourselves with an early admission ticket, entitling us to the right of waiting in one of the aisles before the doors are opened. In this position a visitor may very profitably exercise the virtue of patience while occupying a standpoint whence he watches the thousands who comfortably sit at ease in the pews, and calculates as to the chances of securing a seat. Should we, however, belong to neither of the classes described, our ingress into the great building will, perforce, become a more interesting, though, possibly, a less pleasant process. We shall take up our position under the portico “early;” we shall learn that minutes may be long or short according to the circumstances of the situation. We shall certainly consult our watch oftener than is necessary, as if to be sure that our trusty daily companion is not, for once, deceiving us. Then

43

comes relief in a sudden, exciting manner. Bolts shoot backward, and the apparently electrified crowd, as if in response to a preconcerted signal, move forward *en masse*; for, once inside the chapel, all regulations are summed up in one—First come first served.

On a Sabbath morning, some time ago, I dispensed with each of the methods above specified of entering that institution of modern London, the Metropolitan Tabernacle. By special favour I

occupied a seat on the platform behind the preacher. These seats are twelve in number, forming a double row. They are padded, are lined with crimson velvet, and have arms somewhat after the manner of a first-class railway carriage. Without question they are luxurious in all their appointments; but then they are for the deacons. A deaconship at the Tabernacle is no sinecure, and the occupiers of these seats are known to be worthy of the accommodation they receive.

Suppose it is half-past ten a.m., or thereabouts, when I am politely ushered into my "deacon's seat," and commence to study the extraordinary scene. It is spring-time—the sun is high in the heavens; but within the building the gas is burning, while the view is partially interrupted by a misty atmosphere in sympathy with the slight fog without doors. The immense area, which, to a

44

stranger, might appear to be already nearly filled, must undergo the process of filling till it is packed. The movements of the people can only be compared with the motion of a swarm of insects, not, however, eager and impatient like the crowd outside; for the new arrivals are merely taking up their regularly-appointed places.

Onward move the great hands of the giant clock overhead, until they point to 10.40, when we witness a transformation scene both lively and extensive. Hitherto the "regulars" and "irregulars" had leisurely entered by side-doors, with the comfortable consciousness of being privileged persons; but now all the main front entrances are opened at once, and in pour the broad living streams, to occupy, to the last inch, the standing-room of what appears to be an already overcrowded building. Look this way

or that way, or take a general view, and it will be hard to distinguish between aisles and pews. The new comers are manifestly a little excited in their anxiety to find seats; and yet the bustle is not altogether like any other bustle which is witnessed in public buildings. The coughing, talking, and feet-shuffling produce a compound sound peculiar to the Tabernacle; and this is instantly hushed when Mr. Spurgeon appears on the platform. Perhaps the right phrase to use would be "in the pulpit;" "platform," as asso-

45

ciated with preaching, would have been infinitely shocking to the Claytonian propriety of fifty years ago; but a Clayton, after the model of John of the Weigh House, with a horsewhip for his chief instrument of home discipline, and with an inhuman code of politics, would hardly now be tolerated in Nonconformist society either. *on* a platform or *in* a pulpit.

When the first word of the service is uttered, the multitude of faces are all turned in one direction—towards the preacher. Those who occupy seats in proximity to Mr. Spurgeon's table may perhaps have observed that the tones of his voice seem to be nicely adapted to the requirements of those who are near, as well as to those who are farther away. To persons sitting near they are never unpleasantly loud; to those in the remotest corner they are loud enough, while they are never indistinct. Not that so vast a concourse can be addressed, even by a man of the greatest lung-power, without a strong effort, though in this instance the strain is barely observed even by those who listen immediately beneath the clock. As seen from the deacons' standpoint, it is also interesting to note how the leviathan congregation allows itself to be

managed. It is subject to certain influences as if it were one great being instead of six thousand atoms. It has its recognised coughing

46

times; by way of acknowledging, a touch of humour, it smiles like one vast creature which is particularly sensitive. Then it sings "faster" or "slower," according to directions, and is in all respects most admirably managed.

While reading the concluding verse of "Rock of Ages" the pastor is visibly affected, just as, a few minutes before, he seemed to catch and diffuse the spirit of "that wonderful Gospel chapter," Isaiah lv. Anon, the quiet earnestness of the sermon seems to extend its influence throughout the entire space of the building, until the rapt attention of the crowd, as they listen to exposition and appeal based on the words, "*Without money and without price*" is found to kindle feelings akin to actual awe. To handle what are called common-place or hackneyed texts in a manner strikingly original, is the forte of a great man; the ability to do this with consummate art is characteristic of the genius of Mr. Spurgeon.

It is very common for preachers who stand up before large assemblies to fix their eye on a particular individual; a spectator who views the scene from the deacons' seats at the Metropolitan Tabernacle is extremely liable to find himself doing the same odd kind of thing. There are "characters" enough in the spacious area, if one can only single them out and read their faces,

47

There sits a man in one of the middle aisles of the area; he is middle-aged, full-faced, and altogether in his *tout ensemble* resembles one who makes some pretension to self-culture. Though

he uses no pencil and note-book, his brains are, probably, busily at work taking down what he sees. Let us suppose him to be the representative of some slumberless daily newspaper, which will be sure to place the public in possession of ample information should anything special in the morning's proceedings attract his attention. Single out another, and perhaps you will not be far wide of the mark if you set him down to be a 'cute Yankee editor on the look-out for something piquant about the Britishers wherewith to regale his readers in some obscure corner of the American continent. Do you think it possible you may be mistaken? Look again, and ask yourself if the worthy fellow's features and wearing apparel, when put together, do not spell JONATHAN as completely as can ever be done by eight letters? A fair sprinkling of country pastors are sure to be present. Fix your eye on a Baptist, and he will be found in a genial humour; for when so vast an assembly gathers in a Baptist chapel he thinks, with some show of reason, that his principles are in the ascendant. Select an Independent, and you will judge from his looks

48

that he has not much to complain about; for, after all, this same preacher has wonderfully stimulated the cause of Nonconformity. Besides these, members of the Establishment, of various grades, must be on a level with the rest of the world, and to accomplish this and complete their education they must needs go to "hear Spurgeon." If the Anglican be an Evangelical, he will be abundantly edified; he will go away regretting that the pastor is not Archbishop of Canterbury. Should he side with the Ritualists, he will look pitiful and ill at ease—he may even sit with the scowl of contempt

playing about his eyes. Should he be of the Broad school, he will be sufficiently charitable to take things as they come. As I view the spacious area from my velvet-lined deacons' pew, I know that the Tabernacle is a common meeting-ground for all the characters mentioned, as well as for many others who might be included in the category.

But it is now time to confess that when we sit in the deacons' seats we occupy a comfortable pew, but, while doing so, sacrifice much that would be cheaply purchased by a hard bench with a deal back. When heard from behind, Mr. Spurgeon is heard to disadvantage. He is not a preacher who should be listened to with a pillar interrupting the view, nor with closed eyes. His features speak as well as his tongue,

49

and this part of the sermon was almost entirely missed while I kept company with the deacons on the platform. As viewed from the ordinary pews, these portly church officers appear to be so luxuriously accommodated, and to be in themselves such models of decorum, that dozens of times have they been envied both on account of their state and their station. Let the truth henceforth be known that, like men of self-denial, they are content to forego much for their office' sake.

A word may be added relative to the Weekly Offering collection. The boxes used at the morning service were brought into one of the vestries after the crowd had dispersed. How high a figure the total reached nobody knew, for, as Sunday is a day of rest, the money would not be counted until the following morning. Gold, silver, and copper pieces, together with little packets neatly tied with thread, made up the

motley heap. One miniature parcel enclosed fifteen shillings from "A Working Man." When the whole mass was placed in a strong black bag, I ventured to raise it for the sake of testing its weight.

"It's pretty heavy," remarked an affable deacon, who appeared to be the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the establishment.

I anticipated that the parcel would not be found

50

to be a bag of feathers. It was certainly the "heaviest" collection I had ever set eyes upon, for it was as much as one could conveniently raise from the table with one arm. Would that it had been ten times the weight, that it had been silver instead of copper, or gold instead of silver. This weekly offering treasure and the collection at Mr. Phillips's supper are the main support of the Pastors' College.

51

V.
Mr. Spurgeon at a Whitsuntide Festival.

V.
**MR. SPURGEON AT A WHITSUNTIDE
 FESTIVAL.**

“**A**RE you going with Mr. Spurgeon, sir?” politely asked an active carriage attendant on the departure platform of the Great Eastern Railway terminus in London a few minutes before the starting of the midday Cambridge express-train. The man was evidently a shrewd reader of character, or he would not so happily have hit on the truth at first guess, or have drawn so correct an inference from my mien, appearance, and tourist-bag. I gave the honest fellow an answer in the affirmative, secured a comfortable corner-seat, and in a few minutes the train was spinning along at a rapid speed through Tottenham marshes, our destination being Willingham, in Cambridge-shire.

On our arrival at Cambridge soon after one, it is clearly manifest that Mr. Spurgeon is expected, and a railway official acquaints us with the fact that large numbers of persons have gone forward by the early trains. After a brief delay, we are

again in motion, and this time we are on the Wisbeach branch, and at each small station even the porters are on the *qui vive*. At any rate, one of these worthies, who had probably heard a false

rumour that the preacher of the day was not coming, shouted in a kind of suppressed tone of triumph, "There he is!" just as our train drew up alongside the platform. We arrive at Long Stanton shortly after two, from whence we drive to Willingham through a rich flat country, the air having been made delightfully cool by the storms of the day before. Throughout the route numbers of country people, dressed in holiday attire, scrutinise the carriage which carries the pastor with keen curiosity; while in the village proper a considerable crowd has assembled. Of course, business in general is suspended; banners enliven the street; householders appear to be keeping open house, though provision for a thousand, more or less, is served in farmyard and barn hard by. In a word, the village is *en fête*, and that unanswerable authority, "the oldest inhabitant" of Willingham, is well aware that the doings now in progress out-Herod everything which has come within the range of his experience.

Willingham is situated in the midst of a purely agricultural district, and is some two miles away from the Long Stanton station. The living is a good one; the parish covers an area of five

55

thousand acres; and in Puritan times, under its godly rector, Mr. Bradshaw, the village was remarkable for its piety. In those days, there were "fourscore-and-ten praying families" resident in the parish; and a portion of these, with Mr. Bradshaw, the ejected rector, appear to have been the founders of the Nonconformist interest which has flourished in Willingham from that time to this. The place has its pleasant memories, and the Willingham of to-day presents us with some of the most favourable aspects of English village life. It acknowledges no great land-

owner for its sole lord. Small proprietorships are the rule, and the lords of these, comfortably housed in their villa or cottage freeholds, look as though they knew how to enjoy the privileges of freedom. If an Englishman's house is his castle, there are many lords and castles at Willingham. The gardens in the rear of the houses are not the least extraordinary feature of the village, and they completely verify all I have heard in praise of Cambridgeshire horticulture. The gardens are commonly found to be of great length, and they are usually planted with favourite fruit-bearing trees. I was given to understand that in ground attached to the houses of this small place there are not less than fifty acres of gooseberry-bushes in a luxuriant state of cultivation.

56

The advertisements announced that Mr. Spurgeon would preach the first of his two sermons at three o'clock; and, as that hour drew near, the people who had hitherto thronged the village-street adjourned to an adjacent meadow, there to compose a compact multitude. A spacious marquee had been erected; but, ample as its area may have appeared to the contractors, it was ludicrously small when measured against the space required, and hence to speak from a waggon on the greensward seemed to be the only possible arrangement that could be reasonably made. Having, with considerable difficulty, threaded his way through the throng, the preacher ascended the "pulpit," and found himself in the centre of a sea of upturned faces; and, confessing an inability to speak from the back of his head, he notifies in which direction he will chiefly look. The text is taken from 1 Cor. xv. 10: "By the grace of God I am what I am;" and the ser-

mon, with its masterly delineations and soul-stirring appeals, was admirably adapted to produce a lasting effect on the mixed multitude of hearers. The purport of the sermon was—everybody has some ailment; but Christ is “the mighty doctor of Grace.”

At the conclusion of this service, the people returned to the village to drink tea, which was not difficult to obtain, as everybody still appeared to

57

be keeping open house, and provision for a hungry-multitude was made at the farmstead before mentioned. Mr. Spurgeon and a select number of friends drank tea together in one of the long, secluded gardens for which Willingham is or should be renowned.

On walking out into the High Street, in the coolness of the evening, it was easy to see that both the villagers and their visitors were still in a state of holiday excitement, and were now anticipating the evening service, which would commence at 6.45. Meanwhile, some were interested in the fact that a certain chemist's cart had appeared on the scene a day before its time. Willingham was not yet accommodated with a resident medicine-vendor; it was visited on Wednesdays by an itinerating member of the profession; but on the occasion of Mr. Spurgeon's visit, the pharmacist came on Tuesday, doubtless anticipating a brisker demand for drugs than on ordinary occasions. Passing on from the chemist and his interesting collection, the next object of curiosity is the old Baptist Chapel, supposed to be of the hyperstandard of orthodoxy. At first, it appeared that the sanctuary must be open for the inspection of visitors; but from certain civil answers to questions put to a demure-looking dame, who represented nearly the whole of the congregation, it transpired that Divine service was about to be celebrated.

58

I at once understood that the ancient lady occupying her solitary pew was a pillar of the "old" church, from which the moderate party had seceded. It was not unreasonable further to conclude that the chapel was open for the convenience of those who might be unable to find standing-room in the ten-acre meadow wherein Mr. Spurgeon would officiate.

At the evening service the sermon was preceded by a characteristic address from Mr. William Olney, then one of the most active of the deacons at the Tabernacle. When Mr. Spurgeon again stood forward, he was greeted as before by the up-turned faces of persons who still drank in his words with unabated eagerness. The text was taken from the dying words of King David to his son Solomon, "If thou seek Him, He shall be found of thee." On two subsequent occasions I heard Mr. Spurgeon preach from this same passage; and as the discourse is one of remarkable power, I give an outline, without hoping to convey any worthy notion of the original. In the opening he remarked that the words selected were spoken by David; they were the dying words of a marvellous man, who was in a sense an epitome of all mankind. All that David said was good; but the last words of such a father to such a son as Solomon were especially solemn.

I. They represented our greatest want—we need

59

our God. Without God, Solomon could not rule his kingdom well; and the fact applies to all living. Depravity is natural to man, and he can never be righted until he comes to God. We are orphans until we know His Fatherhood. We want the Son and His blood-bought righteousness and resurrection. We want the Spirit; we

are dead till He gives us life, foul till He washes us, blind till He gives us sight. The want is universal. Without Him, common sense is but a poor thing, riches will afford no satisfaction, while the poor will lack contentment. If any want something, and they know not what, here it is—they want God. Their case resembles that of the neglected child in the gutter—cold, hungry, ragged, emaciated, whose every want is supplied if you can but give it its mother. During winter in the South of France, the sun is everything; so that it is even said, where the sun does not go the doctor will. In the sunshine, there are flowers and ripening fruits; in the shade, icicles and the cold breeze. The sun is the one thing needed there, and the Sun of Righteousness is the one thing needful with us.

II. David tells Solomon how his great need may be supplied—"If thou seek Him." All who would seek God must make no mention of merit or of preparation. It is, "If thou seek Him;" and He is to be sought only by faith, by trust

60

in the merits of Christ. Faith is more often talked about than understood. Faith is believing God; it is holding the pitcher beneath the flowing fountain; it is eating what He has provided. When we try to merit a blessing, we lose our power. A stray dog lately wandered into his (Mr. Spurgeon's) garden, and as such intruders are not good gardeners, he threw his walking-stick at the animal, of course expecting to see it hastily retreat. Instead of running away, however, the dog picked up the stick, and, gleefully wagging its tail, brought the missile back to its owner, the result being that he was patted on the head, and told he might come again as often as he liked. After giving these illustrations with

great effect, Mr. Spurgeon proceeded to ask the unconverted why they did not believe. By unbelief they made God not true to His Word, besides revealing their own desperate state of sin. If the New Testament be true, why not believe it? They might ask Christians by the hundred if God had ever been sought in vain, and they would find that no such instance had ever occurred. The provision was abundant. A stranger in London, having regard to its four millions of people, might become oppressed with the misgiving thought, How can such a multitude be fed? But if in the early morning he goes round to the various markets, his surprise

61

tends in another direction as he asks, Wherever do the people come from to eat such abounding supplies? A sight of the provision alters his opinion; and it is so with Calvary—there is enough for all. If sought in faith, God would be found. There is power in prayer. There was a certain beggar in the street who needed not to say a word—his rags and pallid face pleaded more strongly than language. If they could do no other, let them sit before the Lord in their rags. They must find God, because God says so. Then there are reasons to aid their faith. God is near. A certain ship which strayed, without knowing it, into the Amazon, had a crew on board who were dying of thirst. They hailed a vessel in the distance, telling their woeful plight, when the speaking-trumpet at once sent back the answer, “Why don’t you dip it up? you are in a river.” Further, God delights to be found. When two seek each other, they are likely to meet. The very desire to seek is a gift of grace.

Lastly, the text has a finger—*Thou*. The preacher went on to show that while the young

have a text all to themselves, the old need not be discouraged. Some calculations had been made to show that people are seldom converted after forty-five, and as they grow older the chances that they will ever become partakers of saving grace proportionately diminish. In the opinion of Mr.

62

Spurgeon such notions are as ridiculous as they are unscriptural, and statistics were frequently little else than a means of telling lies by figures.

The evening scene was one to be remembered. Parts of the surrounding district had only lately been visited by storms; but during the delivery of the sermon the peace of a summer evening settled over Willingham. A soft breeze carried the sweet scents of the fresh blossoming country on its bosom; birds were merrily singing in the trees and hedges; while the setting sun on one side of the horizon, and the rising moon on the other side, seemed to be looking each other in the face while they supplied the preacher with materials for illustration. The spectacle was very striking as a scene of rural peace and enjoyment. The powerful voice of Mr. Spurgeon rang out loud and clear, reaching to the utmost limit of the crowd. Individuals representative of various classes of sinners were singled out, reasoned with, and appealed to, the text in each instance being driven home to the heart and conscience—"If thou seek Him, He shall be found of thee."

Thus further proof was given, if that were needed, of the hold which Mr. Spurgeon still retains on every class. I inquired of a Cambridge-shire peasant what he thought of the sermon, "Oh!" replied the poor fellow, "it was lovely; I wish he had kept on all night."

63

VI.
With Mr. Spurgeon on Christmas Day.

64

65

VI.
WITH MR. SPURGEON ON CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE Christmas morning to which particular allusion is now made was hailed by the inmates of the Stockwell Orphanage with all the enthusiasm that had characterised former years; how, indeed, could it be otherwise when the day dawned with promises of feasting and merry-making quite after the heart of Young England, who has found a home in that well-known Institution? While the weather was cold, foggy, and muddy, the aspect of the dining-room presented a cheerful contrast to the reigning gloom without. The ample area was decorated with flags, evergreens, and mottoes, until it partially resembled a baronial hall of olden times, and numbers of visitors were found passing a holiday hour in inspecting the preparations. Callers and stragglers, who dine late, and who are desirous of seeing all they can before dinner, may find a sight worth looking at on Christmas Day at Stockwell—something to educate the heart as well as feed the mind; and should they leave a donation behind them, the remembrance of what they have done will make music in their souls

66

when they themselves sit down to the feast. So, at any rate, would good George Herbert have said, and George Herbert was right.

There are two hundred and forty hungry boys, and these are accommodated at nine or ten tables; while at the end of the room farthest removed from the kitchen is a platform covered with red cloth, and a table furnished for the working staff, besides a few select visitors, such as former scholars and their friends. Over the President's chair is a well-executed device, which may be fairly regarded as the coat-of-arms of the chief baron of the feast, and underneath is the family motto, ON, ON, ON. Viewed from this elevation, the great hall, with its tables spread for the juvenile banquet, makes up quite a pretty scene. In addition to the decorations, it may be noticed that there is an ornamental box of plums placed opposite the knife and fork of every boy; on each box is a new shilling; beside the shilling is an orange, and these, being the offerings of friends, combine to make a festive glitter such as a slight freak of the imagination might transform into mediaeval picturesqueness.

Soon after noon a carriage is heard rattling into the grounds, and this, together with the cheers of the boys, is an intimation that Mr. Spurgeon has arrived. Before dinner is laid on the tables a Board-meeting will have to be held; and while

67

more serious business is in progress, fresh loungers are coming in to show their interest in the arrangements. The kitchen appears to possess extraordinary attractions, and well may this be so; for, vast as is the quantity of food to be prepared, the admirable apparatus at the command of the cooks sits easily beneath its burden, and even seems to make light of it.

After some further unavoidable delay, the boys are marshalled, shortly before two, to be marched into their places, when dinner is served. Sub-

stantial joints of roast beef follow one another from the kitchen, each fresh arrival being handed over to the tender mercies of an amateur carver at a side-table. In the meantime Mr. Spurgeon, who is now seated on the platform, reminds the boys of the gratitude they owe to God for sending them friends who, in their kindness of heart, have provided so rich an abundance of good fare. The youngsters quite appreciate their President's remarks, and show that they understand their obligations by the hearty cheers which shake the building, a fair proportion of the noise being made in honour of the gentleman who presented the boxes of plums and the new shillings. Other cheers follow, for standing in the room are certain tried friends of the Institution who merit the boys' affection, and this is especially true of the President, who is hailed with deafening acclama-

68

tions as the orphan's best earthly friend. At length the noise is succeeded by a calm; grace is sung. "And now, my boys," says Mr. Spurgeon, "I hope you will heartily enjoy yourselves." The beef, which is the best that the London market can supply, is speedily disposed of; and next comes a procession of plum-puddings borne by a regiment of "old boys," who are now out in the world making headway on their own account. After the puddings have shared the fate of the beef, there succeeds a still greater pleasure—each orphan is allowed to retire, and to carry with him to the playground his box of plums, the sweet orange, and the new shilling.

It is now three o'clock, and another dinner will have to be served at once on the raised platform. Mr. Spurgeon takes his seat in the President's chair, beneath the family device and motto, and on either side he is supported by one of his sons.

He is, indeed, an hospitable host who experiences rare delight in ministering to the pleasure of a numerous train of helpers and dependents. There are probably some fifty diners—a rather motley group, consisting of masters and matrons, several students from the Pastors' College, a few "old boys," and some half-a-dozen visitors, who appear to be glad of an opportunity of cultivating the finer instincts of their nature. The President is something more than the life of the company;

69

for, ever anxious lest any should lack attention, his quick eye travels up and down the table, instantly detecting any dereliction of duty on the part of the waiters. Keenly appreciating the attention shown them, and warmed by the hospitality dispensed, everybody finds something to say, so that the flow of wit and wisdom, having its spring in the host, and being creditably sustained by others among the guests, is not likely to be surpassed at any other festive gathering on this Christmas Day. The turkeys are perfect; but at least one gentleman, zealous for the continued ascendancy of King Henry's favourite dish, maintains that the beef is better; and the sirloins, as well as the puddings, are neither better nor worse than those served out to the children. Taken altogether, the season is a time of genuine unrestraint, of innocent enjoyment in unison with Christmas; but there is no licence. The young people are quite welcome to indulge in humour proper to their years. They may make the rafters ring with the harmless laughter of inexperience; but neither young nor old overlook the respect due to themselves as well as to their honoured chairman, whose motto, ON, ON, ON, is still visible through the gathering shades of evening, to remind one and all that the things they are

leaving behind are not worthy of comparison with those which lie before.

70

After an hour has passed thus happily and profitably, there follows fresh entertainment in the after-dinner speeches. Mr. Spurgeon necessarily leads the way in speaking. He gives expression to the Christian affection he entertains for the Orphanage staff, and he congratulates both them and himself on the slight changes which have occurred during the year—nearly all who were present a year ago are still there. It was well known to some of them that many of the devoted servants at the Orphanage had sacrificed fairer prospects in life for the sake of remaining at their post of self-denial; and had the Institution been less favoured, its work could not have proved so eminently successful. They were peculiarly fortunate in commanding the services of Mr. Charlesworth, the head-master. Then comes a word for others who are more or less outsiders; for while the students are welcome, it is a rare delight to see the “old boys,” and it is hoped that the last-named gentlemen will continue to come until they have boys of their own who will bring a contribution to the funds. They had the satisfaction of knowing that so far the “old boys” had been a credit to the Institution; they were a standing proof that the Institution had not failed in its aims.

Very properly, as it would seem, there are no formal toasts. After the President has sat down, any one is at liberty to speak, provided he

71

honours the advice from the chair—“Do not be too long.” Mr. Charlesworth gives utterance to the veneration which one and all on the establishment entertain for their chief. The next speaker shows his possession of a kindly heart, and unintention-

ally provokes a laugh by commencing with, "I'm very glad, sir, you haven't got the gout." Thus one orator follows closely on the heels of another; but nevertheless, on the whole, everybody is too comfortable to make any very formal speeches; the majority speak without rising from their seats, preferring this social way to the more pretentious manner of exchanging sentiments. The speaking part of the entertainment concludes with a vote of thanks to Mrs. Spurgeon for the self-denial exercised in consenting to be separated from husband and sons on Christmas Day for the good of others. After dinner the company adjourn to the Board-room, where gifts are distributed all round; for it has become an annual custom with Mr. Spurgeon to present each member of the Orphanage staff with a Christmas present. Every one enjoys the privilege of naming beforehand what article will prove most acceptable; so that while one selects a copy of "The Interpreter," and another "The Treasury of David," a matron will set her heart on a new gown or on a silk umbrella. In return, the President himself receives an offering; and on the present occasion his share of the spoil is

72

an immense portrait album, furnished with portraits of themselves, and containing the inscription, "From the boys of the Stockwell Orphanage to their best earthly friend, C. H. Spurgeon."

It is now past five o'clock, and, though there is not a hungry boy on the premises, the tables are ready for tea. The good cheer shows no signs of exhaustion, since two leading biscuit-baking firms have sent in ample supplies of cake and biscuits as freewill offerings. After tea there comes a round of evening amusements, the entertainer being an accomplished conjuror, whose tricks are described as simply the triumph of educated

hands over uneducated eyes; but particular mention need not be made of the marching cards, the winged coin, and the accommodating bottle—wonderful as these are to boys at school, and sometimes retaining some fascination for children of a larger growth. Thus the Christmas Day experience of each orphan was, that one delight followed another in rapid succession, and, on being tasted, each must have seemed to have surpassed its predecessor in sweetness. There was the morning walk; then there was dinner; but a box of plums, a new shilling, and an orange were better than aught that had gone before. New delights were kindled in their hearts by the conjuror's tricks. Suppose that these orphans should live to be old, with what gratitude and

73

pensive pleasure will they look back on the red-letter days of youth—Christmas joys of the palmy days of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

In regard to the boys who have left the Orphanage, it is a satisfaction to know that they are making for themselves honourable positions in the world. One has already entered the Pastors' College. Another has joined the staff of paid teachers at the Orphanage, after having served for two years in a house of business. When this young man announced his intention of resigning his situation, a more lucrative appointment was offered and declined. Yet another, who is only eighteen years of age, has had his wages advanced to £42 a year, and he serves employers who have six other Orphanage boys on their establishment. With the view of stimulating these young people to become careful and enterprising, their employers have promised to give them five per cent, on whatever they save, and have in this respect set an example which other

merchants might profitably copy. The Orphanage is in fine working order; as an institution, it reflects eminent credit on the administrative wisdom of the committee; and if the "old boys" should ever fulfil a prophecy of Mr. Spurgeon by founding a like institution for their sisters in misfortune, the act will not greatly surprise either their schoolmasters or the public at large.

75

VII.

Mr. Spurgeon at a Spelling-Bee.

76

77

VII.

MR. SPURGEON AT A SPELLING-BEE.

IN a certain number of *The Sword and Trowel*, Mr. Spurgeon relates his experience at a Sermon-Bee; but I am not aware that he ever attended any of the more popular spelling order until the one he presided over at Newington in March, 1876. There are two large schools connected with the Metropolitan Tabernacle—one being the ordinary day-school, of which Mr. Johnson is tutor; while the other is composed of the boys resident in the Stockwell Orphanage, of which Mr. Charlesworth is head-master. On the evening in question—the 24th of March—it was arranged that a spelling competition should come off between the boys of the two institutions, and it was understood that the practice will be continued annually. The school which proves its superiority is entitled to receive a silken banner from Mr. Spurgeon; while the master of the victorious boys holds a handsome drinking-cup, which will become his own property should the palm be carried off by the same school for

78

three years successively. The Bee was advertised to take place in the lecture-room; but in consequence of a larger platform being required than the basement regions of the Tabernacle supplied,

the rival hosts were marshalled in the chapel. Shortly after seven o'clock, the youthful competitors arranged themselves on the platform beneath the pulpit, the Tabernacle boys wearing blue ribbons, while the orphans from Stockwell were bedecked with yellow. Mr. Spurgeon, as interrogator, sat in the ancient chair which Dr. Gill is supposed to have used while writing his commentary—a relic treasured in the vestry of the Tabernacle. On the table were arrayed several authoritative referees—Walker's, Webster's, and Richardson's dictionaries.

We now sat in a state of expectancy. In the course of his preliminary remarks, the chairman explained that the time had come when every one must either have a Spelling-Bee or go to one. It was very likely that such Bees might be of use; though if certain people were to go up and down the country like spelling gipsies, the Bee would be knocked on the head and come to nothing. Then if they ended in fighting—referring to a row and death which had recently occurred in the North—they were manifestly undesirable. Yet, if used aright, the Bee might be useful. The company present would not expect

79

the boys on either side to spell like grown-up people, though as lads they would spell very well; and there were even elderly writers who could show a dexterity in bad spelling not easily comprehended. These were the people who addressed him (the interrogator) as "Deer Cur," and to whom "Nightingale," as a prefix to the lane where he (the interrogator) lived, was an orthographical puzzle to be handled in divers fashions. Mr. Spurgeon went on to remark that he repeatedly spoke to the students of the Pastors' College about reading, writing, and spelling. A person

who can read well is seldom met with now-a-days. The public reading of the Bible is oftentimes not worthy of being called reading. There once lived a boy in the Highlands of Scotland who presumed to read a newspaper with a twang similar to that which had characterised his reading of the Bible; but his grandmother boxed the youngster's ears for presuming to read the paper in that holy way. Now, the Scriptures should be read in the best way possible—that is, naturally. Then there are great numbers of people who cannot write. Great people write illegibly—let them be greater and write better. The interrogator here narrated a circumstance associated with bad writing which came under his own observation some time ago. A letter was received from an Irish mayor, of which

80

it was not possible to decipher a single word. After cutting the name and address from this interesting missive, and pasting them on the envelope, the packet was returned to the sender with the intimation that not a single word could be read; and, to the great credit of the Post Office, it was delivered at its proper destination. A few days later another letter arrived from the same gentleman, containing a request that Mr. Spurgeon would go and preach at a specified place in Ireland. He (the interrogator) responded to the application, dined with the Mayor in question, when the fact transpired that his worship wrote two hands—one that was illegible to other people, and one he could not read himself. It was next shown that serious educational deficiencies betray themselves in bad spelling. Passing rapidly on to the subject in hand, some complimentary allusions were made to the masters of the two schools. There appeared to be grave

reason for supposing that the Orphanage boys would come off second-best in the competition for these had not enjoyed so many advantages as their rivals. A portion of the boys' time at Stockwell was occupied with housework, and, if beaten in spelling, it was suggested that they would probably prove their superiority in a scrubbing-match.

The Bee was now opened. Each boy received

81

three cards, and as a forfeit for every error made, he was obliged to deliver up one of these; and when the stock was exhausted, he was required to vacate his seat, and no longer ranked with the competitors. The monotonous, or spelling, part of the programme was occasionally enlivened by the singing of a sacred song.

The boys of the Tabernacle day-school led the way, a beginning being made with *ache*—"a very young word"—which was presently followed by *chase*, *blaze*, *vague*, and *gnash*—"a splendid word, that just expresses what it is;" and the summary manner in which all of these were disposed of obliged the interrogator to confess that he entertained small hope of bewildering the boys with small words. In the next round, therefore, it was thought advisable to ascend to higher ground, and to deal out some "cats" and "dogs"—*e.g.*, *catalogue*, *catechumen*, *cataplasm*, *cataract*, *dogmatical*. One youngster was conquered by *beatitude*; and another, who stumbled in his pronunciation of *behest*, received a timely word of caution regarding the aspirate. Indeed, a comical example was given of the domestic inconveniences which may follow a misuse of poor letter H. A gentleman called his servant, and told him to "take that muffin into the kitchen and 'eat (heat) it." The man did as he

was bidden, and rather relished the treat. Meanwhile, as the exercises continued, the words served

82

out became more difficult; though, for such little fellows as the competitors were, they continued to answer remarkably well. One came to grief, however, when he gave three n's to *Abyssinian*; while another failed over *abeyance*. Subsequently, one after another broke down with such words as *septuagint*, *soliloquy*, *sulphureous*, &c. Still, whether they failed or struggled through successfully, the boys so manfully did their best that the spectators repeatedly vented their admiration by cheers. Sometimes an interval of rest was allowed, when "The Village Blacksmith," or some other well-known melody, came as a welcome variation; for, at its liveliest, a Spelling-Bee is not an entertainment suited to the English taste.

To be impartial, we must admit that the boys from Stockwell manifested, during the several rounds, those decided phonetical leanings which are calculated to provoke merriment while they impart diversity to the proceedings. We had, for example, "jamn" given for *jamb*, and "fize" for *phiz*; while one, as the interrogator reminded him, sifted an e out of *sieve* when rendering it "sive." One competitor showed pretty clearly that he knew little about *schism* when he turned the word into "sizm;" and a near neighbour made a hash of *myrrh*, simply through "want of arrangement," when he rendered it "myhrr." A few telling definitions were given in passing. *Sempstress* was a

83

woman who earns her living by her needle, and yet doesn't because she can't. On coming to *oyster*, that was what one seldom sees now-a-days. *Milennium* was the time when everybody would pay their debts, and go to bed at ten o'clock at night.

Abstemious was the word which contained all the vowels in their proper order. Then, when a certain aspirant commenced *Arminianism* with h a r, he was not only stopped, but accorded the consolation, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." The ranks of both camps, as each now took its turn alternately, were considerably thinned; and, had not the interrogator wisely resorted to the plan of making use of words exceptionally difficult, it is not improbable that he might have continued his exercises until midnight. The final result of the wordy contest was, that the Tabernacle school remained masters of the field. They were accordingly awarded the silken banner; their master, Mr. Johnson, was entitled to hold the cup; and Edward William Rogers carried off the first prize. The Orphanage troop retired with the strong hope that they would win on another occasion; the other side were no less certain of being able to maintain their superiority.

In justice to the hard-working staff at the Stockwell Orphanage, it should be remembered that they have to deal with a class of boys different from those who constitute the Tabernacle school.

84

The inmates of the Orphanage are, as a rule, of a low origin, and correspondingly ignorant. The boys of the Tabernacle school, on the contrary, are of a comparatively well-to-do parentage, and they, perhaps, begin and complete their education under the same master. Thus, in a spelling competition, they occupy vantage ground. Still, a spirit of rivalry is kindled, and the losers this year may become the victors next year. As it was, the orphans carried off two out of the six prizes awarded.

85

VIII.

Mr. Spurgeon with his Students.

86

87

VIII.

MR. SPURGEON WITH HIS STUDENTS.

THE first Tuesday in August has now become a recognised festival in connection with the Pastors' College. It is then that the students reassemble for the session to dine together in company with the tutors and with ministers who have been educated in the institution. In former years it used to be customary for the festivities to take place on Mr. Spurgeon's lawn; but as the numbers have grown, it has been found more convenient to meet in a neighbouring meadow—a portion of the spacious grounds of Sir Charles Forbes, which are kindly lent for these occasions. The scene presented is usually as lively as it is interesting. Soon after ten a.m., the visitors begin to arrive, and distribute themselves about the grounds to employ themselves according to their predilections. Some take to cricket, some to bowls, some to less laborious exercise, while some prefer to recline on the greensward, or to enjoy the communion of kindred souls. In the meantime the commissariat and refreshment departments are represented by

88

sundry tents on the ground—one is a kitchen, one is a luncheon counter, another is the dining marquee, where, under the general superintendence of Deacon Murrell, a sumptuous repast is pre-

pared. There friend meets friend as they can only do once a-year, and both hemispheres may be said to be represented, since one pastor, Mr. McKinney, comes all the way from New York to share in the enjoyments of the day. The scene is also additionally interesting on account of its intimate association with the Clapham Set in their halcyon days. The mansion of Sir Charles Forbes is no other than that in which the elder Wilberforce resided, and in which the late Bishop of Winchester was reared. The house is one of those comfortable homes, built for comfort rather than show, and one that seems to have clustering around it many memories of a departed generation. The company, it should be mentioned, includes no less than twenty "freshmen," who now embark on their academical career.

At 2.30 the out-door recreations of the morning are suddenly suspended by the summons to dinner, and presently the one hundred and eighty guests are seated in the prettily-decorated tent purchased for this particular service some years ago by those few liberal friends who subscribe the costs of the day. To their credit it should be stated that the best is provided in abundance. Hitherto the pro-

89

visions have been all cold; but to-day the temporary kitchen sends forth as the first course hot salmon and shrimp sauce. The *entremets*, the wine and the dessert, are also all of that choice description which show that the friends of the students know how to devise liberal things.

After due justice has been done to this ample provision, Mr. Spurgeon rises and says he is rejoiced to see those who are present. It is a most joyous day, and a day unlike the Conference, as there are twenty persons who have never been with them before. The new comers must not accept

what was before them as a specimen of their work in general, they must rather take it as a trial of their industry. He is glad, too, to see those "old" students again who were young last year, but are now getting grey in service; and it is to be hoped they will persevere until their preparatory course is ended. Certain visitors are also welcomed by name—the president of the London Baptist Association, who a dozen years ago was apparently an old man nearly worn out, but who now is young and full of energy; and Mr. —, of whom you never needed to beg, for he would come and ask to have his money taken. Might they long have an apostolical succession of such subscribers to the College! Mr. Spurgeon then expresses the gratitude he feels in being privileged to work with coadjutors like his fellow-tutors. Next he speaks

90

a word to the "freshmen," who, having done well on the first day of their college career, must endeavour to keep on as they have begun. They always reckon to kill off a few of their new hands; some break down or are otherwise discouraged. During the two years of his course a young man must get through an immense amount of work if he intends to succeed. A man who enters the College and does not work will rue the day when he selected the Gospel ministry for a profession. During the year several had been dismissed from the classes, the impression of the tutors being that they would never succeed in the ministry; but there had been no faults of character discovered in any of their number. In proceeding to speak of example, Mr. Spurgeon says that some were coming among them who were like bits of salt. They should have little to say, while taking care their lives were devout. A prayerless man exercises no good influence. The College, it is

believed, has an influence peculiarly its own, the students being often characterised by a John Bull kind of outspokenness, which no one misunderstood. The President concludes by delivering a message from Mrs. Spurgeon, who is too ill to leave her bed, but hopes God will be with them, and by reading a letter from Mr. W. Olney, who is also suffering from indisposition.

Mr. Rogers, with his usual pleasantry, refers to

91

the profitable vacation he has enjoyed, a time during which he has been associated with flowers and trees, well entertained, and held in repute for his work's sake. Since the time of the first church at Jerusalem there has not been such a college of apostles as theirs.

Mr. J. A. Spurgeon thinks the denomination shows signs of progress on all sides, and the future, as it appeared in his imagination, would be glorious in the extreme. Speeches are also given by Mr. Edwards, Mr. McKinney, of New York State, and by others.

In a second address Mr. Spurgeon speaks of the hard, underground work which some of the students are doing. Others would come to reap the honour. Many of their number mean to conquer or die. It is a grand thing to be called to be a minister of Christ; and they do not serve a hard Master. He would rather be minister of the Tabernacle than the angel Gabriel; and even if his position were not so favoured, he would labour in a pastorate at Slowcombe-in-the-Marsh rather than not be employed at all in preaching the Gospel.

Later in the day Sir Charles Forbes, with a party of ladies, makes his appearance in the meadow, one of the number being the baronet's grand-daughter, the others his great grand-

daughters. As Sir Charles inhabits an historic mansion, he conducts Mr. Spurgeon into the

92

more renowned apartments—the one where Wilberforce presided over the first anti-slavery meeting, and that in which the late Bishop of Winchester was born.

Shortly after six o'clock tea is served in the chief marquee. The company afterwards return to their sports until dusk, and thus closes a pleasant holiday, which reflects the utmost credit—first on Deacon Murrell, and then on the other generous hearts that contributed to the day's enjoyment.

II.

The Metropolitan Tabernacle is something more than a hive of workers—it is a centre of hospitality, where from time to time brethren assemble to profit by the best of social intercourse, and to enjoy those meaner things which please the physical appetite. The “parties” that are got up here are quite unique in their way, and are worthy of a cursory notice. I will venture to say a few words concerning two of these characteristic gatherings.

Happening to look in at the new College Buildings, on a certain Friday afternoon, I noticed that a larger number of gentlemen than usual were present to hear Mr. Spurgeon's weekly lecture, and it immediately transpired that the students of the Training Institute for Evangelists, at Bow, had been invited to drink tea with the tutors and

93

classes of the Pastors' College. The meeting, including outsiders or visitors, embraced between one and two hundred persons, and while the fare both for mind and body was of the best, the assembly and their entertainers were in that joyous

mood befitting the occasion. Several prayers are offered, and a number of admirable speeches are delivered; but the crowning treat of the liberal provision is the lecture from the President's chair on the "Voice." This is now included in "Lectures to my Students;" but the piece is one of those productions which cannot be worthily reproduced in print, Mr. Spurgeon's voice being alone competent to render the illustrations. An Edinburgh surgeon, who was present, seemed to be both delighted and surprised to find how correct the lecturer's knowledge was concerning the structure and nature of the human throat. Then came a lesson for all classes of preachers. Hints and rules for the amendment of defects were given, so that any who failed to make an effort to reform were left without excuse. The transitions from the grave to the humoursome were rapid and striking. We listened with 'bated breath to eloquent counsel, worthy of a ripe philosopher. We laughed over the obsolete pomposity of Claytonism, and anon took a gentle warning to preach and not "squeak" the Gospel.

Without suspecting what was about to take

94

place, I again called at the Tabernacle on a Friday afternoon, some months after the above meeting, and found that the students from Regent's Park College, with Dr. Angus at their head, were about to fraternise with their brethren of the Pastors' College. At half-past three all are seated in the lecture-room, when Mr. Spurgeon welcomes his visitors in cordial terms. He is glad to meet those whom he meets every day, but finds extra satisfaction in receiving gentlemen from a refined district of the metropolis. Having come once, they must repeat the visit, otherwise the Pastors' College would be under the necessity of wending its

way westward—an arrangement concerning which there would be no difficulty, because it was believed to be about the same distance from Newington to Regent's Park as it was from Regent's Park to Newington.

After "a little talk" from Dr. Angus,—an admirable address, carrying much general counsel of a sterling kind,—Mr. Spurgeon rises to give the speech of the day.

The young men are directly addressed as persons who believe themselves called to be pastors and soul-winners. Before them lay the happiest and noblest lot in life, and at the same time the most difficult. It is easier to be a minister of State than a minister of the Gospel, for the one has cares which the other knows nothing about.

95

As far as earth is concerned, all the youths in the room are great fools; they have chosen the worst paid of all professions, and one that entails more fighting than any other. Yet if they are called they will never turn back. They must expect difficulties; but while at college they must become well furnished. An empty minister is a horrible sham. It is not enough to be merely *sound*. People want teaching, and hence their teachers must become well filled at college, and then keep full. They should be so furnished as to resemble a good ship at sea, which is prepared for both storms and calms. They need head-power as well as heart-power. Evangelists with very little in them may do much; but permanently useful men must have knowledge. Still, they should remember that literary study has a tendency to drain the heart, so that to keep their hearts warm they should, frequently pray together. They would also gain much by speaking before one another; and though a brother may make a fool of himself, he has the

consolation of knowing that he is not a greater fool than he was before. They would also do well to look after their general behaviour. A pastor should not be stiff and unapproachable. The race of stiff ministers died out with the gold-headed cane and white choker era—the age in which, when one saw a minister, he was ready to exclaim, “How dreadful is this place!” Times were

96

improved, though the all-round Roman dog-collar, without a button in front, still remained. Well, they must eschew coarse, vulgar manners, and cultivate *bonhomie*. Let all study the perfect gentleness of Jesus Christ. A minister should be one to be picked out of a crowd as a good man we should like to know and speak to. Many men are spoiled by their horrible manners. A certain good man, now in heaven, had destroyed his influence for good by being a hypocrite the wrong way all his life—a thoroughly good fellow at heart, though he had still appeared repellent.

Something was added about denominational dishonesty, the unfairness of those who receive their education in one body, and then migrate to another. On proceeding to speak of soul-winners, it is remarked—No one wins souls by accident. The young men present were, however, to be something more than soul-winners—they were to be pastors and ministers; they would have to manage deacons and people—things which many brethren were unable to do. They should cultivate the knack of government; they should avoid a petty suspicion; and, while letting people see their pastors believed in them, they should keep one blind eye and one deaf ear. If born to be pastors, they would not be eaten up by the sheep. They might occasionally be taken in; but better be

97

taken in a thousand times than distrust one true man. It may sometimes prove a source of trouble to wear one's heart on one's sleeve, but it will pay in the end.

After about a couple of hours have been passed in this manner, a substantial tea is served in a room beneath the chapel. Then follows another meeting in the conference room at the College, when prayers and short addresses are offered and delivered. A number of leading men are on the platform, and among them good old Mr. Rogers. This father of the company, according to his own confession, feels like a black sheep among a washed flock, and by his timely wit and matured wisdom, elicits rounds of cheers and roars of laughter.

III.

Probably a good many people who once thought otherwise are coming round to the conclusion that "Spurgeon's students" are an institution called into existence by the requirements of the modern Church. While there will be differences of opinion in regard to the young fellows' general fitness for an arduous calling, the majority of judges will concede that they are men of enterprise, who can battle with difficulties and bear hardship. They have many traits which mark their individuality, and they strive to do credit to the common cause,

98

and to be worthy of their schoolmasters. If you will, you may count these young men too daring, too energetic, or too assuming; but while the field is the world, and the world remains what it is, there will be plenty of others who will think that there is room both for the workers and their singularities. It is well known that there are persons, sensitive and not too charitable, who affect to look

down on the Tabernacle collegians as innovators or interlopers, or perhaps even as trespassers, who monopolise spheres which common fairness would reserve for better people. To be criticised is a privilege, as well as a penalty; for without critics public men would not know their own weaknesses. As regards the "students" in question, we should in justice remember that about seventy per cent, of those who settle in London make their own spheres. Another large proportion, who remove to the colonies and to the United States, cease to be in anybody's way—so far as England is concerned.

Mr. Spurgeon never disguises the fact that the College is his best-beloved Institution. He well knows that his system may have its weak points, but that is only saying it is human. In spite of real or imaginary shortcomings, the College is nurtured as a powerful evangelistic agency. It has even been hinted that he expects, or at least hopes to see, a successor to himself come forth

99

from the classes. Such a genius has not yet arisen; to expect his advent may perhaps savour of enthusiasm. The President is a man of faith; there is time enough yet.

Founded and presided over by so shrewd a judge of human nature and of human motives, this College differs from the ordinary run of theological seminaries. The aim of the tutors is very clearly defined. They do not despise learning, but still wish to turn out preachers rather than scholars, and to accomplish their purpose they cannot complain of any want of material. Every candidate is well aware that he will have to pass a searching examination, and that the aim of the examiners will be to discover his aptitude for work—the quality of the human metal—instead of being

guided in their decision by what he already knows. The judges put down piety at a higher value than Greek and Latin; and they believe that love for mankind is better than a mathematical brain. Come what will, the applicant, if he be a man of common sense, is thoroughly assured that he will be judged on his own merits. He needs no friend at court to advance his interests, the recommendation of his pastor being merely a certificate of character. Nothing can be more unprejudiced than this method of election. Even if it were true, which it is not, that it chiefly attracts the plebeian element, even that would be preferable

100

to being spoken of, as a pretentious Nonconformist college has been spoken of, as reserved almost exclusively for those who can help themselves.

Having survived his probation, the "student" feels that he is a unit in a society which exists to promote the conversion of mankind; and while his interests are not separate from those of his denomination, he will throughout life retain a feeling of clannishness. It is well that it is so, for his difficulties and discouragements are of no common order. Go whither he will, he must resist the opposition of prejudice—a prejudice founded on the poor fellow's supposed lack of good breeding and early advantages. It is surprising how long and correct peoples' memories are when they have to do with things they might gracefully forget. "Spurgeon's student" is often found to be a suffering victim of this persecuting retentiveness. People remember—and if they do not really know they suspect—that he was originally intended for a wheelwright, that he was actually apprenticed, and that he would even now be working at a bench had he not, through some mischance, found his way into col-

lege. They do not stop to ask themselves whether similar things might not apply to numbers of other ministers who have passed through other seminaries. Provided only that a college can boast of a certain kind of prestige, the inmates are looked

101

upon as scholars and gentlemen, who have been directed into their proper avocation. Let us not disparage one class at the expense of another, but give both their due, because neither class can afford to throw stones at the other. In common fairness we are bound to judge of men by their works. The cultured man will find his proper sphere, and between him and the more humble, though perhaps not less useful, evangelist there need be no rivalry. Ministerial successes should be measured by conversions, not by the literary quality of the sermons preached; and so that men are brought in from the bondage of sin into the liberty of Christ, it is hardly worth while to dispute about the polish of the instruments. Who, on looking at an elegant cabinet, asks if the artificer had five fingers on each hand, if he was legally apprenticed, and if the tools used were those of approved makers? The carving is there, and we give the workman his due. If we look at their work from all sides in this spirit, we shall find that "Spurgeon's students" have more than earned their salt. They have established a large number of new churches; they have reclaimed thousands of people who would never have been hauled in from ruin by the kid-gloved hands of a more "regular" agency. They are trained to endure hardship and toil. In a sense, they are undoubtedly innovators; at times, perhaps, they

102

are somewhat too bold and outspoken; but still some of them have become sufficiently dis-

tinguished to rank among the chief apostles of Bristol, Rawdon, or even Regent's Park—that classic retreat for well-to-do aspirants and gentlemen's sons.

The ordinary "Spurgeon's student" has many characteristics which bespeak his training and ruling taste. Perhaps he would be a gainer were he to rub off some of his idiosyncrasies; but such as cling naturally to him are best left alone. With rare exceptions, he never affects the fine gentleman; he does not proclaim his profession through the tailor; with his black tie and felt hat he apparently cultivates a *nonchalance* in dress not readily understood in a fashionable age, when ecclesiastical exquisites need not despair of shining as centre attractions in West End drawing-rooms. Thus it happens that the "student's" friends say he has no sham about him; that he wishes to pass simply for what he is—an evangelist; or if settled, a plain pastor. His severer critics say he is an enthusiast, an imitator of the manners and tones of one man, and that his sermons are declamation. In summing up the evidence of these opposite witnesses, remember that man naturally imitates; that it is well-nigh impossible for classes to come into daily contact with one master mind and not contract a few of

103

his mannerisms. To the young men concerned I would say, Strive against a natural propensity which will provoke ridicule and loss of power. To be peculiar is not necessarily to be weak, though if he try to be peculiar it is a sure sign that the man is a noodle born.

IX.
Mr. Spurgeon at Mr. Phillips' Supper.

IX.
MR. SPURGEON AT MR. PHILLIPS' SUPPER.

THIS chapter may be opened with something about the worthy deacon who gives the annual feast named after him—something concerning

MR. PHILLIPS AT HOME.

As a deacon of the church at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and especially as the provider of an annual sumptuous supper on behalf of the Pastors' College, the name of Mr. T. R. Phillips is pretty generally known throughout the country. Formerly this gentleman was actively engaged in business in the City; but latterly he has found a home in one of those charming retreats which are the glory of our land, prizes such as commercial men more often dream about than win as rewards of toil and enterprise. Then his family domain, which extends over an area of nearly seven hundred acres, has other attractions than such as belong to the picturesque in nature; the farm contains a vast stone quarry, extending, in a system of narrow passages, for miles underground, remind-

108

ing one, not only of the Catacombs at Rome, but of the ingenious industry of our mediaeval stonemasons. Few, we believe, are aware that so unique a subterranean wonder can be inspected by permission within twenty miles of London.

On one of the most enjoyable days of July I left the Cannon Street Station, accompanied by a friend, and after nearly an hour's run, we reached Merstham, which is the nearest station to Bletchingley and to Quarry Farm. Merstham, it may be mentioned in passing, is memorable on account of its association with one of the earliest English railways—the Croydon, Merstham, and Godstone line, which was opened in 1805 for mineral traffic, to be worked by horse-power. Bletchingley, our destination, is politically notorious as an anciently important town, which became disfranchised by the Reform Bill of 1832. The journey thither from Merstham is a delightful drive, regaling the traveller with some of the very finest scenery of Surrey.

Quarry Farm is an old-fashioned spot that has been old-fashioned since the days of Alfred the Great, and even for centuries earlier. There is nothing strikingly antique about the house, which, however, has been designed for comfort, and occupies a favoured site. With lofty hills for near neighbours, it is partially enclosed, though at the end of a long archway of trees, leading from the

109

lawn, one is suddenly treated to a far-stretching, garden-like view of Old Surrey. We soon discover that our hospitable host is an amateur geologist, and, indeed, that he has a passion for that fascinating science. On the greensward facing his house, Mr. Phillips has a collection, unique in its way, of fossils discovered on his estate, and of these he can discourse with all the enthusiasm of a lover of science. But the pre-Adamite animals must not be allowed to divert us from the chief object of our curiosity—the quarry. Having dined, and being otherwise refreshed by a brief rest, as well as by a longer talk about

the fossils, we set about making preparations for our subterranean excursion. At the hill-side, not many yards from the house, masons are still employed in the open air, shaping those small blocks of "firestone" for which the neighbourhood has been remarkable from time immemorial. Close at hand there is an opening not unlike the entrance to a railway tunnel, and that is the commencement of the quarry, which must have been in working a thousand years ago. We enter, to find ourselves on what was once a tramway, inclining several feet downwards in each hundred yards, and in some places the stone roof grazes our hats even when we stoop. With the exception of a few spots, where a dripping spring in the great hill above has moistened the path, the bottom is

110

dry; and when the eye has accustomed itself to the sudden change from the brilliance of the July sun to the complete darkness of the cavern, it is comparatively easy walking. At the entrance there are two principal main routes to the interior, and that which bears to the left is the one we attempt to explore. In a few minutes we lose sight of the last glimmer of light admitted at the entrance; some weird-like thoughts flit through the mind, while for the moment the courage of even a stout heart might fail as the cold air chills the system, and the flickering lanterns fail to reveal what may be fifty yards ahead. Suppose there are any pitfalls left unprotected by the mediaeval miners; as there is no thoroughfare, may not there be foul air? Moreover, may not the venturesome human explorer be attacked by invincible armies of ravenous rats whose existence is stated to be a fact? As we press forward, fear gradually vanishes. The air, at first actually cold in contrast to the heat without, is really pure

and refreshingly cool, and from first to last we see nothing of either a hole or a rat. As we proceed, we come to branch streets, and in some places to spacious chambers, all cut out of the solid stone by hands that have ceased to labour ages and ages ago. The darkness and solitude are awful, though at every step there is something to engage the attention—things which, could they speak, would

III

tell of times when England was nothing more than an agricultural country. Occasionally, some miner's implement used centuries since in the quarry may be discovered; and everywhere there are traces of skilful handiwork left, as though the workmen had ceased from their operations only an hour ago, and not, as we find it hard to realise, for many hundreds of years. It is, further, of considerable interest to know for what buildings these apparently interminable lanes were laid under tribute. First in the category comes Windsor Castle, erected by Edward III.; or, perhaps, even before the Royal palace, we should name the strong arches of old London Bridge. Portions of the Tower, and also of St. Paul's Cathedral, are said to have been likewise formed of material taken from this quarry; while churches too numerous to mention may be traced to the same parentage. Godstone, which is a neighbouring quarry, is explained as meaning the place whence the stone is brought for building God's house. The stone is all of one quality; it appears to be everlasting, and the intensest heat will not cause it either to chip or crack. On this account it is still used for furnace-building in the north of England. An old quarryman was questioned as regards the quantity of material which is still available, and his opinion was that there might still be sufficient stone to erect at least a couple of towns as large as London. Such are

112

the interesting matters that occupy our minds while, under Mr. Phillips' trusty guidance, we penetrate into passage after passage, and chamber after chamber. We can well believe that a stranger might become dangerously perplexed in this wonderful network of stone streets, enveloped in eternal darkness; but to Mr. Phillips the nooks and corners seem to be familiar ground, as though they were turnings out of Cheapside.

After our curiosity was sufficiently gratified, we turned again into the main track, and soon, in the far distance, descried the now not unwelcome glimmer of daylight above. The difference between the coolness of the artificial night and the heat of the sun's rays was once more very striking when we emerged into open day. In the evening we returned to town, much pleased with a day's instructive entertainment, enjoyed through the courtesy of Mr. Phillips.

Some years ago, when a certain gentleman was about to be elected to fill the responsible office of deacon at Devonshire Square, the veteran John Howard Hinton asked one pertinent searching question, Were his friend's worldly circumstances sufficiently easy to allow of his becomingly entertaining brethren in the faith? People might smile at the pastor's caution, but that caution was not out of place; for deacons reflect honour upon their office, not only by dispensing hospitality to com-

113

peers in office, but by occasionally bringing in the poor of the church to sit at their board. What shall we say, however, to a church officer whose genius has taught him to strike out a new path for himself, and who, by entertaining the rich on one night and the poor on another, makes his

bounty redound to the glory of God? He is certainly a man to whom honour is due.

I am not aware that Mr. Spurgeon has ever examined Deacon Phillips in regard to his ability to furnish a table; indeed, any questions in that direction would be a work of supererogation for obvious reasons. Formerly Mr. Phillips was a citizen of London, a city in which good fare is appreciated as it is appreciated nowhere else; and having occupied business premises—a first-class *restaurant*—but a stone's throw from the Mansion House, his ideas of hospitality would be borrowed first-hand from the Lord Mayor. Be this as it may, there are few who would be able to imitate Mr. Phillips' example. From an unpretentious cosy gathering, in Cornhill, the thing has grown until eight hundred cards of invitation are issued every year, and, notwithstanding the number, the sumptuous repast is served up with a civic splendour worthy of the object for which it is given, and worthy, too, of the palmy days of Mr. Spurgeon's pastorate.

On the day of this unique supper the festivities

114

commence in the afternoon. Tea, coffee, and their usual accompaniments, are served in one of the large rooms of the College. As the guests pass in across the lower platform of the chapel, they embrace the opportunity of shaking hands with Mr. Spurgeon, and, provided the pastor be in health, he shows by his flow of humour that he enjoys the occasion thoroughly. He has good words and smiles for everybody, so that with such a host, even the preliminaries of tea and coffee drinking become a season of pleasurable excitement. After tea there are still two hours or more to be occupied, but, as plenty of speakers are present, there is

no difficulty about getting a number of entertaining speeches.

To be chairman of the supper party is an honour properly reserved for the *élite* of the Christian world, and a selection is made from any one of the Evangelical denominations. It matters little whether the chairman be a Churchman, like the Earl of Shaftesbury; an Independent, like Mr. Samuel Morley; a Wesleyan, like Mr. McArthur; or a Baptist, like Sir Morton Peto. The meeting very much resembles a drawing-room assembly on a large scale. All feel that they are among friends; they are accordingly quite at ease, and Mr. Spurgeon never fails to be entertaining. He has, indeed, reason to be in high spirits, for I believe that the Conference week, in which the

115

supper is held, is to him the most delightful season of the year. He sees those around him whom he has trained to fight the Lord's battles; he hears their accounts of advances made, until the address from the President's chair is the nearest approach to a soul being carried away by holy enthusiasm which I have ever witnessed. Among the visitors, however, there is room for the play of a little lighter pleasantry. Some observations are pretty sure to be addressed to the President's "young friend," Mr. Rogers, who, though bordering on fourscore years of age, still remains "a most stubborn Pædo-baptist." Perhaps some regrets may be expressed that Mr. Rogers—who once confessed that he felt like a black sheep amongst a washed flock—cannot be dipped in a baptistery and brought up young again. Then some words will be dropped for the benefit of those who think we shall soon have too many ministers—an evil notion, which should entitle its holder to be kicked out of the universe. Next follows something about the men who have

gone forth from the College to make spheres for themselves in America and in the British Colonies. They are a bold race, and well they may be, after surviving the discipline they have passed through; for Mr. Spurgeon makes some revelations concerning the manner in which he treats young candidates for the ministry. The hapless aspirant's first application is allowed to lie aside as if

116

neglected, and after he has written, say, a dozen times, besides tasting of a little wholesome worry in other ways, he is advised not to be a minister—if he can help it! Young fellows who pass this ordeal are made of tough material, and it is tough material which is required to do the work in hand. I have known of a man being thrown back for a year or two because his modesty made him shrink from the test resorted to, I have heard of another who hastened to seek shelter in a city of refuge in the North West, after receiving an intimation from the Pastors' College that no duffers need apply.

At nine o'clock supper is announced, when we at once adjourn to the lecture-hall beneath the Tabernacle, where the repast is spread, and where the effect produced by the combined efforts of upholsterers, decorators, and cooks is not a little pleasing. Red cloth covers the floor; drapery, banners, and appropriate devices ornament the walls; while at the elegantly furnished tables hundreds of ladies and gentlemen are taking their places. Everything seems to encourage the guests to eat, drink, and be merry; but before one of the number rises from the table, some eighteen hundred or two thousand pounds will have been given to the Pastors' College.

Meanwhile, Mr. Spurgeon reads over the list of subscribers; and, by a series of running comments,

117

still contrives to minister to the entertainment of his friends. There are liberal souls present who do not write in very legible characters, and to these it is explained that education proper largely consists in the ability to make straight strokes and round o's. When Mr. Phillips steps to the front of the raised table, he is, of course, hailed with acclamations, and with emotion he proceeds to explain how the institution originated. What would Macaulay have said to a scene like this? "Homer is not more decidedly the first of heroic poets, Shakespeare is not more decidedly the first of dramatists, Demosthenes is not more decidedly the first of orators, than Phillips is the first of supper-givers."

118

119

X.
Mr. Spurgeon at the Toller Centenary.

120

121

X.
**MR. SPURGEON AT THE TOLLER
CENTENARY.**

WE are to suppose that it is Michaelmas Day, 1875, and that the town of Kettering and the whole neighbourhood are *en fête*. The reason of the unwonted excitement may be thus briefly stated. It is a hundred years since Mr. Toller the elder preached his maiden sermon in the town, his own pastorate and that of his son having extended from that day to this; and to-day Mr. Spurgeon has engaged to preach in the open air to all comers.

During the early part of the week, London and the suburbs have been visited by incessant rain; and hence the grateful outburst of sunshine which gladdens Michaelmas morning cheers the hearts of thousands of holiday-makers, who, for weeks past, have been eagerly counting on being present at the Toller Centenary Festival. Even Mr. Spurgeon, who is the entire attraction of one day's programme, shared in the popular satisfaction; for, as he looked round on the sun-lit landscape

122

while the express-train halted at Bedford Station, he was heard to exclaim, "The day is made on purpose." Still, it is somewhat damp under foot, and the grand gathering of the afternoon will

necessarily be held in a meadow; but, while the glorious autumn sun maintains his ascendancy, shining out of countenance threatening clouds, we can afford to indulge in the best of spirits. Onward speeds the train, and, as we get nearer to our destination, the aspect of the stations bears witness to the public excitement. On our arrival at Kettering, the station is thronged by persons who are all desirous of catching a passing glance of "a distinguished Englishman," as a spectator quietly designates Mr. Spurgeon while speaking to a companion. Beyond the station, large numbers of people are found thronging the roadways, and their satisfaction, on finding that the preacher of the day has arrived—three hours, too, before the time of service—is very genuine, so that they are able to see, criticise, and hear with characteristic good humour. Though in the town itself business is not entirely suspended, it is easy to see that every one is absorbed with the business in hand. Each passing train brings a fresh shoal of visitors, and every road leading into Kettering pours its stream of living beings into the town—a dozen people behind one horse being no uncommon load. How the hotel-keepers contrive to find stable-room

123

for their four-footed visitors, it were idle to conjecture. It is well that they have not to feed the multitude as well as bait the horses. The fact is, the townspeople are entertaining strangers on a large scale. In private houses are found long tables plentifully supplied with the viands of the season, while the Town Hall is temporally transformed into a great refreshment-booth. During the morning, and until the time of meeting at two o'clock, the concourse of visitors do not allow the hours to hang heavily on their hands; for even Kettering has its lions and antiquities. The

chapels are open, and invite inspection—the Great Meeting of the Independents, as Mr. Toller’s chapel was formerly called, being a central object of interest. Then there are the Toller medals in the shops; there are the tomb and pulpit of Andrew Fuller; there is the old white mansion called Missionary House, that more than classic ground where the Baptist Missionary Society was formed. Many look on this honoured homestead with reverence; and, before leaving for London on the following morning, Mr. Spurgeon, with one or two others, might have been observed in a carriage slowly passing along the road.

By two o’clock there are threatenings of rain; but, notwithstanding, a vast congregation has assembled in a suburban meadow, and around a slight erection, which has to serve as a platform,

124

besides accommodating a band of select friends. The rain clears away, and the sight of the people is very imposing. Some think there may be six or seven thousand persons present; others, more accustomed to judge of London crowds, do not hesitate to put down the total at ten thousand.

Now there is silence, as Mr. Spurgeon stands forward to commence the service by referring in suitable words to the occasion, and to the young heart which their friend, Mr. Toller, still carries in his bosom. The hymn,

“Our times are in Thy hand;
O God! we wish them there,”

is then sung; after which, there follows a reading and exposition of Psalm lxxi.—“the old man’s psalm,” as the preacher remarks, the very number seeming to suit those who have passed threescore years and ten. None need fear to go through a second childhood, if they would remember how well they were brought through the first; and it is not

likely that there lives a happier man than Mr. Toller. After a fervent, affecting prayer, in course of which Kettering is referred to as being exalted to heaven by privileges, another hymn follows:

“I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Come unto Me and rest.”

The thousands of faces are now turned towards the little reading-desk, when, in response to the look of general expectancy, Mr. Spurgeon re-

125

marks, “Pray for a capital sermon, and you’ll get it.” The text was taken from Psalm lxxi. 17, 18: “O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth; and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous work,” &c. There had previously been a little rain, but the clouds parted and the sun shone forth as the preacher commenced by saying that, as the occasion was special, an effort should be made to make it so. In the providence of God, it very seldom happened that father and son were found holding a pastorate for a century, though when such a thing did happen they should thank God for it. He referred to the fact that two of his own predecessors—Drs. Gill and Rippon—held the pastorate for 117 years, and he hoped Mr. Toller would live to complete a corresponding period. He felt bound, on such an occasion, to speak more especially to the aged, though he hoped to benefit the young. The text was an old man’s retrospect. David was a model of an aged believer, and it was thought that Mr. Toller could appropriate his words.

I. *The Psalmist’s scholarship.*—David was an instructed believer, and more of the kind are needed. Converted people should be learners. Some seem to jump into salvation on a sudden; but they who have not first learned should have the sense not to teach. Ritualism and scepticism would not have

spread had there been a wider diffusion of knowledge, for error and ignorance go hand-in-hand.

126

David went to school from his youth; he was mighty in the Scriptures as they then existed. Let us, then, read our Bibles. In the old days, there was nothing the Romanists so much dreaded as the catechism. Then let the experienced be teachers of others. As regarded David, the Lord taught him; he was taught by the prophets, and also by Providence. He learned lessons in the camp and in the world. It is a blessed thing when God is our teacher, and His school-room is large enough for all. Further, David began early; the same was true of Mr. Toller, and he (Mr. Spurgeon) was baptized at sixteen, and wished it could have been seventeen years earlier. It is necessary to be taught early; for the sooner we come to Christ, the less we have to unlearn. We grow like early planted trees, and have none of those horrid remembrances which are a cross to many who are reclaimed late in life. The preacher when a child was greatly puzzled by seeing an apple in a vial on his grandfather's mantelpiece; how the apple got there was as profound a secret as the source of the Nile, but all became clear when it was shown that the vial was taken to the tree to have the tiny apple placed within when it grew. Hence the young promote their own happiness by entering the church early to grow up in it. If they would preserve a bright eye and an elastic step, they must cleave to Christ in youth.

127

II. *The Believer's occupation.*—David's occupation was to declare God's works. This was the kernel, all else was but the shell. Some appear scarcely to think of this—the duty of acquainting others with the blessings they themselves have

found. Is there such a thing as a secret Christian? Who knows of one? "I do!" you say. Well, the fact that you *know* him is a proof that he is not a secret Christian. Are such deserters, or are they merely persons of retiring habits? That soldier was of retiring habits who ran away from the field on the day of battle. David, however, proclaimed God's works, and Mr. Toller had done the same for fifty-five years. Let us have a theology full of God and not of man. This is the grandest theme one can take up, and it was the Psalmist's theme. Let them keep to the atonement and all the blessed doctrines of grace. Bring out the old, well-tried guns now that such enemies as Ritualism and Popery confronted them. The preacher had a grandfather who preached the same doctrines from early life to old age, and Mr. Toller could say that the things he loved in youth he loved still. They would note, further, that David's style was commendable. He spoke positively, and his object was to win sinners. What are we doing? All should do something; no man should keep his gift to himself; we must not play at being

128

Christians. It is a poor, miserable thing to be half-and-half. Some can sit in a pew-corner, and when they have heard a good sermon they say, "Bless the Lord!" or they are passengers in the Gospel coach who can do no more than find fault with the horses, coachman, guard, and all about them.

III. *David's prayer, Forsake me not,*—Is it not remarkable that so many of the people mentioned in the Bible as having fallen into sin are old people? Experienced coachmen tell us that the horses are more likely to fall at the bottom of a hill than anywhere else. Old age may be over-

confident, or it may be harassed by too many fears. They have need of sustaining grace to the last; and on the other hand, God never forsakes old servants.

IV. *David's wish.*—He desired to bear one more testimony to his God. The aged and the weak show forth God's strength, and they were often the best "evidences" of the truth of religion. Such, indeed, was the elder Toller, who, after serving in the ministry forty-five years, liked his Master so well, that he brought up his son to the same blessed work.

The sermon occupied nearly an hour and a quarter in delivery, and at the conclusion of the service a large number of people showed a great eagerness to shake hands with Mr. Spurgeon, who,

129

with characteristic good humour, spent a considerable time in gratifying his friends. As he walked from the field, the pastor was accompanied by an admiring throng. Little children walked by his side to look up into his face with a curiosity superior to their years, and poor peasants dressed in their best went away happy if only they were recognised. "I haven't seen you since we met at B——," said one honest labourer, whose face beamed with smiles, and who seemed scarcely to understand why the preacher was not aware of the fact. More striking, perhaps, was the observation of another who pressed forward and remarked, "I pray for you every day!"

At the evening meeting in the Independent Chapel, the chair was occupied by Mr. Adkins, the Mayor of Northampton. He had been acquainted with Mr. Toller all his life, and from the first had associated his name with all that is commendable in a Christian minister. That regard had strengthened since the time of youth, and he congratulated

Mr. Toller, whom God had upheld to be still in vigorous health among them. He also congratulated the church which was so highly favoured.

Mr. Spurgeon expressed the pleasure he felt in being present on such an occasion, and said there was so much involved in fifty-five years' pastorate that it did honour to the man, and added to the praise and glory of God. How must, he have

130

been sustained by the Lord in finding fresh matter to interest the congregation, and in wisdom to direct the church! How must God's Spirit have been with him to bless him in a thousand ways! We should never know what we owed to the grace of God; and it would be one of the occupations of eternity to make fresh discoveries of His love to us on earth—how we had been steered away from the rocks of earth to be guided into the eternal haven. Mr. Toller could be no ordinary man. It did not appear that there was much intelligence in the people who chose him; any fool could see he was a fine fellow. He (Mr. Spurgeon) was a simple, natural kind of being, but he took to his friend Toller at once. There was all about him to attract and nothing to repel. He knew brethren with great gifts of dispersion; put them in a chapel like that, and they would have plenty of ventilation. They lacked that disposition of kindness which attracts and retains. Nor was that all. One who had laboured in the same place for fifty years must have fed his people. Let any one try the work for one year, and see how they would succeed. He was once riding with a Yorkshireman in a railway carriage, and he inquired how they were getting on at the chapel where the man attended. "Oh," replied he, "our minister is a mooff!" "A mooff? What's that?" "Why, don't you know? A *mooff*!"

131

The stranger then entered into explanations. Deacon So-and-so owned a water-mill, and if you ever passed it on Sundays you saw the wheel going round, and heard it go click-clacking at a terrible rate; but it was not connected with the machinery, and so did no work, notwithstanding its noise. That was just the case with the Yorkshireman's minister. Every Sunday his tongue went click-clack, click-clack, click-clack, but he said nothing, and hence was plainly "a mooff." It was different with Mr. Toller. People would not go for fifty years to hear "a mooff"—unless they were muffs themselves.

The principal speeches by Mr. Spurgeon, Mr. Toller, and other gentlemen, were addressed to both congregations successively. Many references were made to Kettering, to its traditions, and especially to Mr. Toller, sen. Robert Hall is reported to have said, that the reason why there were more preachers in England than Mr. Toller was, that all England could not hear Mr. Toller. In the old days "the Great Meeting" showed a marked contrast to the parish church, the congregation consisting chiefly of people in one place, and of empty pews in the other. Some marvelled at the meeting-house being crowded while the church was deserted. "Ah," said one, "it would not be so if Mr. Toller preached in the church, and the rector

132

were to go to the chapel." Another characteristic anecdote of the first Mr. Toller was told in private by one of the family, so that I can vouch for its authenticity. When about fifty the pastor married a second time, the favoured bride having been a fine young woman of half his own years, and who, I believe, died in 1870 at a very advanced age.

In the neighbourhood was a sober minister, who looked askance on the practice of men in middle life allying themselves to mere giddy maidens, his own taste having led him to select, on two occasions, elderly dames with property. He called on brother Toller to deliver a gentle remonstrance. Was it the right thing to do? Was it quite *prudent*, at any rate, for a pastor of fifty to wed an inexperienced girl? Mr. Toller failed to see eye to eye with his well-meaning friend; and hence he ended the discussion by remarking, "Look here, brother Gill, it was never one of my besetting sins to fall in love with old ladies!"

XI.
Mr. Spurgeon and the Maid-
Servants.

XI.
MR. SPURGEON AND THE MAID-
SERVANTS.

DURING the early months of 1876 the maid-servant attracted a considerable share of public attention. That the work of a good domestic is too great to be represented by gold is admitted by all grades of employers, but the genuine article is supposed to be scarcer than of old. While mistresses put down a formidable list of complaints and grievances, Mary and Jane appear to be quite able to set up a defence which has all the force of plausibility. If servants are not perfect models of human nature, neither are their employers. Undoubtedly, there are faults on both sides, and concessions will have to be made both in the parlour and in the kitchen before things can be expected to work happily and harmoniously. Old-fashioned ways of thinking and of living are rapidly passing away. It is a rare thing now to find a domestic who has spent a lifetime in one household, and who would no more think of relinquishing, her "place" than she would of severing the dearest

136

family connection. While our national wealth rapidly increases, and inventions are multiplied, fortune smiles on housemaids and cooks; but still

prosperity exacts its penalties. Though wages are rising, and the demand for competent menials exceeds the supply, their services are becoming more regarded as a mere marketable thing—the contract is less often strengthened by the kindness which ought to flow from a sense of mutual obligation. Under such conditions higher wages will be offered, but there will be less comfort; the girl's independence will be greater, but she will be more exposed to the dangers of frequent change.

Mr. Spurgeon, with his accustomed force and geniality, gave forth some utterances on domestic servitude, which had the effect of provoking the usual amount of criticism. He viewed his subject from the standpoint of a kind-hearted Christian employer who had an eye to detect the trials of one class and the defects of another, so that he has failed to enlist the sympathy of those quidnuncs of the daily press who just before went into raptures over Mr. Charles Reade's platitudes about "Starvation refusing Plenty." Mr. Spurgeon's speech was occasioned by his taking the chair at the thirty-ninth annual meeting of the "Female Servants' Home Society. The committee award prizes for long and faithful service, these

137

encouragements to good conduct consisting of Bibles and gold and silver medals. Mr. Spurgeon's speech was in substance as follows, according to the morning journals:—

He congratulated the society upon the good report they had to show, because a servant's place was not one of the easiest in the world, as most servants knew. He would recommend them to get up a society of mistresses, and award them Bibles and silver medals for keeping their

servants. In the report just read, some of the mistresses had spoken highly of their servants, obtained through the medium of this society. Good mistresses made worthy servants, as a general rule, and where there were bad servants but indifferent mistresses were generally found. He was always glad to find one person willing to praise another. There had been a notion abroad that one must not be praised until he was dead. When alive, holes were picked in his coat by way of encouragement—to keep him from being proud and exalted above measure. But he (Mr. Spurgeon) thought a little encouragement was a very fine thing. A rule formerly adopted was, that when one met a boy his ears were to be boxed, not because he deserved it at that particular time, but that he would certainly deserve it before long. Upon the same principle

138

some people thought that they should always find fault with bad servants, for if they did not deserve blame at that moment they ultimately would. He was glad to find that this state of things was now altered, and that servants were now praised whenever deserving, for a word of encouragement now and then would do them a great deal of good. It had often done him good, and if, instead of receiving a snarl, or some other mark of disapprobation, he had received praise, he had felt nerved to work harder in the cause which he had at heart. He could not help referring to the report, which so constantly stated in the letters from mistresses that “we should not have parted with her [the servant] but for her marriage.” He felt sure that the mistresses wrote such words with considerable sorrow. He thought the best thing a man could do was to get married properly and rightly; but some of the girls staggered him when

he thought of how, by imprudent marriages, they threw themselves into poverty, and became subjects of unkind treatment. If a man drank too much, no matter what sweet things he might say to them, he (the speaker) would advise them to have nothing to do with such a person. He had lately been told that he had arrived at the period of the "infirmities of old age;" but certainly he had had a wide field of observation, and could conscientiously say that he had never known hap-

139

piness follow the union between an un-Christian man and a Christian woman. A woman's notion was that she could reform a bad husband, but such efforts were generally useless. One of the griefs they suffered at the Tabernacle was, that very excellent Christian young women gradually ceased to attend because they had married an ungodly man. There were many things that affected the character of servants, and the happiness of households. Some were too quick-tempered—and so were many people besides servants; others were negligent; some too gossipy; and many were too fond of reading stupid novels—and so were many of their mistresses. Some of these novels he would not like to carry with a pair of tongs to the fire; and yet, from the reviews which he saw in the newspapers, he supposed they had a large circulation. No wonder, then, that the Divorce Court was pretty well occupied. For his part, he could not benefit by reading fiction, and the large majority of such works only gave one a stilted notion of things which "are not as they seem." The world was only an ordinary one, after all; and cows did not always produce cream, the grass was not always green, nor the sky constantly blue. Many who read fiction of a certain kind were

ruined for life. He regretted that only a few servants were able to attend places of worship.

140

Such as could not he would recommend to learn a text, and let it lie on the tip of the tongue all day, like a lozenge, so that when things went wrong with them they could think of this text, thus enabling them to pass their lives away pleasantly.

The comments which appeared on these characteristic remarks reveal in a curious manner how a man's meaning may be misrepresented. "If mistresses generally were to attempt to act on Mr. Spurgeon's principles thus laid down," exclaims one daily newspaper, "to warn cook against keeping company with the greengrocer on the ground that he is not a Christian young man, and further to prohibit all works of fiction in the hands of servants, besides making them commit texts to memory instead—the world of domestic service would rise in justifiable rebellion." We should all think so, indeed, since religious tyranny is only another name for unchristian oppression. It will be seen at a glance that no such notions were advocated by Mr. Spurgeon as those imputed to him by the journalist. The pastor is the last person who would curtail a dependant's liberty, lay down iron rules in regard to her reading, or make her learn the Bible by heart as a task. What he really did was to proffer servants themselves some valuable counsel, the acceptance of

141

which could not fail to enhance both their efficiency and happiness. His critics look at the thing through the green spectacles of individual prejudice; and we fear that a warmer sympathy

between the two classes will not be aided by deceptive innuendoes and pointless wit.

XII.

Mr. Spurgeon as a Litterateur.

XII. MR. SPURGEON AS A LITTERATEUR*

AT an unusually early age Mr. Spurgeon became an author, and each succeeding year has added to his successes in the world of literature. It is not often that a man can excel in an eminent degree with both tongue and pen; but in this instance we have an exception altogether unique. If the

* "The Treasury of David;" Containing an Original Exposition of the Book of Psalms; a Collection of Illustrative Extracts from the whole range of Literature; a Series of Homiletical Hints upon almost every Verse; and List of Writers upon each Psalm. By C. H. Spurgeon. Vol. I. to IV. Passmore and Alabaster, Paternoster Row.

"John Ploughman's Talk." By C. H. Spurgeon. Two Hundred and Fiftieth Thousand. Same Publishers.

"The Metropolitan Tabernacle and its Work." By C. H. Spurgeon. Twentieth Thousand. Same Publishers.

"Lectures to My Students." By C. H. Spurgeon. Twentieth Thousand. Same Publishers.

"Commenting and Commentaries." By C. H. Spurgeon. Tenth Thousand. Same Publishers.

"The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit." By C. H. Spurgeon. Vol. I. to XXI. Same Publishers.

146

reader will accept the paradox, Mr. Spurgeon has never written sermons, although, during twenty years, his sermons have been to him an exercise in writing. In one of those autobiographical articles with which he sometimes enriches the pages of *The Sword and Trowel*, he says: "The earlier sermons, owing to my constant wanderings abroad,

received scarcely any revision, and consequently they abound in colloquialisms, and other offences, very venial in extempore discourse, but scarcely tolerable in print; the latter specimens are more carefully corrected, and the work of revision has been a very useful exercise to me, supplying, in great measure, that training in correct language which is obtained by those who write their productions before they deliver them. The labour has been far greater than some suppose, and has usually occupied the best hours of Monday, and involved the burning of no inconsiderable portion of midnight oil. Feeling that I had a constituency well deserving my best efforts, I have never grudged the hours, though often the brain' has been wearied, and the pleasure has hardened into a task."

After reading the above explanation we shall be well able to understand how the tongue and the pen have worked together to redound to the advantage of both. As a young man Mr. Spurgeon did not entertain very enlarged views

147

concerning the dignity of authorship, and his expectations in regard to the profits of a writer were of the most humble nature. He commenced by committing a mistake for which he paid dear. The copyright of "The Saint and His Saviour," which would have been cheap at £1,000, was sold for a twentieth part of that sum; and the small honorarium was never supplemented by the fortunate publishers. That mistake has not been repeated; and his literary works have, since that day, been sufficiently varied and numerous to represent the fruits of a busy literary life quite apart from the regular issue of the Sermons. Hence it appears that a phenomenon is now seen in the printing and publishing world which it would

be hard to parallel—extensive printing works in one part of the city, and a publishing house in another quarter, are in the main supplied with grist from the study of one man, and that man a Baptist minister, preaching what many call “narrow theology.” Yet they who class the sermons among “narrow” productions will not forget that they are sown over a broader field than is the case with the discourses of any other preacher.

Though Mr. Spurgeon is continually suffering from the effects of over-work, the public is still exacting in its demands; and to judge by the editions issued, readers eagerly welcome each

148

successive offspring of the author’s diligent application. Though “John Ploughman” is the pastor’s most popular character, “The Treasury of David” is his *magnum opus*. In the first he writes like one who can do task-work surpassingly-well; amid the green pastures and quiet waters of the Psalms he explores a congenial land where every advance reveals new beauties, and where labour yields a sweet reward.

“The Treasury of David” has the virtue of being the production of a writer who has been in love with the Psalms from his youth; and, indeed, this enthusiasm for the subject was necessary, for after some dozen years of arduous labour, the work is only two-thirds completed. The exposition bespeaks its author throughout; it abounds in that epigrammatic wisdom which is a sure mark of original genius. Commentaries of olden times—Manton’s “long-metre edition of Psalm cxix.” being a well-known example—rather repelled than attracted inquisitive readers; but after tasting of Mr. Spurgeon’s fare, a self-indulgent literary epicure might desire to come again. The book,

with its ample store of illustrations, gathered from the entire field of literature, would have entertained Dr. Johnson on a journey even better than Cocker's Arithmetic. While it is a rich store-house for the use of professional men, another, seeking relaxation from the wear and tear of

149

commerce, might make the book a companion on a summer holiday. What is it but the triumph of genius when studies, hitherto supposed to be only suitable for ministers and collegians, are made attractive to general readers?

Here and there a metrical version of a favourite psalm is inserted to make an agreeable variation. In another place scientific infidels are described as men who "will not touch Him [Christ] with the finger of faith; but they will pluck at Him with the finger of malice." Sentences which would serve as proverbs might be plentifully gathered. It is also interesting to take note of the skill with which the illustrations are selected. Take the following on the opening verse of Psalm xcvi. :—

"A clergyman in the county of Tyrone had for some weeks observed a little ragged boy come every Sunday and place himself in the centre of the aisle, directly opposite the pulpit, where he seemed exceedingly attentive to the services. He was desirous of knowing who the child was, and for this purpose hastened out after the sermon several times, but never could see him, as he vanished the moment service was over, and no one knew whence he came or anything about him. At length the boy was missed from his usual situation in the church for some weeks. At this time a man

150

called on the minister, and told him a person very ill was desirous of seeing him; but added, 'I am really ashamed to ask you to go so far; but it is a child of mine, and he refuses to have any one but you. He is altogether an extraordinary boy, and talks a great deal about things that I do not understand.' The clergyman promised to go, and went, though the rain poured down in torrents, and he had six miles of rugged, mountain country to pass. On arriving where he was directed, he saw a most wretched cabin indeed, and the man he had seen in the morning was waiting at the door. He was shown in, and found the inside of the hovel as miserable as the outside. In a corner, on a little straw, he beheld a person stretched out, whom he recognised as the little boy who had so regularly attended his church. As he approached the wretched bed the child raised himself up, and stretching forth his arms said, '*His own right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory,*' and immediately he expired."

As a *littérateur* Mr. Spurgeon is a many-sided character; a writer who can work to advantage in various departments, and excel in all. In "The Treasury of David" he is the ripe theologian; as "John Ploughman" he talks a philosophy the common people like to hear and can understand. In his book on the Tabernacle he is a pains-

151

taking historian; in "Lectures to My Students" he is a more lively college professor than any other member of that honourable fraternity with whom I am acquainted. It is worth a substantial entrance fee to listen to one of these Friday afternoon orations; but those who cannot hear should read the book.

In old times when books were scarce, and good teachers scarcer, a clever University lecturer would attract auditors from foreign climes, who in after life were wont to boast of early privileges. It is really surprising to think how the old schoolmen killed time, and wasted their energies in battling about barren topics, or in establishing their finely-spun theories. The popular mediaeval professor, with his host of determined disciples, was hardly a less formidable opponent than we should now find in a confident general who knew that regiments of veterans were ready to give effect to his orders. The shock of controversy often troubled the outside world; but whether the Realists or the Idealists held the field mattered little to the vulgar crowd. Was it ever authoritatively decided whether a thousand angels could, or could not, dance upon the point of a finely-sharpened needle? Philosophy was a dead letter because men worshipped intellect and learning for their own sake, without caring anything about the elevation of the benighted population. Students

152

spent their strength for nought, losing their way in the mazes of casuistry, until nothing short of the mighty awakening of the Reformation sufficed to break their fatal dream.

Had Mr. Spurgeon flourished in mediaeval days he would have been renowned as a man of valour, the Achilles of a school, and even now he is scarcely less than this. No college professor ever before gave lectures precisely similar to "Lectures to My Students." The book is weighty and piquant, serious as well as sparkling; many of its philosophical saws gain force from their settings of humour. In every sense it is a popular reading-book; one not too light for grave scholars, nor of that solid dryness which repels those who read for

amusement. Every page is racy, the wit is free from ill-nature, and throughout there is a characteristic striving after practical results. Pretty things are never said for their own sake; the smallest apophthegm is aimed at a high mark, which is seldom missed. As college homilies, these lectures were not delivered with that professional frown which might seem to give weight to their matter and dignity to the lecturer; they were rather spoken with easy grace, and as we read we seem to be looking on a beaming countenance which of itself may teach what is worth even more than a college lesson. "Our reverend tutor, Mr. Rogers, compares my Friday work to

153

the sharpening of the pin," we are told; "the fashioning of the head, the straightening, the laying on of the metal, and the polishing, have been done during the week, and then the process concludes with an effort to give point and sharpness. To succeed in this the lecturer must not be dull himself, nor demand any great effort from his audience. I am as much at home with my young brethren as in the bosom of my family, and, therefore, speak without restraint."

Mr. Spurgeon lets his readers know who the young aspirants are that constitute the Pastors' College, and also who they are *not*. To those who assert that he has set up a clerical factory, he replies that he is rather a "parson killer." He is ever doing work similar to "the duty which fell to the lot of Cromwell's Triers." He does not want men who are striving to do the best they can for themselves in this world, and applications are declined which come from those whose "main object is an ambitious desire to shine among men." Self-conceited geniuses are always kindly directed elsewhere. Nor is it believed that the students

are generally characterised by "great feebleness of mind," because applicants betraying a mental weakness which is likely to be carried away by any kind of doctrine are counselled to "keep in the rear ranks," in company with other knights of "the kid-gloved order." Another too numerous class,

154

who are not welcomed into the College, are "distinguished by enormous vehemence and zeal, and a conspicuous absence of brains; brethren who would talk for ever and ever upon nothing, who would stamp and thump the Bible, and get nothing out of it at all; earnest, awfully earnest, mountains in labour of the most painful kind; but nothing comes of it all, not even the *ridiculus mus*. There are zealots abroad who are not capable of conceiving or uttering five consecutive thoughts, whose capacity is most narrow, and their conceit most broad; and these can hammer, and bawl, and rave, and tear, and rage, but the noise all arises from the hollowness of the drum." Of others the name is legion, whose natural defects would render them ludicrous in the eyes of a congregation. One applicant "had a sort of rotary action of the jaw," says Mr. Spurgeon. "I could not have looked at him while preaching without laughter, if all the gold of Tarshish had been my reward." Men who base their "call" on a hedged-iip way are not encouraged, because "a man who would succeed as a preacher would probably do right well, either as a grocer, or a lawyer, or anything else. A really valuable minister would have excelled at anything." Mr. Self-conceit cannot always see reason when his offer of self-sacrifice is declined. "Do you mean to say that because I have an unusual genius," asked one, in warm

155

indignation, “and have produced in myself a gigantic mind, such as is rarely seen, I am refused admittance into your College?”

Perhaps no volume sold for half-a-crown ever cost an author more trouble than “Commenting and Commentaries.” The student is directed to nearly fifteen hundred works, treating of separate parts of the Bible, or of the whole book. Like Lord Bacon, Mr. Spurgeon must see Fruit come of his labour, or he is not satisfied. Such books are not written for money, nor for fame, but for the sake of aiding those who have little money to spend in literature; *e.g.*:—

“Here, however, is the difficulty; students do not find it easy to choose which works to buy, and their slender stores are often wasted on books of a comparatively worthless kind. If I can save a poor man from spending his money for that which is not bread, or, by directing a brother to a good book, may enable him to dig deeper into the mines of truth, I shall be well repaid. For this purpose I have toiled, and read much, and passed under review some three or four thousand volumes. From these I have compiled my catalogue, rejecting many, yet making a very varied selection. Though I have carefully used such judgment as I possess, I have, doubtless, made many errors; I shall, certainly, find very few who will agree with

156

me in all my criticisms, and some persons may be angry with my remarks. ... He who finds fault will do well to execute the work in a better style; only let him remember that he will have my heifer to plough with, and therefore ought, in all reason, to excel me.”

It is taken for granted that persons who purchase the book value the assistance of Biblical expositors. "Of course you are not such wise-acres as to think you can expound Scripture without assistance from the works of divines and learned men, who have laboured before you in the field of exposition," the students are told. "If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and, like a little coterie who think with you, would resent the attempt as an insult to your infallibility." His opinions on the leading commentators are not those of a man who has not taken the trouble to read their works for himself.

"First among the mighty for general usefulness, we are bound to mention the man whose name is a household word, MATTHEW HENRY. He is most pious and pithy, sound and sensible, suggestive and sober, terse and trustworthy. You will find him to be glittering with metaphors, rich in analogies, overflowing with illustrations, super-

157

abundant in reflections. ... It is the poor man's commentary, the old Christian's companion, suitable to everybody, instructive to all. ... Every minister ought to read Matthew Henry entirely and carefully through once at least. I should recommend you to get through it in the next twelve months after you leave college. Begin at the beginning, and resolve that you will traverse the goodly land from Dan to Beersheba. You will acquire a vast store of sermons if you read with your note-book close at hand; and as for thoughts, they will swarm around you like twittering swallows around an old gable towards the close of autumn."

John Calvin is “a prince among men.” Matthew Poole “is a very prudent and judicious commentator.” Trapp is recommended “to men of discernment.” Gill is a “master cinder-sifter among the Targums, the Talmuds, the Mishna, and the Gemara. ... I have placed next to Gill in my library Adam Clarke; but as I have no desire to have my rest broken by wars among the authors, I have placed Doddridge between them. If the spirits of the two worthies could descend to the earth in the same mood in which they departed, no house would be able to hold them.” He goes on to say that the first money received for services in London was exchanged for Scott’s

158

Commentary; but “for a minister’s use Scott is mere milk-and-water.”

The “Metropolitan Tabernacle and Its Work” would have been a work of surpassing interest had the author done what he thinks he could not be expected to do—had he turned his “pages into an autobiography.” Mr. Spurgeon will not, however, portray himself. He prefers to see himself as others see him.

Generally speaking, a man’s “writings” do not, or should not, include his sermons; but when the preacher weekly devotes “the best hours of Monday” to the revision of what was spoken on the day before, the pen has much to do with the work of production.

“Before I had ever entered a pulpit,” says Mr. Spurgeon, “the thought occurred to me that I should one day preach sermons which would be printed.” During the year 1854 a considerable number of his discourses were published; but the regular weekly issue, continued without break from that day to this, was commenced, “with much fear and trembling,” in the opening week of 1855. “I

am more astonished at the fact than any other man can possibly be," says the preacher, "and I see no other reason for it but this—the sermons contain the Gospel, preached in plain language, and this is precisely what multitudes need beyond anything else." Concerning this weekly publica-

159

tion, and concerning individual sermons, many remarkable things are told. Some on special topics have commanded a very extensive sale, the one on Baptismal Regeneration leading the way. When this was first published, it was feared that the circulation would be disastrously affected; but the number of subscribers actually increased.

The history of these Sermons would constitute a unique chapter in ecclesiastical annals. Some years ago, an ardent admirer of Mr. Spurgeon gave away, at his own charge, a quarter of a million copies. He had volumes elegantly bound for presentation to the crowned heads of Europe. He also had books, containing a dozen in each, sent to every member of both Houses of Parliament, and to all the students of Oxford and Cambridge. More singular still was their circulation "as advertisements in the Australian papers; one gentleman spending week by week a sum which we scarcely dare to mention, lest it should not be believed." In a sense, Mr. Spurgeon is a preacher to the whole Protestant world; and if any doubt this remarkable fact, let them note what he himself says about the general diffusion of these pulpit discourses:—

"In America the sale of the edition published there was extremely large, and I believe that it

160

still continues; but dozens of religious papers appropriate the sermons bodily, and, therefore, it is quite impossible to say where they go, or, rather, where they do not go. Of translations, the Dutch have been most plentiful, making large volumes. An edition of two volumes of selected sermons has been circulated in the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, among the Dutch settlers of that region. In German there are three noble volumes, besides many smaller ones. German publishers, with the exception of Mr. Oncken, of Hamburg, seldom have the courtesy to send the author a copy; and I have picked up in divers places sermons bearing date from Baden, Basle, Carlsruhe, Ludwigsburg, and so on. How many, therefore, may have been sold in Germany I am unable to compute. In French several neat volumes have appeared; in Welsh and Italian one volume each. In Sweden a handsome edition in four volumes has been largely circulated, and the translator informed me of the conversion of some of noble and even royal birth through their perusal. Besides these, there are single sermons in Spanish, Gaelic, Danish, Russ, Maori, Telugu, and some other tongues, and permission has been sought and gladly given for the production of a volume in the language of Hungary.”

Did literature represent his sole profession, the

161

fruits of Mr. Spurgeon’s pen could not be expected to be more abundant than they are, even though the sermons be left out of the category. Authorship is to him a pleasure, as well as a duty; and he evidently values literary power as a sacred trust to be accounted for hereafter.

The Popular Minister and the Bores

CONCLUSION. THE POPULAR MINISTER AND THE BORES

A STATESMAN once remarked that life would be endurable enough were it not for its pleasures; it may be added that a great man's every-day experience would lose half of its diversity were it not for the bores. I would not class bores among necessary evils; they are rather a genus who impart a sort of charm to existence by enabling the bored to realise their individual importance. Every man occupying a prominent position in the world is favoured, more or less, with the bore's attentions; but popular ministers have special attractions which the tormentors cannot possibly resist. Gratuitous advice is voluntarily sent to them, or their counsel in personal matters is earnestly sought. There are persons who avow their readiness to subscribe money for special purposes; others are in need of funds to establish themselves in business or to mature novel inventions which will delight and surprise the public. One has some definite theological opinions he wishes to promulgate; he warns the unwary

166

preacher from dangerous ground, or in trenchant language he undertakes to correct imperfect teaching. The bore is confessedly a person of

good intentions; if we except disguised impostors, his errors arise from a weak judgment or an impaired intellect, rather than from wilful sin. This chapter will unfold the bore's character for the instruction of an inquisitive public, and will thus contain extracts from documents which have been actually posted and received. I once had my curiosity gratified by being shown some samples of the communications received from the class of persons in question; but while giving the following examples, it should be understood that the subject is treated generally. Mr. Spurgeon's experience is in this respect identical with that of others who stand in high places.

Let us begin with that numerous class who are mentally weak and extremely opinionated. They lead an uncomfortable existence, being painfully aware that all the world is going wrong while they alone have a remedy to offer. Perhaps these meddlesome persons are possessed of ample means which allow of their exclusively concerning themselves about the degeneracy of mankind; or they may be invalids who, crushed by physical restraints, brood over evils they cannot cure. These characters are commonly persons of one idea, and to the duty of impressing that one

167

idea on the public mind they are content to devote the energy of a life. As the popular minister knows to his cost, they never want perseverance.

The first article to be noted in my cabinet of curiosities is a rather closely-written manuscript, of eighty-four pages, and written by a person who informs us that he has not learned anything from newspapers, either by reading or hearsay, during the last twenty years. With labour one's imagination fails to estimate, the poor fellow prepared eight copies, as he particularly tells us, of

this important lecture, for the purpose of sending them to as many eminent ministers in different parts of the world. Mr. Spurgeon, Mr. Maclaren, and Mr. Ward Beecher were among the pastors selected as being worthy of favour. It is not likely that one of the eight read beyond the first three pages.

Still, to persons of leisure, the work was not without interest from its very absurdity. The theme selected for discussion, moreover, bore this uncommon title—"The Decline and Fall of Spiritual Blackguards, of High and Low Rank, Male and Female." The style of writing is decidedly loose, and the mark aimed at by the author is not always very clearly defined. He is seriously puzzled about the Apocrypha; but being a man who goes at once to the root of a difficulty, he thus begins—"More than twenty years ago, when

168

we heard that the Apocryphal Books of the Bible were not considered to be authentic, as they were taken from a Greek copy, we said, Surely they must have got the first copy from a Hebrew copy, or how did they get it? ... They did not think of this." Passing from the Apocrypha, we come to the subject nearest to the writer's heart. "Blackguards, all know well, will step into the best-regulated societies and company," he remarks. "Why do you not get Parliament and the great resources of the country to have a great national protection like the police, &c, under proper control, and the whole ability and talent of the nation to see that it is properly managed, and properly managed at all times, and to have all the proceedings of it open to the public?" But what have this earnest author's voluminous effusions to do with the popular preachers to whom they are submitted? Just this, and nothing less—the

author, like other holders of valuable knowledge, desires that his opinion should enjoy publicity; and, provided you can coax them into being your friends, where can be found more fitting agents than popular ministers? Hence the following liberal licence is appended in a concluding paragraph—"You or any one may write or give copies of this article, written on this and the preceding seventy-eight pages. And you or others may read it to any one in public or private, in any church or

169

house, or in the street, or anywhere, either on Sunday or any other day." Did public-spirited magnanimity ever exceed this?

Bore No. 2 is a far less pretentious person. He has no "views" to propound, and he is not a man of war in any sense. He eyes the popular preacher with awe from the far distance, and writes a complimentary letter, coupled with a polite request. He is conscious of being somewhat bold, but excuses his presumption by remarking—"i have heard so much of your fame, and Redd your Books;" and then concludes—"And now my wish, with many others, is that you would send us your photograp. i hope to see and meet you in heaven, But it would give me much pleasure to see you down here first. Dear Brother, don't forget my wish; and if i don't Presume to much, send me 2 or 3."

It might be a saving of expense were popular ministers to become amateur photographers in a limited way, as applications for their "pictures" are certain to be pretty numerous; and next to themselves in popularity will be their wives, for whose portraits there will be a steady though more limited demand.

In the wake of the *carte* collector follows the poor schoolmaster, who sees in popular preachers

desirable patrons and referees. Only the bold, painfully-enterprising members of a profession will

170

thus venture to torment men to whom they are quite unknown, and to whom they owe no particular grudge; but such being inconveniently plentiful, it would not be difficult to collect a museum-tray full of Quixotic circulars. A few literal quotations from one of these educational prospectuses will show the kind of seminaries preachers of mark are asked to recommend:—

“Real and Unsectarian Education is the principal theme at ‘The —— Academy,’ conducted by Mr. ——, Professor over twenty years.

“Mr. —— begs to state that a Very Superior Education, altogether separate from much of the ‘Hypocritical Teaching’ of the present day, is offered at his highly-respectable school.

“The pupils (both male and female) are soundly instructed in——,” &c. [Here follows a list of subjects which one might despair of mastering in three lifetimes, after which the circular proceeds.]

“‘Delightful task to rear the Tender Thought’ and ‘TEACH the young idea how to shoot’ The pupils of this Academy are ‘SCIENTIFICALLY TAUGHT’ instead of the ‘USUAL’ and ‘SILLY’ practice of being ‘ordered to learn.’

“The Delightful Mind is the noble storehouse of Wisdom. Solomon says ‘WISDOM is the PRINCIPAL Thing.’”

171

Intending patrons are further informed that there is “No ‘PLAYGROUND’ to retard the progress of the Pupils during School hours,” and that “The Noble situation of this highly-celebrated Academy is as salubrious as that of ‘Dartmoor.’”

A smile may reasonably be indulged in when a professional tutor uses quotation commas for the purpose of giving emphasis to words; but, taking it for all in all, this school, or, rather, "this highly-celebrated Academy," is doubtless a wonderful institution.

Next come those unfortunates who are manifestly crazy. One stands forth with an authoritative manifesto addressed "To the Children of Men"—that is, "A Protest against all that is not according to the Law and Testimony of God, if you know what that means." Another enthusiast addresses his farrago "More especially to the wealthy inhabitants of Nineveh, the chief city of the Chaldean Nation;" and his proposed reforms are thought to be proper topics for pulpit discussion. "Jacob" sends a long communication, both printed and written, in which he insists that the National Debt is driving the working-classes into lunacy and pauperism; and he is of opinion that those who are responsible for this condition of affairs should either be imprisoned or hanged. "But this debt has got to be cancelled," he proceeds, "and if I, the Lord's Servant, have to cancel

172

it, the faces of the emptiers of this nation will turn black with famine! ... Against whom do you contend? Against whom do you lift yourselves up? Jacob." There are times when fanatics of this class do not confine their action to the comparatively harmless pastime of writing and printing. They take their stand in the congregation, and, imitating as they think the tones of ancient seers, prophesy impending judgments.

"The residents of the Agapemone," as they are pleased to style themselves, may justly be classed among the misguided enthusiasts who bore popular ministers. It would appear that these

people believe that the Day of Gospel grace is ended, that the Day of Judgment has begun, and that the dead founder of their blasphemous system, "Brother Prince," is exalted to sit at the right hand of Christ. While living, Prince was regarded as a religious madman; he is now exalted by his followers into a kind of deity, a fact which proves that there is no absurdity too gross to attract its disciples. These strange people appear to keep their eyes on our leading divines, and will occasionally supply them with the articles of their faith. "We are so thoroughly convinced of the truth of the things whereof we testify," say they, "and are so alive to the tremendous reality and importance of them to all, that we cannot forbear earnestly en-

173

treating you not to cast away these words as a vain thing. ... We charge you, Reverend Sir, as one who will have to give account to God of the souls committed to your care, to make known the contents of this paper to your people."

Among the crazy bores are numbers of industrious persons, whose letters of interminable length are not seldom written in a hand which is painfully illegible. As a rule, these productions find their way direct into the waste-paper basket; of course, they are not acknowledged—they are not even read. Patiently to decipher such effusions is a sufficiently tedious task; but occasionally an uncommon passage meets the eye which partially repays for the inconvenience incurred. "Knowing that your time must of necessity be very much occupied," writes one, "I hasten to hand you a brief abstract of my letter on the subject of the delivering of my body to Satan for a season." Another understands that the preacher to whom he writes officiates in a fine

chapel, and on this circumstance he remarks, "Now my mother was very fond of enlarging rooms, and making home really commodious." But what of that? asks the bored pastor, as he scans the pamphlet-like letter. Simply this—as a popular minister, he preaches in a large chapel, and hence the logical conclusion he must be "her son"—*i.e.*, the son of the writer's mother.

174

As general friends and benefactors of mankind, popular preachers are too often regarded by inventive geniuses as men who look with peculiar favour on inventions which are the offspring of an active brain; they are also supposed to have money in their pockets to favour the interests of those who may apply to them. Take an example from real life, which will explain itself:—

"REV. SIR,—As your time is precious, I will make my letter as short as possible. I have recently invented a velocipede (see drawing), the speed of which will be greatly superior to the ones now in use. The speed with which it will turn corners, run round in a circle, and run backwards, is quite unprecedented in the history of vehicles, at least those vehicles which I am acquainted with. I am naturally anxious to obtain a patent for this invention, but I am unable to do so, because of the low state of my finances ... I have not quite enough to secure provisional protection for six months, so I want you to lend me £5. Deny me not (Prov. xxx. 7). ... The early Christians were 'ready to distribute' (1 Tim. vi. 18). I hope you will be as ready to 'lend.' Send your loan in bank-notes, or in one five-pound note, enclosed in a sealed letter. Don't register it, for reasons

175

which I may state in a future letter. I don't wish you to send a Post-office order or check."

The popular minister declines to send the amount to the bore as requested; and probably all recollections of having consigned a particular letter to the waste-paper basket passes from the mind, until another communication, intended to be a conscience-pricker, appears among the morning delivery:—

"REV. SIR,—I wrote a letter to you on Monday, the 6th instant, requesting a loan of £5. Notwithstanding the fact that I strengthened my request with several passages of Scripture, I have received no answer from you as yet. Under the circumstances, I think I could not do better than ask you again to lend me £5 by nekst feb. or march, when I will pay it back again with any amount of interest up to 100 per cent. You are able to lend it if you like, for 'in the house of the righteous is much treasure' (Prov. xv. 6). Inclose the loan in one or more Bank-notes in the stamp envelope which I enclose in this letter. ... Do not keep me waiting longer. The patent agents are waiting on me since October; I suppose they are angry."

This peremptory note at least brings matters to

176

a crisis, and the bored man returns the enclosures, though he does not send the £5.

Then there is yet another class, and that not a small one, who are a source of perplexity to popular ministers; I refer to persons who, having relinquished doctrines formerly held, seek to be admitted with colours flying, and amid suitable acclamations, into the denomination with which