

SPURGEON AS I KNEW HIM.

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I was a young boy when Charles H. Spurgeon came from his quiet country home to the great city of London.

My esteemed father was a Baptist, and the coming of such a prodigy and the profound impression produced by him soon became the table talk of our home.

Park Street Baptist Chapel, to which the boy-preacher was called (for he was then but nineteen years of age), was located on a side street, and was not at all attractive; had seen better days, but now its attendance had declined to near zero, and "Ichabod" was written over it, for its glory had departed.

But by his unecclesiastical language, his fresh manners and his extreme youth, Spurgeon soon attracted the crowd. The world's metropolis was startled by a new voice, so unlike any other then being heard. The Christian church at large was amazed at his audacity, and by his tremendous earnestness he at once caught the popular ear, and the people flocked from all parts of London to see and hear him, so that the streets near the building in which he preached were literally thronged with people, and if on a Sunday morning or evening one asked: "Where does Spurgeon preach?" the answer would be: "Follow the crowd."

The question was soon raised, "Can he continue to draw like this, or is he simply a passing meteor that will soon be forgotten?"

It would take an abler pen than mine, and language beyond my vocabulary, to give any just presentation of the profound and far-reaching awakening which accompanied the early years of young Spurgeon's ministry in London. Great Britain was aroused from center to circumference.

The boy was a marvelous preacher: fearless, independent, natural, intensely in earnest, hating shams, and the most remarkable voice I have ever known. The voice deserves more than a passing word. He never shouted, and yet 20,000 persons, as in the Crystal Palace, came to hear him, and not one was disappointed. It could sound loud, almost like a rushing torrent, or be as gentle as the cooing of a dove or the lisping of a child, and yet it had such a distinct carrying power that never mind what part of the auditorium you were in, every word was distinctly heard.

Not only did the common people hear him gladly, but all classes followed him as he went from Park Street to Surrey Music Hall, where a great fire and panic broke out while he was preaching, and from there to Exeter Hall, where he continued preaching until the Metropolitan Tabernacle, the largest non-conformist place of worship in the world, was ready for him. Nor did he spare himself, for during these months his labors were most abundant—raising money for his new building—for he declared he would not preach in it on a Sunday until every cent was paid and it could be opened for worship free of debt—so he went forth, traveling throughout England, Scotland, and Wales, often preaching every day and witnessing thousands of conversions. There can be no question but that the power of the Holy Ghost rested upon him and wonderfully blessed his messages, so that hundreds of persons were saved—brought from darkness to light—saw their sin and beheld the Saviour during his sermons.

In this respect, I hardly know its counterpart in any modern preaching. In the days of the Wesleys and Whitfield, tens of thousands turned to the Lord and forsook their sins, but such remarkable manifestations of the triumphs of grace had long since passed when Spurgeon began his work; and modern methods, such as are now being used, were never adopted by him: no rising for

prayers; no coming forward to confess Christ; no after meetings, but regeneration taking place during the preaching itself. I well remember one man, a sea captain, who had a Sunday in London, and from mere curiosity went to hear young Spurgeon, and while listening to the sermon he was brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God, and in after years became an elder in the church. At another time word came of persons being converted while Mr. Spurgeon was reading a hymn and making comments on the same.

This may afford some idea of Spurgeon as a preacher; for surely it was this which brought the people to him and kept him in the front of modern preachers. My belief is that as a preacher he was never surpassed, if ever equalled, from the days of the Apostle Paul to the time of his departure. No building erected could hold the crowds that flocked to hear him. And what was there about his preaching? It lacked the versatility of Beecher; the sharp, keen analysis of F. W. Robertson; the sustained, dramatic force of Guthrie; the biting, stinging sarcasm of Parker; the strength of thought of Bushnell; the well-nigh perfect finish of McLaren. And yet it surpassed them all in popularity and effective power. Teachers, preachers, lawyers, writers, yea, men like Gladstone and Ruskin, came frequently to hear him.

He was the great gospel preacher of modern times. Many things helped him. The times and the country in which his lot was cast. The Church of England—I mean the State Church—well-nigh overshadowed everything. Non-conformity lacked a great leader. There were but few great preachers when Spurgeon appeared, but his pure Anglo-Saxon words, his terse idioms, his apt illustrations, his marvelous voice, his vein of humor, his common sense, his broad liberalism in politics—for Spurgeon was the great Commoner in England—all these helped him. And then, he had a great message. He called a nation to repentance. The grace of God as manifested

in Jesus Christ was his favorite theme. His preaching was very biblical, intensely personal, always understandable, never appealing to the crowds, never stepping aside for popular subjects, always exalting Jesus Christ.

Yes, he was narrow; he saw no good in unsaved human nature; he had no choir in his church; no pipe organ or any other musical instrument; no stained or cathedral glass windows; no manuscript was ever used by him; he never lost self-control in the pulpit; he never ranted; he was utterly indifferent to what people thought or said of him. He did not study consistency; he was but little handicapped by his Calvinism. He was a Calvinist, and in his early days hurled many a javelin at "free will", and seems to have had a very commercial idea of the atonement; believed that all that the Father had given Christ, were purchased by Christ and would surely be saved; held to the verbal inspiration of the original Scriptures, and yet his great heart took all in, and he called upon all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel. He led no great moral reforms, and yet he failed not to rebuke sin in high or low places.

Looking back to those early days of Spurgeon and his work, one can see how such a youthful preacher with such wonderful results, soon became the target of bitter criticism and of no little opposition. He flinched not in his attacks upon the stronghold of Satan. He was unsparing in sarcasm and bitter in his invectives; and he made many enemies. He hated sham and mere display; abhorred a State Church, and said so in many a sermon. He declared the Church of Rome to be the "masterpiece of the devil", while those who differed from him in his views of election, baptism and the verbal inspiration of the Bible were all enemies of the truth. He seemed to take special delight in shattering all ecclesiastical authority and many things held sacred by men; in fact, he was an iconoclast and delighted in idol breaking; and yet from the beginning of his ministry to its close he was the great

evangelical preacher. He never changed that note. He gloried in redemption by the cross; grace was his favorite theme, and with much tenderness, tremendous earnestness and a fervor of soul never surpassed, he held up Jesus Christ as the only way to God and eternal life.

SPURGEON AS AN ORGANIZER.

But he was more than a great preacher, and in his early days he laid the foundations for his great work. He not only preached daily, but organized and gathered in the results of his work. Forty different societies, some of them exceedingly powerful, came into existence under his leadership; and when ultimately the great Metropolitan Tabernacle was finished, it was not a mere crowd that flocked there, but a materly organized people. The Pastor's College took in young men of a fair education and fitted them for preachers. The Colporteurs sold or gave away religious literature all over Great Britain. The Stockwell Orphanage took in thousands of orphans, educated and equipped them for life's duties. The homes for the aged provided the comforts of life for many in their declining years; the church membership became the largest, I suppose, of any one church in the world; his weekly sermon failed not to appear in print for forty years, and was translated into well-nigh every tongue; while his monthly magazine, *The Sword and Trowel*, and books of more pretentious form, appeared constantly from his busy pen.

Spurgeon was blessed with a good fund of humor. At times he was full of fun and as playful as a kitten; but it was not always fun to the victim. He had a very original way of expressing himself, and when he was criticising or sarcastic we never knew what was coming next.

In our lecture hall stood the old box pulpit of Dr. Gill, the commentator. The pulpit had been brought in from the old Park Street Chapel, of which Gill and Spurgeon

had both been pastor, and once a week some student had to enter that pulpit and preach a sermon before Spurgeon himself. One time he suddenly stopped a young man right in the sermon and said: "Call the janitor in", and he was called in. Spurgeon said to him: "Bring in the castor." I think you call it the cruet stand here. It was used before individual holders of condiments were in use. Well, the castor was brought in by the janitor. Said Spurgeon: "Take it up to the young man in the pulpit and tell him to put some salt and pepper and mustard in that sermon; it is too flat."

You know that Londoners are proverbial for dropping their "aitches", that they would say, "Give the 'orses some hoats to heat". Well, a Londoner was preaching before the "king of preachers". Spurgeon did wait until he got through, and then said: "Stay right there young man. Call in the janitor." The janitor came. "Bring your dust pan and broom." Soon the dust pan, broom, and janitor appeared. "Go to the pulpit and sweep up the *aitches* that young man has dropped." Probably the young man never forgot that lesson.

In personal appearance Spurgeon was not specially attractive, and became less so as his age and work told heavily upon him. He was rather short of stature; very fleshy, with a large face, small eyes; he suffered much from gout, frequently limped while walking, and at times gave signs of being in much pain, was rather slow in his movements, and yet planning and thinking and working all the time. He died ten years before he should have done so. But when preaching every impediment vanished; his eyes sparkled, or seemed to burn with a strange fire; his whole being was aroused, and never did warrior in battlefield grasp the situation more thoroughly than did Spurgeon when proclaiming the gospel. His voice would ring out like that of a mighty chieftain, he seemed to carry all before him. At times the great multitude appeared so completely under his spell as if it had ceased breathing.

From the merely human standpoint, I cannot tell the secret of his power, for I do not believe that any other country or age has produced another Spurgeon. His own sons, Charles and Tom, were fine boys and good preachers, but were not the shadow of a ghost of their father. James A. Spurgeon, the great preacher's brother, was possibly a riper scholar than Charles, and was no insignificant preacher and a favorite in the class room, but his chief honor was in this: that he was a splendid second fiddler; keeping himself out of sight and keeping the work going so that his gifted brother could stay in the front and be undisturbed. We must look away from the merely human to find wherein Spurgeon's great strength lay.

He was a man of much prayer; he was a man of great faith. He endured as seeing Him who is invisible. He loved Jesus Christ with a great love. The Holy Spirit rested upon him; and God spoke to the world by him. He taught me never to follow the crowd if I would have the crowd follow me. He taught me that the language of the people is the language needed to reach the people. He taught me never to fear the face of man. He taught me to make Jesus Christ my all in all.