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## The Spurgeon Centenary.

LONDON Baptist life of 1853 presents few exciting features. Somnolence rested on most churches. Extension proposals aroused little enthusiasm. Ministers fed their flocks with solid, soul-satisfying doctrinal sermons, and buried them to the accompaniment of funeral orations of wearying length. In the main members were faithful to their churches and the means of grace; albeit, those on whom the responsibility of church membership sat lightly were no more unknown than they had been unknown eighty years earlier or are unknown to-day, eighty years later. The London Association of Particular Baptist Churches was slowly dying a painless death, and the Baptist Metropolitan Chapel Building Society, formed the preceding year "to erect and aid in the erection of commodious chapels," was having a hard struggle to collect the funds to build the one chapel that was erected under its auspices. A drought was in the churches; refreshing dew and rain had been absent; but, in the closing days of that year, the aged deacons of one historic church, wearied with their looking again and again, wondered if they saw "a little cloud out of the sea like a man's hand." Before the passing of another year they knew that the windows of heaven were open and that refreshing rains were falling on the churches.

Humanly speaking an Essex youth, then in his twentieth year, was responsible for this change. He came unheralded, for he was unknown to the denominational leaders. His two years' pastorate at Waterbeach had passed unnoticed by the editors of the *Baptist Manuals* of 1852 and 1853; and when, in 1854, they became aware that Charles Haddon Spurgeon was at New Park Street, their knowledge was so meagre that they failed to print his initials correctly. In 1934 the centenary of this youth's birth will be celebrated, and it is fitting that, in anticipation of the celebrations, we should publish a series of articles on some aspects of our greatest preacher. The writer of this, the first article, desires to acknowledge his deep indebtedness to the pastor and deacons of Spurgeon's Tabernacle who, four years ago, generously placed their minute books and records at his disposal. Mention should also be made of the kindness of several who knew Spurgeon intimately; particularly the late Dr. W. Y. Fullerton who, on the 30th May, 1928, gave the

writer a prolonged interview at the Mission House, answered his many questions and permitted him to take full shorthand notes of the replies; and the late Rev. John Bradford, who gave him interviews both at Leytonstone and the Baptist Church House.

### Gleanings from the Minute Books.

“Memorandum: The Rev. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, formerly of Waterbeach, near Cambridge, commenced his pastoral duties over the Particular Baptist Church in New Park Street, Southwark, on the first Lord’s Day in May, 1854.” Those words, the first of a new minute book, record the commencement of the most remarkable pastorate in history. Two books preceded this book. The first, dating from the formation of the church in 1719, covered the whole of Gill’s long pastorate and more than half of Rippon’s. The second, from 1808, covered the closing years of Rippon and the full period of the three short pastorates which followed. Spurgeon’s first and second books lasted seven and five years respectively. The comparison needs to be modified, however, by the statement that Spurgeon’s volumes, although quite hefty, were smaller than those of Gill and Rippon, and that Gill, who wrote his own minutes in writing as microscopical as his *Body of Divinity* is complex, succeeded in filling his pages with many more words.

As one would expect, the series of church and deacons’ minute books covering the thirty-eight years from 1854 to 1892, open many windows on Spurgeon’s character and activities. Not all the features have been emphasised by his biographers.

I. THE ZEALOUS PASTOR. The crowd might come to hear Spurgeon preach, but the crowd was made up of individuals and they needed shepherding. So, in the New Park Street days, he toiled, early and late, visiting and interviewing. Cholera ravaging the metropolis only challenged him to redouble his efforts to take the gospel to the sick and dying. His memory for names and faces was remarkable, and his members were known to him one by one, the humblest not being lost in the crowd. Genuine pride is revealed in his annotations of his earliest members. “The pastor resided with this pious couple,” he writes against two. “First student in the College, pastor at Portsmouth in 1876”; “afterwards Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon”; “afterwards deacon”; “a conjuror”; “Became pastor at Tottenham Court Chapel, and then an actor on the stage. A sad case”; “Became an eminent preacher among Plymouth Brethren”; “Missionary to

India"; "Became pastor at Limpsfield," are but a few of the comments in his own handwriting in the first of his minute books. A comment of another type made on the 5th March, 1866, after certifying the minutes, was "Shocking pens, it being a custom to use the worst possible pens in our vestries."

Help soon became essential. Additional deacons were appointed without delay, and within four years Spurgeon asked for elders "to watch over the spiritual affairs of the church." On January 12th, 1859, ten were set apart, and four of the deacons "having for some time really attended to both the spiritual and temporal affairs" were also elected. For thirty-three years Spurgeon gave his elders a task that occupied all their spare time. He expected them to labour with a zeal like to that he had shown in his own early years, and the records reveal their hearty response. Books were supplied for full reports on their visitation of candidates. Other duties allotted to them were "the seeking out of absentees, the caring for the sick and troubled, the conducting of prayer meetings, catechumen and Bible classes for the young men." These elders well deserved Spurgeon's tribute, "The success of my ministry is very largely owing to those who go round picking up birds after I have wounded them."

Church meetings became a problem. Except at the annual church meeting in January, there was little business other than membership. But each candidate received careful consideration, there was no rushing in of members to build up a huge membership. First, the candidate appeared at the meeting and "gave a satisfactory account of the Lord's dealing with his soul," next, the reports of the two messengers and the pastor's testimony were given, and then, all being favourable, "it was agreed that he be received as a member in full communion with this church after he has been baptised." At one such meeting which commenced at 2 p.m. on the 18th May, 1860, forty-two candidates appeared. At the end of the minutes Spurgeon wrote, "This most blessed meeting lasted till a late hour at night. Bless the Lord." He was then only twenty-five, but he could not continue holding meetings which lasted for several hours, and he found it needful to fit in shorter meetings whenever opportunity offered. Occasionally one of the officers shared with him the privilege of presiding. In July, 1861, church meetings were held on the 8th, 11th, 15th, 22nd, 25th, 29th and 30th; but possibly the most interesting series was before the April Communion, 1874, when the church met (1) 9th March, after the prayer meeting, (2) 12th, at six before the lecture, (3) 12th, after the lecture, (4) 16th, after the prayer meeting, (5) 19th, at six before the lecture, (6) 19th, after the lecture, (7) 22nd, Sunday afternoon, (8) 23rd,

after the prayer meeting, (9) 26th, at six before the lecture, (10) 26th, after the lecture, (11) 30th, after the prayer meeting, (12) 2nd April, after the lecture. Ninety-three were welcomed at the following Communion. This number was eclipsed on at least three occasions, 121 on 2nd June, 1861 (apparently the largest number at any one service), 102, on 7th January, 1872, and 114 on 8th December, 1872.<sup>1</sup> By this time much of the pastoral side of the work was in the hands of Spurgeon's invaluable brother, J. A. Spurgeon; and the minutes reveal that no one could have served with greater love and unselfishness, or more completely maintained his elder brother's thoroughness in all the church organisation.

Two early minutes relate to the observance of the Lord's Supper. "11th May, 1859. Our Pastor announced that the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper would in future be administered on the first two Sundays in the month, the present over-crowded state of the chapel and schoolrooms consequent upon the continued increase of the church having rendered this step necessary." "8th October, 1863. Our pastor stated that several of the brethren thought it their duty to celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sabbath, and he himself considered it to be an apostolic practice which ought to be revived. Although there is no express command for weekly communion, yet it is certain that in the time of the Apostles it was so observed, and therefore the church agreed that convenience should be provided for those who desire it."

Other pastoral minutes illustrate Spurgeon's difficulties with Strict Baptists concerning the transfer of members and the steps he took to protect the position of those who were in full and honourable membership. These difficulties commenced with his first member. On 17th May, 1854, "Ann Wake, at present a member of the church in Trinity Street, was proposed for membership, but that church declines to grant dismissions to us on account of their holding strict communion principles." New Park Street dispensed with the letter of transfer. Difficulties of a like nature occurred on other occasions as, for example, on the 3rd March, 1867, when a church replied, "We cannot dismiss any of our members to a church that holds the doctrine of 'Duty Faith,' and opens the Lord's Table to all that profess to love God irrespective of their Baptism and membership with the

<sup>1</sup>In his *Life of Spurgeon* (p. 141), Dr. Fullerton states, "At one Communion Service 100 persons were admitted to membership and 150 at another." Dr. Fullerton obviously was careful to check his figures as the other figures given on p. 141 are accurate. In the writer's perusal of the minute books he could not find that 150 were admitted at one Communion, but he found that 100 was exceeded on the three occasions named above.

Church of Christ; and therefore we cannot dismiss James Porter to your communion. If therefore you receive Mr. Porter into your communion, you must receive him in the ordinary manner as if he were not a member of a Church and we shall consider that he is no longer in our communion. Wishing you all that a Church must possess to enable it to answer the holy and beneficent ends for which a Church state and Church fellowship were instituted by our Lord on the earth." On 20th November, 1861, Spurgeon wrote a letter of protest to one church which was ordered to be entered in the minutes. It reveals his attitude to the requests which constantly came to him for membership by transfer from other Baptist Churches and therefore is printed here :

" DEAR BRETHREN,

" We have always been extremely reluctant to write to you for the dismissal of any of your members to our fellowship because it never has been our desire to build up our numbers by secessions from other churches. Nevertheless, when we have seen friends constantly worshipping with us, who have applied to be received into our fellowship, when we have heard them affirm positively that they would not return to you and have added that they differed from you in the matter of terms of communion, we have felt free to accede to their requests and have then written to you to request their transfer. We beg to remind you that our deacon Mr. Moore has, on our behalf, written you several times requesting the transfer of Brethren Haynes, Williams and a sister. To our repeated letters we have had no reply. If you cannot grant these friends an honourable dismissal will you kindly inform us to that effect, for at present we know nothing against them. We are sure that you would do us the courtesy of some reply. In all other cases, even when no dismissal is sent, we have been indulged with some answer and we cannot believe that you will refuse us the usual custom of Christian Churches. It is very far from our object to raise any question which can lead to strife, we simply ask you whether you can and will dismiss these friends, and if you cannot or do not see fit to do so your notification to that effect will be all we can expect. Both the Brethren know our views upon the communion question and agree with us. We do not, therefore, judge that they would be acceptable members with you even should they be induced to return, which they have positively assured us they will not do. We do not need them and had much rather that they would remain with you, but as they will come among us, we do not see how we can refuse them the union they seek. Wishing you all prosperity and trusting that our

ancient and near relationship, as branches of the same venerable stock, will ever constrain us to promote each other's growth and prosperity, we beg you ever to believe us to remain,

"In Jesus Christ Your Brethren and fellow labourers,

"The Church in the Tabernacle—

"Signed for the whole assembly  
by order of our meeting,

"Nov. 20th, 1861.

"C. H. SPURGEON, *Pastor.*"

II. THE CHURCH EXTENSION ENTHUSIAST. On the 16th August, 1859, at the laying of the first stone of the Tabernacle, Spurgeon, then twenty-five years of age, said, "God sparing my life, if I have my people at my back I will not rest until the dark county of Surrey be covered with places of worship. I look on this as the beginning of the end. I announce my own schemes: visionary they may appear, but carried out they will be. It is only within the last six months that we have started two churches, one in Wandsworth and the other in Greenwich and the Lord has prospered them. . . . And what we have done in two places, I am about to do in a third, and we will do it, not for the third or the fourth, but for the hundredth time, God being our helper." The hundredth time! That was no idle boast. Spurgeon was responsible for the erection of chapels far exceeding that number, and not in Surrey only but throughout the length and breadth of the land. He never lost his passion for bricks and mortar. When he heard of a new district or of an opportunity for a new cause or of a number of people who were banding themselves together and needed his help, he usually sent one or two students from his College with instructions to "blaze away" in the open air, strengthening them with the heartening promise, "I'll stand by you." If the circumstances appeared promising he rented the most suitable room that could be obtained; whether in a school, or assembly rooms, or attached to a tavern was immaterial. Not all the ventures were successful, but success always meant the purchase of a site, for Spurgeon was eminently practical and realised that a church, to survive, must have a permanent home. The site was usually conveyed to Spurgeon and his deacons as trustees, the trust deed being drawn up by Spurgeon's own lawyer. These trust deeds were not all of a uniform pattern. Their provisions as to membership, admission to communion, and other issues, varied according to local circumstances. The amount Spurgeon contributed to these new churches out of his own pocket and from money entrusted

to him will never be known. We do know, however, that from these sources he usually paid the preliminary expenses and the rent of the room, and, if necessary, supplemented the amount paid to the student. When a site was acquired he assisted with the deposit, and usually gave a donation, varying from £100 to £500, to the building funds. His church presented a communion set, and when the time arrived for the formation of the Church he addressed to the members an epistle of almost apostolic length. That sent to Drummond Road, Bermondsey, from the Tabernacle Church Meeting on 23rd July, 1866, is a good example.

“To the Brethren who have made application to be dismissed from the fellowship of this Church and to be formed into a Church of the same faith and order at Drummond Road, Bermondsey.

“BELOVED BRETHREN,

“It affords us great satisfaction to find that God has so prospered your affairs in the new chapel as to render it expedient that you should be formed into a Church. Believing that it is the Saviour’s design to spread His Kingdom in the world by the instrumentality of His people banded together, and also to promote their growth in grace and knowledge of Himself by means of their Church fellowship, and He having in His providence opened a sphere of labour and inclined your hearts to engage in it, and given you some tokens of His presence with you and blessing in your efforts; we heartily approve of the course you contemplate. We are happy to bear testimony to your consistent walk and conversation as the professed servants of Christ, and in furtherance of your purpose do hereby grant you an honourable dismissal from our fellowship and have deputed our beloved Deacons, brethren Wm. Olney and T. Cook, as our representatives in the wish of forming you into a Church of our faith and order and pray that you may be so blessed that you may speedily become a power and an ornament in that section of the Church to which we belong. In accordance with our principles you will henceforth have the conduct of your affairs in your own hands and without constraint from any be at liberty to adopt such means for extending the knowledge of the Saviour’s name in your locality and such means for maintaining the discipline and purity of the church as shall from time to time in the fear of God seem right to yourselves. We have no doubt you have carefully considered the responsibilities involved in the step you are about to take and that feeling your own weakness you will ever act in humble dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We affectionately counsel you ever to keep distinctly in view the great object for which the Church exists,



viz., the Glory of God in the gathering of souls to the Saviour and the establishment of those that believe. Let the truth as it is in Jesus be earnestly maintained by you but be not content except as you see that truth moulding your individual character and bringing forth in you the fruits of holiness to the praise and glory of His grace to be accepted in the beloved. As a means to your own souls' prosperity we affectionately urge you to cherish full sympathy with your minister in the great work in his hands, let it ever be your prayer that his bow may abide in strength that the arms of his hands may be made strong by the hand of the mighty God of Jacob. See to it that no oppressions of care and anxiety about his own temporal things may distract his attention from the spiritual concerns of the church which should fully occupy his energies both of body and mind.

"Cherish full sympathy with the great denominational movements and seek association with sister churches that you may take your part in the work to be done. The expression of your love and gratitude to our beloved pastor is very grateful to all our hearts, and inasmuch as God has blessed you by means of the Pastors' College, in which you know he takes so deep an interest, we respectfully suggest to your Christian judgment whether that institution has not a special claim on your sympathy and support, as God in His providence may prosper you. Lastly. We affectionately urge that while you hold fast those peculiarities in which you, in common with ourselves, are distinguished from other sections of the church, you will cherish thorough large heartedness toward all the disciples of Christ and ever be prepared to say with the Apostle, 'Grace mercy and peace be unto *all* them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.' You are comparatively few in number at present, but this need not be a cause of fear or discouragement but rather an incentive to faith and hope. The streamlet issuing from the mountain side is so narrow and so shallow that a child may wade through, but it deepens and widens in its course, renders fruitful the land through which it flows, and becomes a mighty river on whose bosom the richly laden vessel may be borne to the expanse of ocean beyond. God grant that you though small may soon be widened by the addition of precious souls, may the moral wastes around you soon become by your instrumentality fruitful as the garden of the Lord, and may many a soul richly freighted with the precious things of Christian experience be borne forward on the bosom of your church to the shoreless ocean of eternal blessedness. In bidding you farewell we adapt the language of the Apostle. 'Only yet your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ, that whether we come and see you or else be absent we may hear of your affairs that ye

stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.'

"We are beloved brethren yours faithfully in the Lord,

"Signed on behalf of the Church,

"C. H. SPURGEON, *Pastor.*"

His interest in an infant cause did not cease with the formation of the church; he remained its friend, and reports from it were read at his own church meeting. Thus on 25th February, 1862, Wandsworth (East Hill) sent a report which concluded, "Mr. Spurgeon was the first promoter of the cause and has ever been its firm supporter."

As often as possible Spurgeon induced members to leave the Tabernacle to join with the new churches; twenty-nine were transferred to form Drummond Road, Bermondsey, and twelve to form Stockwell, both in 1866. Similar dismissions occurred at intervals. In the course of a few years, men trained by him were ministering in over fifty new buildings, for whose erection he had been more or less directly responsible. Early in the sixties he started the Metropolitan Tabernacle Loan and Building Fund so that loans free of interest could be made to the causes started by his men. At his death this Fund had a capital of £5,118.

This passion for church extension was one of the determining factors in the formation of the London Baptist Association. Spurgeon had visited Yorkshire, where he had witnessed the fine corporate life of the Yorkshire Association. Report states that the Yorkshiremen also treated him to some humorous raillery on the inability of London to maintain an Association. The banter suggested to Spurgeon a means whereby something more might be done for his beloved church extension. What the churches could not do individually they could do collectively, and this united work would bind them in Association bonds more closely than anything else. So he got in touch with his friends, Brock, of Bloomsbury, and Landels, of Regents Park, and the trio instigated the launching of the Association, one of the main objects of which was the erection each year of a church where one had not previously existed. Three resolutions relating to the Association occur in the early minutes:

"30th November, 1865. It was moved by Brother Thomas Olney and seconded by Brother Pope 'That this Church do unite itself with the London Association of Baptist Pastors and Churches and do elect the delegates to represent it upon the Committee of the Association' which was agreed."

"Lord's Day, November 4th, 1866, at Communion Service.

Our pastor stated at one of our previous church meetings that the London Baptist Association has set apart Monday, November 5th, as a Day of fasting and prayer. It is therefore agreed 'That we desire as a church to accept most cordially and unanimously the invitation of our beloved pastor to unite with the London Baptist Association in setting apart to-morrow, Monday, November 5th, as a day of fasting and prayer and we pray that the day may be made memorable by such special nearness to God as we have never before realised and may be the precursor of an enlarged blessing on our own church and the church of Christ at large.'

"23rd January, 1868. Resolved 'That the church rejoices to record the fact that the London Baptist Association, which was first formed in the Tabernacle, and now at the close of the second year of its existence numbers more than 90 churches with about 22,000 members, has been remarkably blessed of God to the promotion of brotherly love and zealous piety in our sister churches. The church rejoices to know that the ministers and delegates partook of its hospitality and requests the deacons to invite the brethren another year.'

For over twenty years Spurgeon gave active assistance to the Association, and unquestionably it had a warm place in his heart. It is pleasant to add that the building policy formulated by him sixty-eight years ago remains the building policy of the Association and never has it been more earnestly followed than in recent years.

III. THE GENIAL "GOVERNOR." The correct noun is difficult to select, although there is no difficulty with the adjective. "Autocrat" or "dictator" would perhaps be too strong, and "leader" or "director" would not sufficiently define Spurgeon's position. So recourse must be had to the name by which he was familiarly known. His word was law, but grace was never far from the law. He was the head of his deacons ("a minister must take the oversight of his deacons"), his elders, his members, his church. "Happy am I to have such deacons," he once said, and among them he had some of the finest and ablest laymen in the denomination. Everything associated with the Tabernacle, the College, the Orphanage and the other Institutions, was so dependent on him that these men of keen spiritual vision and business acumen rejoiced to do his every bidding and to follow him almost unquestioningly. He was in control from the start. He, a youth of twenty, had no fear of Samuel Gale, the denominational lawyer and church treasurer, who had been in membership over fifty-five years and wore silk stockings and knee-breeches, and was, according to Mrs. Spurgeon, "a short,

stout man, whose rotund body, perched on his undraped legs, and clothed in a long-tailed coat, gave him an unmistakable resemblance to a gigantic robin"; nor of James Low, a member of the church over forty years, who had been many years treasurer of the Baptist Union and in 1847 its first lay president; nor indeed of any of his officers. He came to them with modern speech and modern methods. He preached the gospel in the language of his day, not in the language of John Gill's day. He did not accept "an opinion which had been received for a thousand years as necessarily right." He had "no very great veneration for old moss-grown towers; no great respect for mouldy, worm-eaten things, that are good for nothing." The fact that "a thing never used to be done" influenced him not at all. "I think, if anything is right, let us have it; and if it is an invention of our own so much the better, we shall have the honour of it, and shall not have to thank our forefathers for it, but some of those who come after us may thank us." So he was prepared to hold bazaars, to hire music halls for public worship, and to deliver popular lectures in his church building on such subjects as "The Gorilla and the Land He Inhabits," "Candles," and "Illustrious Lord Mayors." Samuel Gale could not stand it; he was an old man with an outlook that was fixed. When the next annual meeting was held on 17th January, 1855, he sent his treasurer's accounts with a letter resigning his office. But he was a Christian and, instead of remaining and becoming a disgruntled critic, he quietly withdrew to the less disturbing ministry of William Brock. "The kindest thing that the good man could have done," wrote Spurgeon some years later.

Spurgeon's unflinching mastery is evident throughout the discussions on increasing the New Park Street premises and building the Tabernacle. The Committee reported to the church meeting on 13th August, 1856, that they "found the subject surrounded with very many grave and serious difficulties principally as to the raising of the requisite funds . . . and unless the church and congregation come forward almost unanimously this undertaking cannot at all be accomplished." But Spurgeon never doubted. His officers might stand appalled, almost overwhelmed, at the audacity of his proposals, but they soon got into step. Thus it continued through all the years. He led, the deacons followed. In later years he rarely attended their meetings as "they bothered him and he had not the patience for differences of opinion." His brother knew his wishes and his brother had the necessary tact to deal with men possessed of one consuming loyalty, but made up of very varied temperaments. Decisions on important issues were usually postponed until the senior pastor's judgment had been obtained.

The deacons could trust Spurgeon implicitly on financial matters. There was no personal greed in him. He was a genius in the raising and disposing of funds. He attracted money but money did not attract him. His congregation gave more for his support than he needed, so he stipulated for a smaller sum; at the deacons' meeting on 17th April, 1867, the deacons discussed the disposal of the surplus on the Agricultural Hall services and, "Mr. Spurgeon agreed to give up any claim to it"; generous people would subscribe handsome amounts for his personal use but, oft-times to their chagrin, they found it impossible to control his interpretation of "personal." He and his deacons thoroughly enjoyed their social fellowship. They appear to have resembled a band of overgrown schoolboys on the visit to Brighton which they took annually for a few years. Their love for their pastor was deepened by his personal interest in them and their families, of which an illustration occurs in the minutes of 5th March, 1876. At the communion service "William Higgs, George Higgs, Charlotte Higgs and Anna Maria Higgs having been previously baptised, were received into full communion." Spurgeon added in his own handwriting, "It is worthy of special note that four children of our beloved deacon, William Higgs, were thus added to the church on one evening, while others of his family have preceded them. As he was the builder of the Tabernacle in which we meet, we rejoice that the Lord there blesses his household."

Before passing from this section one other aspect must be mentioned if the picture is to approach completeness. The minutes are often little more than bare records, but it is possible to discern that Spurgeon was all heart in his judgment of the men around him. He was very slow to believe that his confidence had been misplaced. The facts might be stubborn, but they were judged by his heart, not by his head, with the result that he was very badly let down on two or three occasions. In these matters his brother and his deacons had greater prescience and had he followed their advice he would have saved himself needless worry. He, however, was the "Governor," and there was a point beyond which they did not venture. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that speaking generally Spurgeon was too warm-hearted to be a good judge of men and that, consequently, he could be imposed on by the plausible and be very gravely misled by unwise, small-minded associates. The writer put the point to Dr. Fullerton, who replied, "Spurgeon was not a good judge of men and could be easily deceived by them, except in spiritual matters, where his own spiritual genius gave him great power. He believed in men, was loyal to them, and trusted them."

IV. THE "SUFFERER'S DEGREE." On the 7th March, 1884, Spurgeon wrote to W. Y. Fullerton, "I cannot myself get well, or rise out of the grim dust of pain and woe. . . . I am a woe-begone mortal, yet rejoicing in the Lord. I shall soon be able to take a sufferer's degree surely. Ah me, how little do I learn, and at what a cost!" *A sufferer's degree.* Spurgeon qualified for that degree with honours. He suffered from a malformation from birth, his legs from the thigh to the knee being very short. Moreover, despite a family history of gout, he did not readily learn the need for extreme care in his choice of food. He never had the time nor the inclination to engage in sport other than an occasional game of bowls and the endeavour to ride a horse off which he "could fall in every possible way." The malformation and the gout made robust physical exercise a hopeless proposition, and, as the years passed and responsibilities increased, his life became more and more sedentary. The Surrey Gardens disaster of 1856 seriously undermined his health and left a permanent effect on his mind. His close friend, William Williams, suggested "that his comparatively early death might be in some measure due to the furnace of mental suffering he endured on and after that fearful night." He was ill in the autumn of 1858, and when, on the 24th November, church meetings were resumed after a lapse of three months, the relief of the members was evident in their resolution of "devout and heartfelt thanks for his recovery."

Resolutions and entries relative to his health continue throughout the minutes until the final breakdown in 1891. On the 27th December, 1867, the Deacons thanked Dr. James Palfrey "for his care and attention to our Pastor during his recent illness." On the 17th January, 1875, he wrote a letter to the church which was entered in the minutes. In the course of it he said, "After enduring much intense pain, I am now recovering, and, like a little child, am learning to stand, and to totter from chair to chair. The trial is hot, but does not last long, and there is herein much cause for gratitude. My last two attacks have been of this character. It may be the will of God that I should have many more of these singular seizures, and if so I hope you will have patience with me. I have done all as to diet, abstinence from stimulants, and so on, which could be done, and as the evil still continues, the cause must be elsewhere. We call the evil 'gout' for want of a better word, but it differs widely from the disorder which goes under that name. On the two last occasions I had an unusual pressure of work upon me, and I broke down. My position among you is such that I can just keep on at a medium pace if I have nothing extra, but the extra labour overthrows me. If I were an iron man you should

have my whole strength till the past particle has been worn away, but as I am only dust, you must take from me what I can render, and look for no more. May that service which I can render be accepted of the Lord.

"I now commend you, dear friends, to the Lord's keeping. Nothing will cheer me so much as to hear that God is among you, and this I shall judge of by importunate prayer-meetings, good works of the church systematically and liberally sustained, and converts coming forward to confess their faith in Christ. This last I look for and long for EVERY WEEK. Who is on the Lord's side? Who? Wounded on the battle-field, I raise myself on my arm and cry to those around me, and urge them to espouse my Master's cause, for if we were wounded or dead for His sake all would be gain. By the splendour of redeeming love, I charge each believer to confess his Lord, and live wholly to Him."

This letter is typical of very many, some being available in the *Autobiography* or the *Sword and Trowel*. On the 10th January, 1878, their "sad and weary Pastor" wrote to the Deacons "few of you have any idea of the agonies of mind through which I pass. After the joy of Wednesday night I have been very low and I remain so." A letter to the Deacons nearly ten years later, on the 28th July, 1887, is of particular interest, showing, as it does, his state of health in that crucial year: "I am bound, like Charles II., who apologised for being so long in dying, to make intense apologies for being ill. I do not like it, and I make a very bad hand at it, but I cannot help it. I am mending rapidly, and I hope I may preach on Sunday morning; *but I cannot be sure*. If the pain were to return, I could not preach, any more than I could fly. The pain is so severe, so dreadfully penetrates the pith of my heart, that it drives all the thought out of me. Woe's me! But there is no use in moaning. I doubt not that the Lord, who has made it a delight to work, and has also supplied all the needs of that work to this day, will also make it yet a joy to suffer if thereby I can honour Him in a new way. I am sure it is all right: only please look after my sheep while I am unable to carry either crook or wallet."

Often he entered the pulpit in intense pain and very carefully raised his gouty leg to a chair. He would then proceed with the service oblivious of the physical pain until he returned racked to his vestry. Doubtless those who delight to use modern language would find some high sounding term to denote this condition, but, simply stated, it was the triumph of the spiritual over the physical. It was, indeed, a manifestation of the power of the Grace of God.

SEYMOUR J. PRICE.