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SPURGEON'S INTELLECTUAL QUALITIES

"HONOUR to whom honour is due" is a maxim that commands general assent. Nor can any characteristic be named on which modern illuminism plumes itself more than the catholicity of its palate. It boasts a capacity for appreciating every type of excellence as one of the credentials of its prestige. Such a claim affords a ready test of its pretensions, since it requires a measure of candour and magnanimity to frame a just appraisal of a life-work cast in a very diverse mould from that of its assayer. It was at this point that Dr. Glover failed so lamentably two years ago, when in the course of a markedly partizan retrospect of Nonconformist religious history during the last half-century appearing in *The Times*, and since, we believe, reprinted, he did such grave injustice to the memory of the most conspicuous figure in the roll of his fellow-Baptists. Their cavalier tone did not tend to make his strictures more palatable; in fact, it reminds us forcibly of the bantam spirit of Molière's bluestocking monopolists of polish, when they decree: "Nobody shall have any wit except us and our friends."¹ Mr. Spurgeon's critic assumes on this occasion an Aristophanic vein which is obviously not his *forte*, and draws a caricature of his victim about as like the reality as the Attic comedian's "counterfeit presentment" of Socrates. To vary the image a little, we may say of this performance that it exhibits in effigy a personage highly endeared to Evangelical Christendom, muffled by a "member of the holy office" in the *sanbenito* of a religious obscurantist, doing penance at the shrine of Cantab culture for the adulations accorded him by a cockney mob. Far be it from us to dispute a "Latin orator's" distinction in his own province of scholarship, or his skill in tickling the ears of classical groundlings at *Commencement*. But in the case of this peevish pasquinade the sciolism which he would fain fasten on Spurgeon more truly attaches to the writer himself. *Nil fuit unquam sic impar sibi*, we murmur, and wonder by what ill-hap this great pleader for God "came betwixt the wind and his gentility".

The recent celebration of Spurgeon's centenary has revived interest in his phenomenal career; and it renders a brief survey

¹ *Nul n'aura de l'esprit hors nous et nos amis.—Les Femmes Savantes.*

of his peculiar gifts opportune, were it only as a corrective for the sample of splenetic detraction to which we have alluded. Happily ample material exists for a more equitable award.

I

Envious lampooners early stigmatized him as little better than a rustic greenhorn. Even at that initial stage, however, the allegation was unfounded. For its disproof, it suffices to remark that as a pupil at two schools, one of them an Anglican collegiate foundation, the lad attained an honourable status, especially, be it noted, in mathematics; that a university course was mooted and an ushership easily procured for him, and a theological training all but arranged. Extant evidence shows that by this time our young student had acquired facility in Latin and French and an elementary knowledge of Greek, afterwards notably augmented. The marvel is how, filling as he did, a village pastorate in his teens, and embarking on the gigantic work that lay before him in London ere he was twenty, he ever contrived to amass so much and such various information as he even then possessed. Astronomy, for example, was among his favourite early studies. The first printed sermons betray many tokens of immaturity; they could not do otherwise; yet they exhibit withal a disciplined mind, not working at random, but with lucidity and method, and singularly alert to seize every apposite argument or illustration and turn it to happy account. In contrast with the pulpit of the day, languishing by reason of its fine airs and polysyllabic periods, we meet here with a kindling intensity of soul mated with a strong will and an active intellect, resident in a born speaker whose passionate persuasion of the truth of his message grows during its delivery into a potent engine for persuading the audience before him to embrace it likewise, not as his, but as the very "word of the Lord which endureth for ever". Even at this period, with all its vestiges of boyishness, the germs of his later development exist in embryo. Already we find him resorting to apologue, apostrophe, sententious aphorism; and the characteristic gift of pictorial artistry manifests itself, in conjunction with a transparency of manner and a firm grip on conscience truly marvellous in so juvenile a speaker. In the dissection of human nature he was from the outset no mean adept. One of his choicest talents lay in a power, seldom equalled in the annals of the pulpit, of singling out individuals from the

mass and buttonholing them, as though no one else were present. "Let me introduce you to yourself", he exclaims in one of his earliest discourses; just as long afterwards, addressing a vast congregation, we hear him cry: "Come, young man, step aside and let me have a word with you!" Moreover, the quotations interspersed through these youthful productions bear witness that his lifelong habit of reading had then been definitely formed. With Shakespeare and Milton he appears peculiarly familiar, and Rutherford and Herbert are already favourites.

We need not recount how the astonishing popularity of the precocious youngster crowded the congregation out of their own chapel into Exeter Hall, and, when the Strand in turn became blocked by waiting throngs, to the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, the largest available building south of the Thames. The fatal panic on that spot in the autumn of 1856 almost unhinged the young preacher's reason, as well it might! Yet by God's help he weathered that fell cyclone, and all the torrent of slander and abuse subsequently rained upon his devoted head by what Carlyle styles "the devil's elect", stung to frenzy by the inroads of this David *redivivus* on the kingdom of darkness. A wondrous campaign in sooth it was for such a stripling to wage in the name of the Lord of Hosts, aggressive, telling, victorious. Ere the attainment of his majority we find him holding an enormous crowd of hearers captive in Hackney Fields, and a year later discoursing at the Crystal Palace on the national fast-day appointed for the Indian Mutiny to no less than 23,654 souls. In Wales and elsewhere audiences of tremendous size gathered to hear a new Whitfield. He might have said with Byron: "I awoke one morning and found myself famous." For before he was twenty-five years of age the *American Methodist Quarterly* describes him as "the best known preacher of the day, a household word in Europe and the U.S.A." and pronounces him the greatest living "stormer of the human heart". The fact that he was not thrown off his balance by the extraordinary notoriety he won at a stride furnishes signal proof how the grace of God can ballast a young soldier of the cross amid scenes of intensest excitement and nerve-racking stress and strain. Wherever he went in those amazingly strenuous days of his unimpaired physical vigour, Spurgeon's trumpet-like tones and clear-cut sentences enchained attention, and the slain of the Lord were many. Never had a gospel preacher reached so cosmopolitan

an auditory as the readers of his sermons grew to be. Besides a very large circulation in the States, their reproduction as costly advertisements for years in the *Australasian* newspaper carried them to thousands of stragglers in the bush, from many of whom testimonies of permanent blessing came to hand. Translations into various European and Asiatic tongues opened to him yet another constituency. Can anyone ponder these indisputable facts without recognizing both his signal endowments for his task, and the presence of a supernatural Helper with him? Here were a Divine and a human workman co-operant.

This celebrity in spite of himself (for his personal appearance was decidedly against him) took his unsought laurels with sturdy self-command, yet comparative meekness. There were seasons when his extraordinary influence over crowds drove him perforce to his knees, and wellnigh crushed his naturally buoyant spirit. But he went on his way unscathed by frowns or smiles; for he strove conscientiously to give God the glory of His grace; and so the Lord honoured His honourer right royally.

Spurgeon made mistakes doubtless and committed indiscretions and extravagances in those days, albeit his presence of mind was superb, and his sagacity beyond his years; but no veteran in the holy warfare could have shown more jealousy than he of self-aggrandizement. Living in the public eye as he did, he trod that temptation most resolutely underfoot. The peril of the pinnacle never ceased to haunt his thoughts. "I would not cross the street to hear myself preach", he once observed; and among his latest protestations we read: "*C.H.S.*: away with him! *I.H.S.*: let that dear name be glorified for ever!"

II

In reviewing his outstanding characteristics we are disposed to place his *aptitude to learn* in the forefront. During the scantiest of leisure hours he found time to strengthen his hold on Greek and acquire a running acquaintance with Hebrew. Take a typical volume of his Sermons (XXIII), when he had attained the maturity of his powers. Here are sixty sermons, preached in the ordinary course of his ministry, in which there are at least a dozen instances of Greek criticism unobtrusively introduced, evincing an average quantum of scholarship by no means scio-istic. Elsewhere a few examples even of textual criticism may be found embedded in his later discourses. His was, moreover,

a judgment that reacted on all it read, not merely an absorbent of pabulum but a ruminant understanding. Dr. William Wright, the Superintendent at the time of the British and Foreign Bible Society, testifies to the thoroughness of Spurgeon's mastery of whatsoever he studied; and furnishes this striking illustration, taken from his declining days. When Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* was fresh from the press he called on Spurgeon and they compared notes together. A third party present challenged the correctness of the preacher's apprehension of certain details; whereupon Spurgeon proceeded to cite a whole paragraph *verbatim* from memory in vindication of the criticism he had just passed upon it. (Yet the speed at which he could read was like that of a stenographer.) Dr. Wright, himself an Oriental scholar of standing, subjoins: "He had a mind that absorbed all knowledge from books or nature that came within its range." Such a *finis* goes far to explain the frontispiece of a life woven of one texture throughout.

To this generation of course he can be known only through his printed works. These, except the *Treasury of David*, were thrown off at full speed, *hot-foot*, to borrow one of his own archaic phrases. The weekly sermons, perfectly extemporaneous in delivery, had usually to be corrected for the press the next day after their utterance. Yet all of them exhibit a trained judgment and careful articulation of parts, whilst some are highly finished productions, couched in the raciest and most luminous English. Can an ambiguous sentence be produced from all the mass of his handiwork? Certainly no statement unelucidated by its context. The growth of the speaker's powers from less to more may be traced in these animated pages; for "to him that *bath* shall be given". An unsparing censor among his early hearers remitted him a sheaf of critical suggestions week by week. That was beneficial, no doubt; but his own robust good sense and sanctified instincts were his best human mentors. Some minds depend for all their acquirements on formal tuition; others can explore broad tracts of knowledge for themselves. Spurgeon belonged to the latter class. To quote one of his favourite proverbs, "An ounce of mother-wit excels a pound of clergy."

We propose to vindicate his memory against small-minded cavillers mainly by letting him speak for himself; for his own text, set in a slight framework of commentary, will best rebut the insinuation of incompetence. But we cannot quite ignore

one asset, moral rather than mental, which he possessed in a pre-eminent degree, and of which his plain-spoken Anglo-Saxon style might be viewed as the index. That was his *downright straightforwardness*. "Speak from my soul I do," he exclaims. For this reason perhaps more than any other the common people heard him gladly. "I speak out what I know of God's truth in such words as come to hand" is his own description of his method of discourse. It often resembles a man thinking aloud. It was as the frank and fearless exponent of his inmost convictions, no adroit sail-trimmer nor cringer to the spirit of the age, but old Honesty personified, that he won and retained the esteem of honest hearts. Professor Ferrier's well known comment on his preaching: "This sits very close to reality", was the impression produced alike by his mien and matter. Artificiality was his *bête noire*, and the scheming policy so idolized by ecclesiastical trimmers and tricksters his abhorrence. That does not imply that in his hatred of shams he neglected elocution, of which he was a master. Even Matthew Arnold the Supercilious, when he heard Spurgeon lecture on George Fox, with all his captiousness, was forced to own that it was a "study in the way of speaking and management of the voice". There was nothing uncouth in *that*, at any rate.

III

Turning to more purely mental traits, we remark as one of the most arresting, the *point and pungency* with which his writings teem. He was far too deeply in earnest to sacrifice truth to epigrammatic glitter; yet hundreds of such piquant comments on, or generalizations from, the topic in hand, struck out like sparks from an anvil in the heat of the moment, illuminate his public utterances. His strong sense of humour, as he tells us, he kept under bit and bridle in pulpit ministrations; but these pithy brevities must have been keenly relished by every discerning hearer. We cull a handful of them by way of specimen. Some are intellectual brilliants of no slight worth.

1. It is God's prerogative to *be*. He is real; all else is shadowy.
2. The proper study of mankind is—God.
3. Faith is reason at rest in God.
4. Eternal love borrows no fuel from without; it is a flame enfolding itself.
5. The man who can say *My God* is a match for death and hell.
6. Faith is the missing link between the soul and God.
7. Justification by faith is the Thermopylae of Christianity.

8. The acceptance of our Representative is our acceptance.
9. The High Street of the Gospel runs crosswise.
10. Man's holiness is much ado about nothing.
11. Sin that deserves pardon is no sin.
12. We have to pass through no quarantine before forgiveness.
13. What you are going to be will make no atonement for what you have been.
14. The ethical influence of Christ's atonement is its shadow, the expiation its substance ; but if you remove the substance, the shadow will vanish.
15. Salvation must be sued for *in forma pauperis*.
16. See that what you believe is worth believing.
17. If your religion has not changed you, change your religion.
18. Whoever your master, you are changing into his image.
19. If any man invented the character of Christ, I will worship him ; for he must be divine.
20. When the bride begins to criticize the Bridegroom, love is at an end.
21. He who rent the veil of the temple has ended the priest's business.
22. We have too much respect for the Virgin to worship her.
23. Big as men count themselves, they all trace up their line to a gardener who lost his place for stealing his Master's fruit.
24. *Do, do, do*, generally ends in nothing being done.
25. The chief want of this age is want of principle.
26. Blood is the mysterious link between matter and spirit.
27. Pantheism is atheism wearing a fig-leaf.
28. The living epistles are the same all the world over ; their binding only differs.
29. Affliction cuts the facets of the Lord's diamonds.
30. If your prayer reaches to heaven it is long enough.

IV

Some of these *disiecta membra* suffer by detachment from their context ; for Spurgeon's workmanship always bears the impress of consecutive thinking. But a still more salient feature in his equipment for his task consisted in the *affluence of his imagery*. In the discovery of resemblances he outstrips all competitors. No observant reader can overlook the abundance of his stores of metaphor and analogy. Not only does he levy large imposts on history and the arts, but lays the whole realm of nature under tribute. Others may labour a simile at length ; as a rule, he prefers (like Burke) to distil its essence into a pregnant phrase or sentence. When he pleases, however, he can expand a figure with rare fertility of invention throughout an entire address. Among such descants on a given theme might be mentioned the sermons on *The Cedars of Lebanon* (No. 529), *There go the Ships* (No. 1,259), or on *Christ the Destroyer of Death*

(No. 1,329). The wealth of his fancy in such moods, the mastery of his management of his symbolism and the Bunyan-like dexterity with which he can bit the mouth of an allegory, must be studied to be appreciated. We were about to say that he thinks best in pictorial emblems,

Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones and *lore* in everything.

Take the following instances out of thousands strewn over his pages with a lavish hand, and mark the presence of that subtle witchery of diction termed *style*, the true "gait of the mind".

1. God alone is from everlasting. We talk of the eternal hills; but in His presence they are babes that were born yesterday. We say: "Roll on, thou ancient ocean"! but the ocean is not ancient; it is a drop just fallen from the tip of the Creator's finger.

2. The Lord guides the grain of dust in the March wind and the comet in its immeasurable pathway. He steers each drop of spray that is beaten back from the face of the rock and He guides Arcturus with his sons.

3. I have seen a little plant beneath an oak tree sheltered from the storm and wind and rain, happy to be screened; but I have seen the woodman come with his axe, and fell the oak; and the little plant has trembled because its protection was removed. "Alas for me!" it cried; "the hot sun will scorch me, the driving rain drown me, the fierce wind tear me up by the roots." But lo! the shelter being removed, it has breathed freer air, drunk more of heaven's dews, received fuller light from the sun and borne flowers which else had never bloomed.

4. The words of Jesus never become threadbare. You may ring the changes on them and never exhaust their music. You may beat them in the mortar of contemplation with the pestle of criticism, and their perfume shall only become the more apparent. When loitering upon the *Lido* off Venice and listening to the sound of the city's bells I thought the music charming as it floated across the lagoon; but when I returned to the city and sat down in the midst of all the bells, the charming sounds were transformed into a maddening din; not the slightest melody could I detect in any one noisemaker and harmony among the whole company was out of the question. Distance had lent enchantment to the sound. How few of the utterances of poets or orators bear minute investigation! Their belfry rings passably, but one would soon weary of each single bell. It is never so with the divine words of Jesus. You hear them ringing from afar and they are sweetness itself. When you roamed at midnight like a traveller lost on the wilds, how they called you home! But now that you have reached the house of mercy, you sit and listen to each distinct note of love's perfect peal and feel that even angelic harps cannot excel it.

5. The instrument does not comprehend the tuner who fetches harsh sounds from its disordered strings. But all these jarring notes are necessary to the harmonious condition which he is aiming to produce. If the discords were not discovered now, the music of the future would be marred.

6. There was a door through which I hoped to enter into life. I had spent much pains on painting it. It seemed to me to have a golden knocker, a marble threshold and posts and lintels of mahogany, and I thought it was the very door of life for me. But now what do I see? I see a great black cross adown it, and over it written: "Lord, have mercy upon us!" That door was the door of my good works; but now I cry: "God have mercy on my good works"! The death of legal hope it is that ushers in salvation. Let legal hope be swung up as a traitor!

7. An English ship of the olden times is cruising the ocean, and she spies a Spanish galleon in the distance laden with gold from the Indies. Captain and men are determined to overtake and capture her, for they have a relish for prize-money; but their vessel sails heavily. What then? They fling into the sea everything they can lay their hands on, knowing that if they can board the Spaniard the booty will make amends for all they lose and vastly more. So is it with the man who is in earnest to win Christ and be found in Him.

8. Once on a time Light said to Darkness: "I am growing weary of shooting my arrows at thee every morning, weary of pursuing thee round the globe continually. I will retire if thou wilt." But Darkness replied, "Nay, of necessity if thou yieldest thy dominion I shall take it. There can be no truce between me and thee."

9. All hell was distilled into that cup of which the Redeemer drank. The woe that broke over the Saviour's spirit, the fathomless ocean of anguish which dashed over His soul when He died, is so inconceivable that the very spray from that tempestuous deep baptized Him in a bloody sweat. Even standing on the shore, as He heard the awful surf of wrath breaking at His feet, He was sore amazed and very heavy.

10. You have a tame leopard in your house and are warned that it is a dangerous creature to sport with. But its coat is so sleek and its gambols so gentle that you let it play with the children as if it were the domesticated cat. Alas! one black and terrible day it tastes blood and rends in pieces your favourite child. Then you need no further warning; it has condemned itself. So we thought sin such a fair thing that it could not be our deadly enemy; but when sin leaped upon the altogether lovely, and gloated like a ravenous wolf in His slaughter, it stood condemned indeed. (Image borrowed from the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus?)

11. Beware of a seared conscience. Like a pond in winter, a very thin scale of ice may be formed at first on it, but afterwards the surface becomes hard enough to bear half a town.

12. Do not try to grow the hyacinth of love without the bulb of faith.

13. We bathe our wounds in the lotion of prayer and the pain is lulled.

14. The Divine Artist takes us, poor smudges of paint that we are, and makes the blessed pictures of His grace out of us, and it is His own skill that does it all.

15. In our Lord's life there is no break. The unities are observed in His grand career; it is like His garment, without seam.

16. My Lord is a rare confection of all perfections, the meeting of all sweetnesses to make up one perfect sweet.

17. Sometimes God sinks wells of trouble and puts His servants into them, that they may see His starry promises.

18. There are theologies abroad which magnify man; they give him a finger in his own salvation and so leave him a reason for throwing up his cap and crying: "Well done I!" But covenant theology sets man aside, making him a debtor and receiver.

19. Sinner, the great guns of the Law, charged to the muzzle, are all pointed at thee! They do but wait the fatal moment when the uplifted finger of justice shall bid them be discharged; and where wilt thou be then?

20. Did you ever light upon a clump of lovely flowers right away in a lone spot of forest, where the foot of man has seldom profaned the soil? Have you not paused to admire? There they stand with their golden cups like a king's chamberlains! Why are they here in such gorgeous livery? Whom is all this beautiful variety of form and colour intended to greet? "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." What king has come to sip from these jewelled chalices? It is the Eternal God who delights in the work of His hands; He it is who walks among

these solitary beauties in the cool of the day. Did you not see the flowerets bow their heads in worship as they felt His breath among their foliage? Down deep at the bottom of the sea the coral grows in luxuriant abundance, and many-tinted shells that seem like unfinished rainbows are lying there unseen, never to be seized by human hands or bartered in the market for gain. The Lord visits those cool grots and takes pleasure in His own delicate handiwork. *All things are not for greedy man*: the Lord hath His gardens reserved, His springs shut up, His fountains sealed.

Surely a master of the cadences of rhythmical English prose stands revealed in some of these extracts.

V

“God fits the man for the place and the place for the man,” said C.H.S. in reference to John Wyclif; “there is an hour for the voice and a voice for the hour.” This language might not inaptly be applied to himself. If he owed comparatively little to human tuition, the Lord trained him in His own school of grace; and that private curriculum qualified him for the publicity which he could not abjure. *Preaching the Word* was his ruling passion. All his faculties roused themselves for that task. The fundamentals of the faith formed his inexhaustible theme, nor did he crave any other; but to the danger of monotony he was fully alive, and variation of treatment and aspect were constituent elements in his ideal of a full-orbed ministry. Now he discourses doctrinally, now experimentally, now evangelistically, more rarely in an evidential, not seldom in an argumentative strain. Some of his sermons are a series of pictures, others may be classed with meditations. All of them are the utterances of a staunch believer and passionate lover of the Bible. He might have said with Wesley: “Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be a man of one book.” That was the language of an Oxford Fellow, conversant with letters; nor would Spurgeon (who tells his students: “You cannot learn too much if you salt your learning with grace”) have construed the proposition in any more restricted sense than the founder of Methodism. And both men alike would have endorsed the noble sentiment of Archbishop Thomson: “I will take the ripest clusters of every vintage to cast them into the winepress which Christ trod. I will make the Christian scheme the ground-plan on which my mind shall be built.”

Professor Machen has pronounced modernism an anti-intellectual movement, and supplied good warrant for his criticism. Spurgeon’s stable faith on the other hand contained

an intellectual element which could furnish a reason for its unshaken confidence. He boldly remarks : " Religion should be a matter of intellect as well as affection, and a man's understanding should always be able to justify the strongest possible passion of his soul." We venture to say that there is more sound reasoning on given premisses in Spurgeon's regular ministry than can be found in all the witty inventions of " advanced thought ". As a fisher of men he knows better than to angle without bait, and rational inducements and sustained expostulations are among his most effective lures. He appeals less to the emotions than the reason, though he can play on every chord of the heart with remarkable skill. Mighty were his gifts of persuasion. The whole man seemed to gather himself up for the task of grappling hand to hand with the sinner. " I wish I could devise some mode of speech ", he cries, " whereby I could thrust my hand into your hearts." The unflagging zeal and expert strategy of his pursuit of souls has never been surpassed. And how whole-hearted was the quest ! " If the preacher's interment in the grave could bring you to the Saviour ", he says, " it were a cheap price to pay." How strong, too, his conviction that he should not labour in vain ! He ever reckoned on reaping. His unique Gospel *must* produce unique results. How few could echo his own grateful acknowledgment : " My life has been *one long harvest home* " ! Those thousands of spiritual children he bore constitute his supreme vindication against " the enemy in the gate ".

We remark in him a happy wedlock of qualities frequently divorced, *vehement impetus* and *great sanity of judgment*. Who is not aware of his devoted attachment to the doctrines of grace ? Yet what modern preacher has dwelt more insistently on the topic of human accountability ? His declarations again on such vexed questions as unfulfilled prophecy or Biblical chronology are eminently sober. Independence of human, submission to Divine, propositions, was his characteristic attitude. " We count ourselves amenable to God and the text." But humility and good sense, as well as the grace of God, caused him ever to retain that measure of deference for the consensus of evangelical testimony which the spirit of caste and self-esteem inherent in modernism prompts it to discard and deride.

His Calvinism never encouraged sloth, but inspired tireless activity. Possessed of the true catholicism for human ills, he

proffered it to all, despairing of no outcast within call. "When the gates of respectability are shut, the gate of mercy is still open." Nor could sanctified ingenuity make the plan of salvation plainer than he did. "The Lord Jesus came into the world to provide a way by which, without dishonour to Divine justice, sin may be forgiven. That way is substitution. Christ stood in the sinner's stead and bore the wrath of God for sinners. For all sinners? Nay, but for such as will trust Him. I then being guilty come and trust Him. I see good reason for doing so. He is God, and appointed by God to be a Propitiation for sin. What God appoints and delights in I may confidently accept. I do accept Him; I now trust my soul with Jesus. Then I am saved. My sin has gone, my iniquity ceased to be."

Mark the syllogistic process of this exposition. The doctrine of particular redemption figures in one sentence; but Spurgeon asserts with equal firmness the boundless intrinsic merit of Christ's sacrifice. "My plummet finds no bottom here, my eye discovers no shore. Once admit infinity into the matter and limit is out of the question. The Divine purpose fixes the application of the infinite offering, but does not change it into a finite work." There is no lack of mental acumen, no bare smattering of divinity, legible here.

However displacent to dainty tastes, the note of warning as well as wooing, of alarm as well as attraction, was not absent from this great soul-winner's course of instruction, any more than from his Master's. The most bloodcurdling story I know is the narrative of the fatal bite inflicted by a cobra at the Zoological Gardens on a tipsy keeper, who insisted on tampering with the venomous reptile (*The Brazen Serpent*, No. 1,500). It forms a lurid background to the lifting up of the Son of Man as the Healer of sin's snake-bite. Told dramatically as Spurgeon alone could tell it, it must have made every ear tingle.

Adequate proof of the vigour and versatility of his faculties has already been adduced; yet perhaps it is well to append one example of his *logical powers*. His innate sense of fitness deterred him, as a rule, from indulging such a vein in popular addresses. Here is an exception. He is rebutting the common religious fallacy that moral ability invariably limits moral obligation, contending that belief in the name of the Son of God is our duty, because it is commanded.

“ I know that there are some who will deny this upon the ground that man has not the spiritual ability to believe in Jesus ; to which I reply that it is altogether an error to suppose that the measure of the sinner's ability is the measure of his duty. There are many things which men ought to do which they have now lost the spiritual, though not the physical, power to perform. A man ought to be chaste ; but if he has been so long immoral that he cannot restrain his passions, he is not thereby freed from the obligation. A debtor should pay his debts ; but if he has been such a spendthrift that he has brought himself to hopeless poverty, he is not exonerated from his debts thereby. Every man ought to believe what is true ; but if his mind has become so depraved that he loves a lie, is he therefore excused ? If the Law of God is to be lowered to the moral condition of the culprit, you would have a law graduated on a sliding scale to suit the gradations of human sinfulness, and the worst man would be under the least law and become the least guilty. God's requirements being made a variable quantity, we should in truth be under no law at all. When the Lord ‘ commands all men everywhere to repent ’, they are bound to repent, whether their sinfulness renders it impossible for them to be willing to do so or not. In every case it is man's duty to do what God bids him.”

Spurgeon's firm grasp of the doctrine of Christ's person and its implications evinces the same intellectual perspicacity. Robertson Nicoll was not far out when he averred that “ the church does not yet know what a great saint *and doctor* she possessed in Mr. Spurgeon.” If he declined the title of *reverend* he possessed the essentials of the character it embodies.

VI

Finally, let us emphasize the *literary distinction* of his best handiwork. Many of the introductions to his sermons are models of lucid composition and marvels of ingenuity in leading up to the subject in hand. Some learned doctors write miserably piebald English ; their stream is *drumly* enough. But this “ untutored genius ” draws from a wellspring undefiled, limpid as the liquid current of a Highland burn. “ I have never cultivated the arts of eloquence or exhibited the elegancies of language,” he remarks ; yet he can strike a *high oratorical note* on occasion, and our study of his gifts would be incomplete without a couple of samples in this line of things.

1. *The Church's Invulnerability.* The doctrine that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners is no more to be wounded by the sword of persecution than the ocean to be scarred by the keel of navies. When winds may be manacled, when waves may be fettered, when clouds may be shut up in dungeons, then (nay, not even then!) may the Word of God be bound. The free spirit of the cross of Christ cannot be vanquished by armies nor can legions tread it down. If our devotion hovered round an earthly shrine, and could only be presented by a certain order of men robed in a peculiar garb and chanting a peculiar ritual, then the truth might be put down for a while, if not extinguished; but we depend on none of these things. We can worship God in barns as well as in basilicas, in catacombs as well as cathedrals; ploughmen and paupers are as much priests unto Him as presbyters or prelates; and solemn silence may yield as true praise as the voices of the sons of music with all their pipes and organs.

2. *Worthy the Lamb.* Jesus is a thousand times more worthy of my love than I can express. He is worthy of all the songs of the sweetest singers, worthy of all the poetry of the best writers, worthy to be adored by all that are in the earth and under the earth and in the sea and in the heavens and the heaven of heavens. We say *worthy* because we cannot utter how worthy. If I had fifty thousand lives in this poor body He is worthy that they should all be poured out for Him in martyrdom. One should be burned alive and another broken on the wheel and another starved by inches and another dragged at the heels of wild horses, and He would deserve them all. If we had all the mines of India, silver and gold and gems, the rarest treasures of all the kings that ever lived, and were to give it all up to Him and go barefoot, He is worthy of that. Worthy! I would make every drop of dew sparkle with His glory, every leaf of the forest bear His name; I would make every dell and mountain vocal with adoration, and teach the stars, and the angels above the stars, His praise. Let Time and Space become one mouth for song and all eternity sound forth that mighty word: *He is worthy!*

We are greatly mistaken if the stamp of the truest oratory, that eloquence which overflows from the heart to the lips, be not graven on passages like these.

C. H. Spurgeon fell asleep in January 1892, at the age of fifty-seven. As the French say of tireless workers, the blade wore out the scabbard. He spent himself to the utmost margin of his strength in his Lord's service, and thus, humanly speaking, shortened his days. In the flower of youth we find him prepared for such an act of self-sacrifice. "I know a man who, when he feels that God has given him a work to do, would sooner break his heart or destroy his health than fail in it." The language was almost prophetic; for his labours were unquestionably excessive. Grievous, in consequence, became the inroads of sickness on his physical stamina, as the years rolled by. His faith abode the trial of the furnace as well as the paean of acclaim; for it was an integral part of his being. But the elasticity of former days waned and his sentences grew more short-breathed and his flights less soaring towards the end. The earthly tabernacle was clearly dissolving; and the spiritual degeneracy of the Nonconformity he loved so well weighed heavily upon his soul.

He himself belonged to the old race of thoroughbreds, and *fin de siècle* mongrelism he could not well brook. As long as he could he held his peace; but the *Downgrade Controversy* was inevitable; for the cleavage between the critical libertines and the heralds of Christ crucified went down to the foundations.

The unkindest cut of all in Dr. Glover's diatribe consisted in the suggestion that the paroxysms of gout which Spurgeon latterly endured might be charitably regarded as an extenuation of the part he played in this conflict. By parity of assumption, did not good taste forbid, it would be easy to plead (or affect to plead) on Dr. Glover's behalf that his article bears internal evidence of having been written when he was chafed by hepatic or neural perturbations. The Satanic factor lugged in by Dr. Glover must be a hoax from the father of lies! It so happens however that the other taunt was hurled at Spurgeon at the time by unfeeling opponents, and he himself has dealt with it, denying the connection assumed *in toto*, and rebuking its discourtesy, none the less flagrant for being varnished with a semblance of pity for the sufferer. These parties made the living man, who could defend himself, their target. But is it less unchivalrous to reaffix the stigma of exacerbation on the honoured dead? *Non dee guerra co' morti aver chi vive*, sings the Crusaders' bard. Nor was Dr. Glover's war-whoop, or shall we style it *jihad*? consonant even with "classical music"; for the injunction "crow not over the dead!"¹ is one that may be traced all the way from Homer to Lucian.

In truth, Spurgeon on this occasion was just the man without a mask he had ever been, by no means to be hoodwinked. Nobody was more warmly attached than he to the denomination of his choice, for whose spread he had done more than any man living, and which he had been wont to view as a bulwark of evangelical belief, well nigh impermeable by treasonable practices. But he was also aware that, so long as the Baptist Union made immersion its sole basis of fellowship, it was like a pyramid erected on its apex. According to its constitution, there was no heterodoxy but the denial of the Baptists' distinctive rite. A credal basis might have seemed superfluous in days of vigilant and deep-rooted orthodoxy; but the anomaly needed amendment when the historical Christian faith was being widely assailed and anti-Scriptural speculation gaining ground. Zeal

¹ ἐπὶ τοῖς κειμένοις μὴ ἐπεύχου.

for the baptistry or for denominational prestige had no business to take rank above the essentials of the Gospel, without agreement in which baptismal accord was a sheer farce. Spurgeon therefore advocated their adoption of the doctrinal basis professed by the Evangelical Alliance. (The Congregational Union had started with such a declaration of faith, and reaffirmed its creed, on challenge, in 1878.) The Union's refusal to show its colours (other than water-colours!) came as a painful shock to him. *Credophobia* (to borrow a hybrid but convenient coinage) was no foible of his; and, identifying baptism, as he did, with confession of faith, he counted it least of all befitting in Baptists. Transparent as daylight himself, he had always avowed his convictions as a matter of course, an act of loyalty to his Lord. He did so now by withdrawing from a body which, despite its large orthodox element, *to the orthodox believer of other communions at least*, by its syncretist policy reduced itself to an association of parties doctrinally ductile, dogmatical on dipping alone. As to the parting kick the "long-suffering Union" bestowed on Spurgeon in the shape of a "vote of censure", that seemed to most people to savour rather of the mule genus than of the sheep! That, however, is not our business, nor the halfway compromise that ensued, without remedying the mischief.

Our concern in the conflict, which wounded Spurgeon, alas! so lethally, lies in its wider ramifications. Well did he observe: "It is not with this man or that union that lovers of the old Gospel are at war at present, but with the general body of unbelief which is now attempting to borrow the Christian name and effect a settlement in Christian territory." He adds: "For my part I am willing to be eaten of dogs for the next fifty years; yet the more distant future shall vindicate me." Nor has his prediction that the anti-Evangelicals would ere long concert schemes for ousting the true nestlings failed of fulfilment in all manner of quarters, far and near.

By the grace of God this Essex lad was enabled to cut out his own niche in the temple of honour and to fill it right worthily, till his name became almost a household word wherever the English tongue was spoken. At once a Puritan born out of due time and a pioneer abreast of his age, he was cast in his own peculiar mould; and when the Lord took him home, none could be found to fill his place. Ulysses's bow none save Ulysses could draw. A man's uniqueness stands confessed when he leaves no

successor. Above all else Spurgeon was a knight-errant for Christ, to please whom was his absorbing passion, the supreme preoccupation of his life. "To sit at Jesus' feet in quiet rest," he sweetly says, "He the Master and I the little child, I the vessel waiting to be filled and He my Fulness, I the mown grass and He the falling Dew, I the raindrop and He the Sun that makes me glisten—that is all-in-all to me."

Such a single-eyed disciple, jealous for his Master's honour far more than for his own, will be sure to be misread by your religious diplomat or "Facing-both-ways". The ignoble army of nondescripts cannot scorn C.H.S. more than he scorned their policy and watchwords. "God save us", he cries, "from the men of willow and guttapercha and plaster of Paris, a dear bargain at a shilling a dozen. Take them away, O Father Time, and give us back men of granite, men of backbone, say rather, men of God."

Such was his own type. For the appreciation of this kind of Greatheart a certain affinity of soul appears requisite. The minimal Christianity at present dominant has its own stock of idols, fashioned in its own flimsy image; for its vaunted breadth can appreciate nothing save its own features. Yet there remain in our midst sympathizers with Spurgeon's Biblical Christianity who will thank us for laying this tribute on his altar of witness. We set him up on no pedestal above human failings; nor would he have sanctioned such an act one moment. There are minor matters in which we should positively dissent from his findings. But these are as the dust of the balance when weighed against the admiration we cherish for that unsullied escutcheon which he bore so bravely to the last, for that unfaltering hold of evangelical truth which he displayed through good and evil report, and for the wholeheartedness of his devotion to his exalted Lord, for whose sake he breathed and toiled incessantly, and in whose encircling arms he sank to rest, after spending his last ounce of ebbing strength in the service of Immanuel, "Perfection's Self", as he once glowingly described Him, alike his and heaven's Well-beloved. God be praised for John Ploughman's straight furrow!

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