

CHRISTIAN HISTORY



Long before the Megachurch,
Nearly 6,000 People Crowded
Every Service to Hear

**Charles Haddon
SPURGEON**

C. H. Spurgeon

**In an Age of Great Preachers,
Why Did He Rise above Them All?**

Did You Know?

ERIC W. HAYDEN

A collection of true and unusual facts about Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Charles Haddon Spurgeon is history's most widely read preacher (apart from the biblical ones). Today, there is available more material written by Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, living or dead.

One woman was converted through reading a single page of one of Spurgeon's sermons wrapped around some butter she had bought.

Spurgeon read *The Pilgrim's Progress* at age 6 and went on to read it over 100 times.

The New Park Street Pulpit and *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*—the collected sermons of Spurgeon during his ministry with that congregation—fill 63 volumes. The sermons' 20–25 million words are equivalent to the 27 volumes of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The series stands as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity.



Spurgeon's mother had 17 children, nine of whom died in infancy.

When Charles Spurgeon was only 10 years old, a visiting missionary, Richard Knill, said that the young Spurgeon would one day preach the gospel to thousands and would preach in Rowland Hill's chapel, the largest Dissenting church in London. His words were fulfilled.

Spurgeon missed being admitted to college because a servant girl inadvertently showed him into a different room than that of the principal who was waiting to interview him. (Later, he determined not to reapply for admission when he believed God spoke to him, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not!")

Spurgeon's personal library contained 12,000 volumes—1,000 printed before 1700. (The library, 5,103 volumes at the time of its auction, is now housed at William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri.)

Before he was 20, Spurgeon had preached over 600 times.

Spurgeon drew to his services Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone, members of the royal family, Members of Parliament, as well as author John Ruskin, Florence Nightingale, and General James Garfield, later president of the United States.

The New Park Street Church invited Spurgeon to come for a 6-month trial period, but Spurgeon asked to come for only 3 months because "the congregation might not want me, and I do not wish to be a hindrance."

A caricature of Spurgeon (shown preaching in the Metropolitan Tabernacle's "crow's nest") from the December 10, 1870, edition of *Vanity Fair*. The drawing was number 16 in the magazine's "Men of the Day" series. The accompanying text described Spurgeon as "honest, resolute, and sincere; lively, entertaining, and, when he pleases, jocose."

When Spurgeon arrived at The New Park Street Church, in 1854, the congregation had 232 members. By the end of his pastorate, 38 years later, that number had increased to 5,311. (Altogether, 14,460 people were added to the church during Spurgeon's tenure.) The church was the largest independent congregation in the world.

Spurgeon typically read 6 books per week and could remember what he had read—and where—even years later.

Spurgeon once addressed an audience of 23,654—without a microphone or any mechanical amplification.

Spurgeon began a pastors' college that trained nearly 900 students during his lifetime—and it continues today.

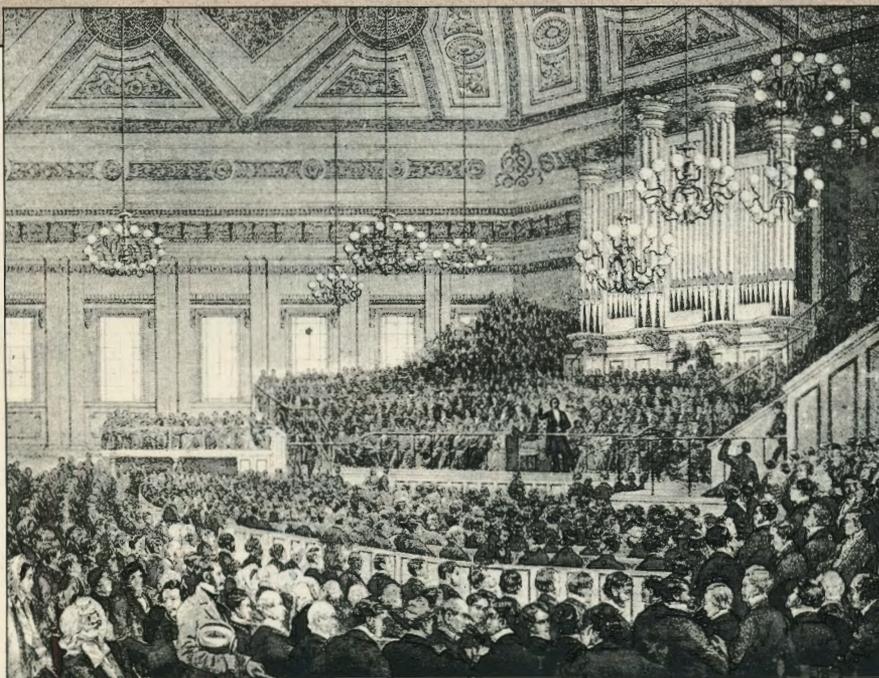
In 1865, Spurgeon's sermons sold 25,000 copies every week. They were translated into more than 20 languages.

At least 3 of Spurgeon's works (including the multi-volume Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit series) have sold more than 1,000,000 copies. One of these, *All of Grace*, was the first book ever published by Moody Press (formerly the Bible Institute Colportage Association) and is still its all-time best-seller.

During his lifetime, Spurgeon is estimated to have preached to 10,000,000 people.

Spurgeon once said he counted 8 sets of thoughts that passed through his mind at the same time while he was preaching.

Testing the acoustics in the vast Agricultural Hall, Spurgeon shouted, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." A worker high in the rafters of the building heard this and became converted to Christ as a result.



Spurgeon preaching in Exeter Hall in London.

Susannah Thompson, Spurgeon's wife, became an invalid at age 33 and could seldom attend her husband's services after that.

Spurgeon spent 20 years studying the Book of Psalms and writing his commentary on them, *The Treasury of David*.

Spurgeon insisted that his congregation's new building, The Metropolitan Tabernacle, employ Greek architecture because the New Testament was written in Greek. This one decision has greatly influenced subsequent church architecture throughout the world.

The theme for Spurgeon's Sunday morning sermon was usually not chosen until Saturday night.

For an average sermon, Spurgeon took no more than one page of notes into the pulpit, yet he spoke at a rate of 140 words per minute for 40 minutes.

The only time that Spurgeon wore clerical garb was when he visited Geneva and preached in Calvin's pulpit.

By accepting some of his many invitations to speak, Spurgeon often preached 10 times in a week.

Spurgeon met often with Hudson Taylor, the well-known missionary to China, and with George Müller, the orphanage founder.

Spurgeon had two children—twin sons—and both became preachers. Thomas succeeded his father as pastor of the Tabernacle, and Charles, Jr., took charge of the orphanage his father had founded.

Spurgeon's wife, Susannah, called him *Tirshatha* (a title used of the Judean governor under the Persian empire), meaning "Your Excellency."

Spurgeon often worked 18 hours a day. Famous explorer and missionary David Livingstone once asked him, "How do you manage to do two men's work in a single day?" Spurgeon replied, "You have forgotten that there are two of us."

Spurgeon spoke out so strongly against slavery that American publishers of his sermons began deleting his remarks on the subject.

Occasionally Spurgeon asked members of his congregation not to attend the next Sunday's service, so that newcomers might find a seat. During one 1879 service, the regular congregation left so that newcomers waiting outside might get in; the building immediately filled again. □

Eric W. Hayden, formerly minister at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, is the author of numerous books on Spurgeon, including Searchlight on Spurgeon (Pilgrim, 1973).

A London street scene, circa 1885, near Spurgeon's church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Conductors of horse-drawn buses in north London used to attract people by calling, "Over the water [Thames River] to [hear] Charlie."



Sleepy Preaching

An old joke says that preaching is the art of talking in other people's sleep. Charles Haddon Spurgeon turned that joke around; he once preached a sermon while *he* slept.

One Saturday night Spurgeon began talking in his sleep. His wife, Susannah, heard the noise and awoke. She realized her husband was preaching, so she listened attentively and in the morning gave her husband a detailed summary. A few hours later, he preached that sermon to his congregation.

To paraphrase the ads, "Seminarrians, don't try this at home."

Marked by vivid word choice, ringing assertions, and sharp, sometimes barbed, wit, Spurgeon's sermons clearly *connected* with his listeners. He told the story, for instance, of meeting a man who identified himself as an agnostic.

"'Oh,' I said to him, 'that is a Greek word, is it not? The Latin word, I believe, is *ignoramus*.'

"He did not like that at all. Yet I only translated his language from Greek to Latin. These are queer waters to get into, when your philosophy brings you only the confession that you know nothing, and enables you to glory in your ignorance."

Even in his own day, Spurgeon was considered the "prince of preachers." A young artist named Vincent Van Gogh preached Spurgeon's sermons in the ghettos of London, with numerous conversions. Missionary David Livingstone carried one of Spurgeon's sermon tracts in his journeys across Africa.

Today, Spurgeon's influence is still felt. Tom Carter, author of *Spurgeon At His Best* (Baker, 1988), wrote recently and said, "Each time I read one of Spurgeon's sermons, I fall in love with preaching all over again. My faith is rescued from the temptation to consider the proclamation of God's truth irrelevant. . . .

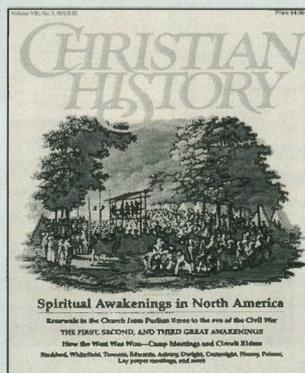
"I'm also challenged to preach biblically. As I read between the lines of these sermons, I hear Spurgeon saying to me, 'As a preacher, your job is not to create your own material. Just discover what God has already said in his Word, and then relay that to your people.' "

This issue of CHRISTIAN HISTORY explores the life and significance of this preaching giant, who continues to awaken preachers and preaching in our day. Even if he could preach with his eyes closed.

MARSHALL SHELLEY, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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Coming in the Next Issue: Readers' responses to the recent issue on "The 100 Most Important Events in Church History."



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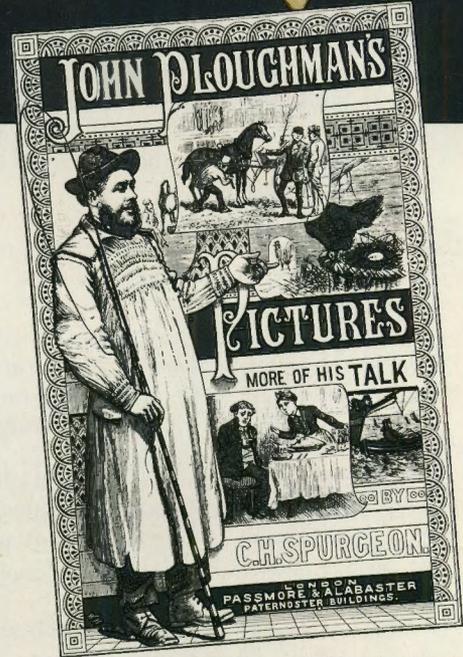
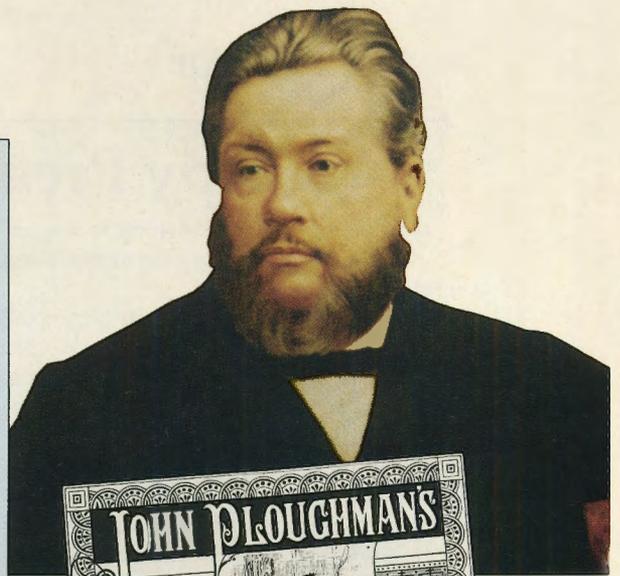
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Spurgeon appears as a farmer on one of his best-selling books—a collection of humorous warnings about debt, drunkenness, and other perils. For a sample of Spurgeon's wisdom and wit, see page 12.



In 1855 Spurgeon began training students who desired to become pastors. His Pastors' College continues today in the building shown above. See page 40.

©1991 CHRISTIAN HISTORY. COVER: An oil painting of Charles Haddon Spurgeon in midlife. Print courtesy of Pilgrim Publications, P. O. Box 66, Pasadena, TX 77501. Color prints, 20" x 24", are available through Pilgrim. PHOTO CREDITS: Unless otherwise noted, all photographs and large initial capitals are from C. H. Spurgeon's *Autobiography*, 4 vols. (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897–1900). The editors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Bob L. Ross. CHRISTIAN HISTORY (ISSN 0891-9666) is published quarterly (February, May, August, November) by Christianity Today, Inc., 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188. SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: Please write to CHRISTIAN HISTORY, P. O. Box 11618, Des Moines, IA 50340; include current address label with all correspondence. For faster service, call toll-free: 1-800-873-6986. LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: Please write to Kevin A. Miller, editor, CHRISTIAN HISTORY, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188. CHRISTIAN HISTORY does not accept unsolicited manuscripts; please send a query letter first. PERMISSIONS: Requests to reprint material should be directed to Mary Ann Jeffreys, editorial coordinator, CHRISTIAN HISTORY, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188. Phone: 1-708-260-6200. REPRINTED 2015.

The Life & Times of Charles H. Spurgeon

PATRICIA STALLINGS KRUPPA

He was the quintessential Victorian Englishman, yet his masterful preaching astonished his era—and lives long beyond it.



William E. Pardee Center for Baptist Historical Studies, William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri.

Next year marks the centennial of the death of the English Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon. When Spurgeon died, in January 1892, London south of the Thames went into mourning. Sixty thousand people came to pay homage during the three days his body lay in state at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. A funeral parade two miles long followed his hearse from the Tabernacle to the cemetery at Upper Norwood. One hundred thousand people stood along the way, flags flew at half-mast, shops and pubs were closed. It was a remarkable demonstration of affection and respect, even in an era when peo-

ple were scrupulous in observing the rituals that accompanied death.

Spurgeon died in the same month as Cardinal Manning and Prince Edward. Newspapers and periodicals observed the coincidence with special issues, bordered in black, featuring the portraits of the three men. Manning, a famous convert and a prince of the Roman Catholic Church; Edward, Duke of Clarence, the dull grandson of Queen Victoria; and Spurgeon, the fiercely anti-Catholic evangelical preacher—they constituted a curious mix, even in the pages of the lachrymose penny press. The Duke lacked character or intelligence but was born to great things. Manning, a man of exceptional abilities and powerful connections, had been marked from an

early age as one destined to achieve power in church or politics. Charles Spurgeon had none of these advantages of privilege, education, or aristocratic connections. He traveled a more difficult road to his position of eminence, and his is the most remarkable story of the three.

Weaned on Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*

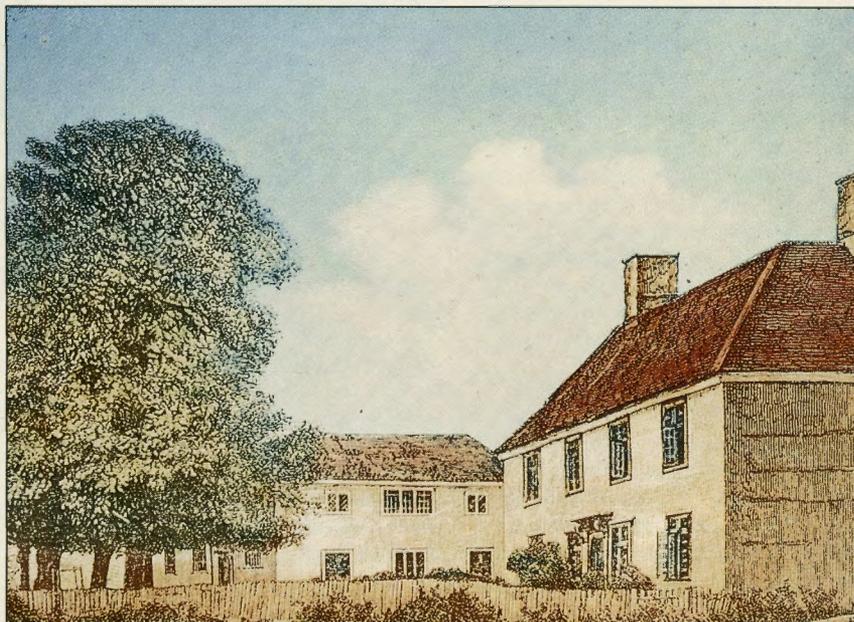
Spurgeon was born in 1834, in Kelvedon, Essex, an area with a long tradition of Protestant resistance dating back to the persecutions of "Bloody Mary" in the sixteenth century. His father, John, and his grandfather, James, were Independent ministers. Like many nineteenth-century Nonconformist ministers, Spurgeon was a "son of the manse." His earliest childhood memo-



J. J. Brown

The house in Kelvedon, Essex, in which Charles Spurgeon was born on July 19, 1834. His father, John, an Independent minister and part-time accountant, moved the family 10 months later, probably because of financial difficulties.

ries were of listening to sermons, learning hymns, and looking at the pictures in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. He would later recommend Foxe's book as "the perfect Christmas gift for a child," and it was clearly one of the most significant works he ever read, vividly shaping his attitudes toward established religions, the tyranny of Rome, and the glory of martyrdom. The brave Protestants who were burned at Smithfield, and the valiant Puritans, such as Bunyan, who were jailed for their beliefs, were his childhood heroes. And they remained his heroes and models in the years when he evoked their example to the thousands who came to hear him in the Tabernacle and the tens of thousands who read his sermons each week.



J. J. Brown

readers uneasy with the rapid shift from a rural society to an urban one.

During Spurgeon's lifetime, for the first time, a majority of Britons came to live in cities. For many, the result was alienation, displacement, a lack of tradition, and an end of purposeful work. Spurgeon shared the misgivings about the disappearance of the old England, but he never lost his faith in the fundamental decency of ordinary Englishmen. He understood the values of faith, kinship, and meaningful work that had given purpose to the lives of villagers for centuries. And he was able to recall those values to urban congregations in such a plain and compelling manner that he seemed to many to embody all that was quintessentially English. In Dr. John Watson's words, Spurgeon was "as characteristic an Englishman as our generation has produced."

Education and conversion

Spurgeon's formal education, by nineteenth-century standards, was mediocre. After returning to live with his parents in Colchester, he attended a local school for a few years, and then for a brief time was an usher (or teaching assistant) at an Anglican school in Newmarket where a maternal uncle was a master. He moved to Cambridge in 1850, and he lived in the Cambridge area until he began his London ministry four years later. During his years in Cambridge he combined the roles of scholar, teaching assistant, and preacher. He was briefly tutored in Greek, but his acquaintance with the classics was fleeting in a period in which the undergraduate curriculum was overwhelmingly classical, and knowledge of classical languages was assumed to be the prerequisite to scholarship. As a Dissenter, Spurgeon could not at that time take a degree at Oxford or Cambridge, but there were excellent Dissenting academies and denominational colleges open to him. But Spurgeon decided that he would not seek formal ministerial training. His example was unusual, even among the Baptists.

The manse and Independent meeting house in the rural village of Stambourne. Spurgeon came here when he was only about 14 months old, to be cared for by his grandparents and aunt, and he stayed until he was age 6. He often visited Stambourne later, saying that "there is no other village in all the world half so good as that particular village!"

Rural Values

For much of his childhood, Spurgeon lived with his grandparents and Aunt Anne in the small agricultural village of Stambourne. There were about five hundred people in Stambourne, a town so remote that even at the end of the nineteenth century it lacked a railroad station. The revolutions in industry and transportation that transformed Victorian Britain were unknown to Stambourne, where the pace of life revolved around the seasons rather than the machine. Spurgeon's grandfather preached in an Independent Meeting House that dated back to the seventeenth century.

Ten years after leaving Stambourne, Spurgeon began his London ministry, and for the rest of his life the metropolis was his home. Yet he was never truly comfortable in an urban setting. All his life he continued to return to Stambourne, hoping to find in that tranquil setting some respite from the hectic pace of city life. His roots and values remained those of rural, pre-industrial Britain.

Spurgeon expressed these roots and values most notably, perhaps, in his popular *John Ploughman's Talk, Being Plain Talk for Plain People*. The fictional character of John Ploughman was modeled upon Will Richardson, a farmer and neighbor in Stambourne; but there was much of Spurgeon as well in the blunt, opinionated, and humorous ploughman. John, like his creator, was a man of the people, with "no trimming in him." His common-sense wisdom and vernacular wit struck a chord among

No chapel seemed large enough to hold the people who wanted to hear him.

Although Spurgeon did not attend a college, he valued learning and loved books. He collected Puritan editions, and his personal library of twelve thousand volumes contained one thousand works published before 1700. He was a literate man with a remarkable command of language that the exacting critic John Ruskin was not alone in finding "very wonderful!"

Spurgeon broke with his family's independent religious tradition when he decided, at age 15, to become a Baptist. His mother's reaction, "I often prayed the Lord to make you a Christian, but I

never asked that you might become a Baptist," suggests the dismay that his family must have felt at his decision. There is a hint of youthful rebellion in his move. Spurgeon had become convinced while he was still a schoolboy that the ritual of infant baptism, practiced by his father and grandfather, was unscriptural. When he endured the adolescent agonies of religious doubt, he admitted that his father was "the last person I should have elected to speak to upon religion."

Spurgeon attributed his conversion to a sermon he heard by chance—when a snowstorm blew him away from his destination and into a Primitive Methodist chapel. The event reinforced his conviction that truth was more likely to be found among the poor and humble than among the overeducated and refined. When he established his own pastors' college, there were no academic requirements for admission.

The preaching "boy wonder"

Spurgeon began preaching in rural

Cambridgeshire when he was barely in his teens. His first pastorate was in the village of Waterbeach, a few miles from the university. Spurgeon was not average; even as a teenaged pastor in a country town he had star quality. Before he was "the preaching sensation of London," he was "the boy wonder of the fens." He was small in stature, and in his youth pale and slim, appearing even younger than he was. His boyish appearance was in startling contrast to the maturity of his sermons, which naturally were strongly influenced by the Puritan works he had studied since childhood. He had a retentive memory and always spoke extemporaneously from an outline. His youth, energy, and oratorical skills, combined with his command of old-fashioned texts, made a vivid impact upon his congregations. People trekked from miles away to hear the preaching prodigy of Waterbeach. Within eighteen months his reputation had spread to London, and he was invited to preach at the historic New

SPURGEON'S CONVERSION

The story he told over 280 times in his sermons

I was years and years upon the brink of hell—I mean in my own feeling. I was unhappy, I was desponding, I was despairing. I dreamed of hell. My life was full of sorrow and wretchedness, believing that I was lost."

Charles Spurgeon used these strong words to describe his adolescent years. Despite his Christian upbringing (he was christened as an infant, and raised in the Congregational church), and his own efforts (he read the Bible and prayed daily), Spurgeon woke one January Sunday in 1850 with a deep sense of his need for deliverance.

Because of a snowstorm, the 15-year-old's path to church was diverted down a side street. For shelter, he ducked into the Primitive Methodist Chapel on Artillery Street. An unknown substitute lay preacher stepped into the pulpit and read his text—Isaiah 45:22—"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."

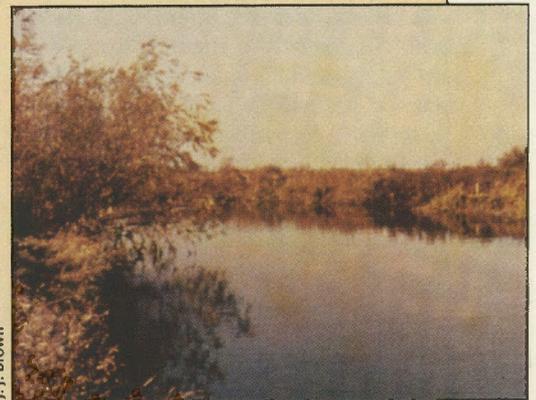
Spurgeon's *Autobiography* records

his reaction:

"He had not much to say, thank God, for that compelled him to keep on repeating his text, and there was nothing needed—by me, at any rate—except his text. Then, stopping, he pointed to where I was sitting under the gallery, and he said, 'That young man there looks very miserable' . . . and he shouted, as I think only a Primitive Methodist can, 'Look! Look, young man! Look now!' . . . Then I had this vision—not a vision to my eyes, but to my heart. I saw what a Savior Christ was. . . . Now I can never tell you how it was, but I no sooner saw whom I was to believe than I also understood what it was to believe, and I did believe in one moment.

"And as the snow fell on my road home from the little house of prayer, I thought every snowflake talked with me and told of the pardon I had found, for I was white as the driven snow through the grace of God."

Upon his return home, his appearance caused his mother to exclaim,



J. J. Brown

The River Lark, in which Spurgeon was baptized as a teenager.

"Something wonderful has happened to you."

For the next months young Spurgeon searched the Scriptures "to know more fully the value of the jewel which God had given me. . . . I found that believers ought to be baptized." And so he was baptized, by immersion, four months later in the River Lark, after which he joined a Baptist Church.

—Mary Ann Jeffreys

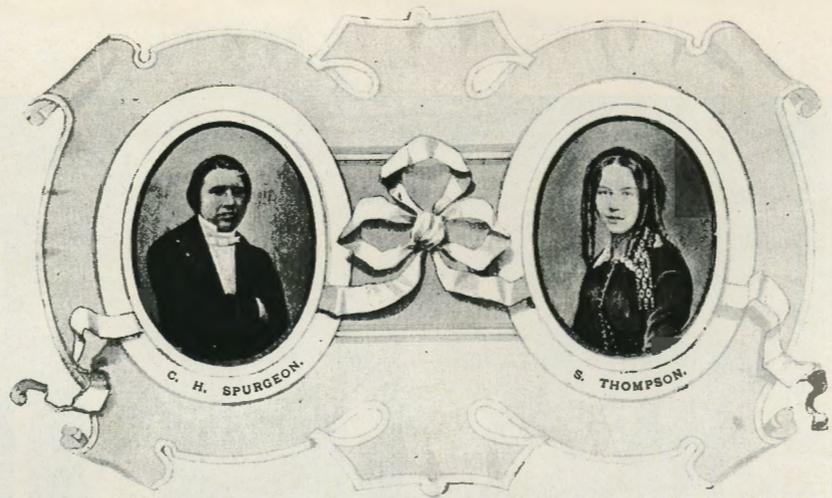
Park Street Chapel. The congregation at New Park Street was impressed by the visitor and voted—with only five “nays”—to invite to him to preach for an additional six months. The 19-year-old country-bred boy preacher moved to the city.

In the early years of Spurgeon’s career, he preached in London and throughout the kingdom. No chapel seemed large enough to hold the people who wanted to hear him, and he moved into London’s great secular halls—Exeter Hall, Surrey Gardens Music Hall, the Agricultural Hall—where he preached to thousands. In 1861, his congregation moved to the new Metropolitan Tabernacle, and Spurgeon left London less frequently.

Spurgeon’s popularity

The period of Spurgeon’s early London ministry was a period of considerable economic and social distress in Britain. Cholera was a great scourge: Twenty thousand died in 1854, Spurgeon’s first year in London. Also in that year, the Crimean War broke out, the first war involving the major European powers since Waterloo. The mutiny of the Sepoys in India in 1857 provoked a tremendous outpouring of rage and grief, concluding in a National Day of Fast and Humiliation during which Spurgeon addressed the largest audience of his life: twenty-four thousand gathered in the Crystal Palace. These events, with the economic disruptions caused by the outbreak of the American Civil War, brought suffering and economic ruin to many, who sought religious solace in confused and troubled times. Not coincidentally, the 1850s ended with the “Great Revival,” which began in Ireland and Scotland and swept into England, igniting religious emotions in a fashion not seen in Britain since the days of Wesley and Whitefield. Spurgeon disdained the title of “revivalist,” but his ministry clearly benefited from the religious enthusiasm sparked by the events of 1859.

Some of Spurgeon’s popularity in the mid-Victorian years can also be attributed to the fact that going to church was one of the few Sabbath diversions permitted in an evangelical household. It is difficult to exaggerate the change for many evangelical families when the Sabbath dawned. Books and papers were put away, games were forbidden,



This keepsake shows Spurgeon and his young love, Susannah Thompson. Susie was a parishioner at New Park Street Church, and she was baptized by Spurgeon, then her fiancé, in 1855. The following year the two married and had their only children—twin sons Charles, Jr., and Thomas.

and any secular amusement was out of the question. John Ruskin’s mother, for example, turned all of the pictures in the house face-to-the-wall. For many Victorians, attending a Sunday service—indeed, attending several Sunday services—was a satisfying way to fill the void. Although an evangelical would never attend a theater, he or she could have a theatrical experience by going to hear the young Spurgeon preaching before thousands in Exeter Hall.

And Spurgeon was a compelling, charismatic speaker—as his friend John Carlile remembered, “dramatic to his fingertips.” Photographs from this period show him assuming dramatic stances, and visitors’ accounts tell us he seemed to act out the parts, to assume the identity of the biblical characters he spoke of. Before age and gout slowed him down, Spurgeon paced the platform and even ran from side to side. His sermons were filled with sentimental stories that ordinary people could relate to: tales of dying children, grieving parents, repentant harlots, and servants wiser than their masters.

Spurgeon’s language was graphic, emotionally charged, occasionally maudlin and sentimental. But great actors, novelists, and preachers of the era appealed to emotions. People cried when Little Nell died and when Little Eva went to heaven. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was the best-selling novel in nineteenth-century Britain. The evangelical appeal to emotions led to the abolition of the slave trade and brought the condition of the child factory worker to the attention of the public. Because of emotional appeals, lives were changed and desperate people were given hope.

Spurgeon’s critics

The dramatic devices employed by Spurgeon have become commonplace now. But they were novel in the mid-Victorian years, and many critics roundly condemned the young minister’s style, manner, and appearance. He was called “a clerical poltroon,” “the Exeter Hall demagogue,” and “the pulpit buffoon.” His ministry was dismissed as a nine days’ wonder, and he was compared to popular entertainers such as Tom Thumb, the clown at Astley’s Circus, the Living Skeleton, and a whole range of fire eaters, flying men, and tightrope walkers who briefly captured the attention of the fickle populace. Other ministers were openly contemptuous of his “sensationalism,” although many would eventually copy his style and even appropriate his sermons.

Spurgeon survived the hostile reviews and learned to live with the jealousies of his fellow ministers. He proved to his critics that he had staying power, and he earned the respect of those who had been quick to denounce “Spurgeonism” as a passing fad on a spiritual level with table rapping. In preaching, as in most things, nothing succeeds like success, and when Spurgeon moved his flock into the new Tabernacle in Southwark in 1861, it was fully paid for. The new building could seat six thousand people, and when Spurgeon stood on his platform—he hated conventional pulpits—he looked out at the largest Protestant congregation in the world. In the words of the title of his first biography, he had gone *From the Usher’s Desk to the Tabernacle*.

Spurgeon was sometimes called “the Pope at Newington Butts.” He cer-

SAYINGS OF SPURGEON

A sampling of his wisdom and wit

The preaching of Christ is the whip that flogs the devil. The preaching of Christ is the thunderbolt, the sound of which makes all hell shake.

The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on His shoulders. If He bids us carry a burden, He carries it also.

I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist; I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist; but if I am asked what is my creed, I reply, "It is Jesus Christ."

As well might a gnat seek to drink in the ocean, as a finite creature to comprehend the Eternal God.

Few preachers of religion do believe thoroughly the doctrine of the Fall, or else they think that when Adam fell down he broke his little finger, and did not break his neck and ruin his race.

I am certain that I never did grow in grace one-half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of pain.



The heart of Christ became like a reservoir in the midst of the mountains. All the tributary streams of iniquity, and every drop of the sins of his people, ran down and gathered into one vast lake, deep as hell and shoreless as eternity. All these met, as it were, in Christ's heart, and he endured them all.

I would rather lay my soul asoak in half a dozen verses [of the Bible] all day than rinse my hand in several chapters.

There is dust enough on some of your Bibles to write *damnation* with your fingers.

Do you think to come to Jesus up the ladder of knowledge? Come down, sir; you will meet him at the foot.

It is a grand thing to see a man dying full of life. . . . God makes his dying people to be like the sun, which never seems so large as when it sets.

A sermon wept over is more acceptable with God than one gloried over.

On Acts 26:28— Almost persuaded to be a Christian is like the man who was almost pardoned, but he was hanged; like the man who was almost rescued, but he was burned in the house. A man that is almost saved is damned.

The most useful members of a church are usually those who would be doing harm if they were not doing good.

—compiled by Mary Ann Jeffreys

tainly ruled his congregation with a firm hand, although perhaps the best analogy would be to an enlightened despot rather than to the pope. Every person who joined his huge congregation was personally interviewed by Spurgeon, who wanted to be sure the candidate's conversion was genuine. His deacons adored him to the point of idolatry. One, presumably speaking for all, declared that if the pastor ever encountered a ditch, they would fill the ditch with their bodies so that he could cross over. "That," said Spurgeon, "was grand talk."

Spurgeon's congregation was not fashionable; most members were lower middle class, although comfortable enough and eminently respectable. In later days his congregation provided him with private rail cars and expense-paid vacations to Mentone, France, a favorite resort of affluent Victorians. His Tabernacle base was comfortable

and secure, and he knew it. As one impressed reporter put it, "He spoke of his thousands as lightly as the Shah of Persia."

Spurgeon's love

From all accounts, Spurgeon's congregation was evenly divided between males and females, which was unusual in a century in which many congregations in Britain and the United States became increasingly female. Spurgeon exuded an air of comfortable masculinity, and women clearly found him attractive. Before his marriage he was deluged with hand-sewn slippers and requests for locks of hair.

In 1856, Spurgeon married Susannah Thompson, a member of his congregation and the daughter of a prosperous ribbon manufacturer. She was trim, pretty, and stylishly dressed in the crinolines and bonnets popular in the mid-Victorian years. By her account, it

was not love at first sight. She thought the young preacher countrified. But he was a persistent suitor. The Crystal Palace, site of the Great Exhibition of 1851, had been recently dismantled and moved from Hyde Park to the London suburb of Sydenham. Susannah and Charles each bought season tickets. Here, in Paxton's vast exhibit halls of iron and glass, the two wandered amid the stuffed elephants, monstrously ornate furniture, *faux* ruins, sewing machines, threshers, and other mechanical marvels and oddities that entranced visitors. It was a suitable Victorian backdrop for a courtship that had all the charm of an old-fashioned valentine.

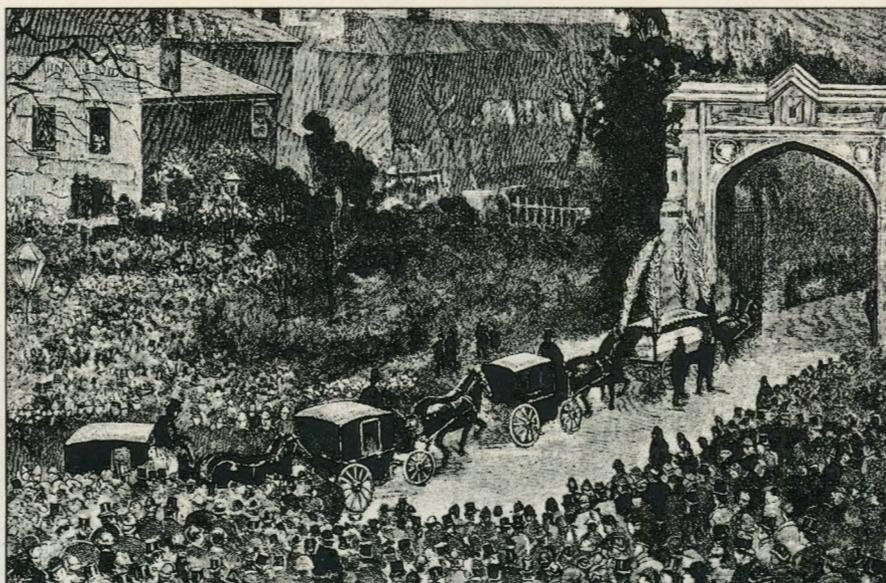
They were married, went to Paris for a honeymoon, and within the year were the parents of twin sons, Charles and Thomas. The marriage was a source of strength and abiding comfort to both. Both suffered periodic illness and invalidism. The trim figures of

youth became more ample in middle age, but they remained devoted lovers, each seeking the word or token that would lighten the burden of the other. The Spurgeons lived at a time when gender roles were clearly defined, and neither was of the temperament to challenge the prevailing view that man's sphere was the world and woman was "the angel in the house."

Spurgeon's controversies

Spurgeon was a public figure, and as a public figure with strong convictions, he was often the center of controversy. This was inevitable, but unfortunate, for those who knew him well, believed that he was not at his best in controversial situations. He was an eloquent and persuasive speaker, but he was not a good debater, and he paid a heavy emotional and physical price for his involvement in theological and political controversies. But upon certain subjects—Rome, ritualism, hypocrisy, or modernism—he was incapable of moderation. The tragedy was that in all the controversies in which he was involved, there were good and honorable men on both sides.

"The Grand Old Man" of British politics, W. E. Gladstone, four times prime minister of Britain, was Spurgeon's political hero. Gladstone entered the House of Commons in the year that Spurgeon was born, and in writing to him, Spurgeon referred to him as his "Chief." The two were much alike: both deeply religious, both emotional and easily moved to tears, both passionately committed to principle. From the 1860s to the 1880s, Spurgeon was an ardent political Dissenter, active on behalf of the Liberal Party and Gladstone. If he did not quite tell his congregation to vote for Gladstone's party, he came very close. And he did denounce Disraeli (Gladstone's opponent) in sermons and pass out handbills in support of Liberal candidates. Gladstone attended a service at the Tabernacle, and he invited Spurgeon to dine at Number Ten Downing Street. But when that great man of principle, Mr. Gladstone, became convinced that justice for Ireland meant Home Rule, he split his party and lost Spurgeon's support. For Spurgeon, Home Rule meant Rome Rule, and in his memory the faggots of Smithfield would begin to glow, and the cries of the martyrs would call him to



Spurgeon's funeral cortege enters Upper Norwood Cemetery on February 11, 1892, flanked by some of the 100,000 people who lined the route. Spurgeon had died in Mentone, France, 12 days earlier, primarily from a long-lasting case of gout.

resistance.

Gladstone split his party, and Spurgeon split his denomination. In the 1880s, about the time Spurgeon broke with the Liberals, he began to express fears that some ministers in his own conservative Baptist sect had become tainted with modernism. He worried that these preachers no longer subscribed to evangelical teaching such as scriptural infallibility, the atonement, and eternal damnation.

The "Down-Grade Controversy," as it came to be known, pitted Baptist against Baptist, minister against minister, and even some Spurgeon's College men against Spurgeon. The controversy darkened Spurgeon's last years, already made bleak by physical debility, and led to charges by supporters that he had been killed by the controversy and died "a martyr to faith." Spurgeon withdrew from the Baptist Union. The Union, in retaliation, passed what came to be termed "a vote of censure" on the most famous Baptist in the world. Spurgeon ended his life where he began it, in independency, a man too big to be defined by a single denomination or party.

The preacher's preacher

"When our lives come to be written at last," Spurgeon once wrote, "God grant that they be not only our *sayings*, but our *sayings* and *doings*." A fair assessment of Spurgeon's life must include both.

He was not an original thinker, and he never claimed to be a theologian. He was a preacher, and in that role he

was unsurpassed in his day and not often matched since. His originality as a preacher lay in his combination of old-fashioned doctrine and up-to-date delivery. He may have been an ordinary and conventional Victorian in many of his personal tastes and prejudices, but he had an uncanny ability to sense the pulse of his times, and to know, almost instinctively, how to reach out to ordinary and troubled people in a language which they could not resist. It was the language of the marketplace—pithy, pungent, often humorous, and at once commonsensical and compelling. The power of that language reached a worldwide audience and has kept the name and message of Spurgeon alive long after the embers of old controversies have died out.

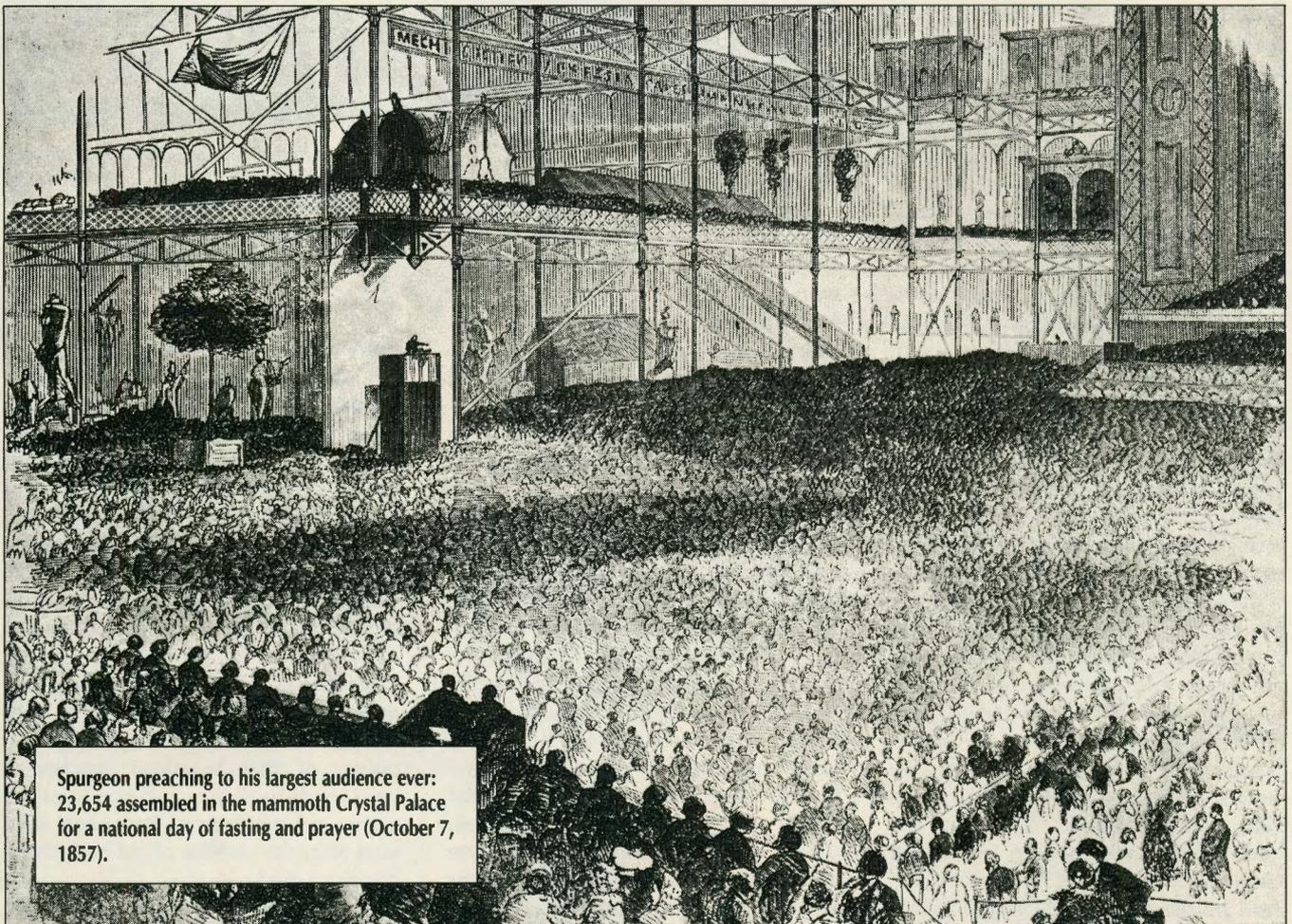
"I *must* and I *will* make the people listen," the boy preacher said. None did it better. □

Dr. Patricia Stallings Kruppa is associate professor of history at the University of Texas at Austin, and author of *C. H. Spurgeon: A Preacher's Progress* (Garland, 1982).

The Secrets of Spurgeon's Preaching

Why would thousands come to hear him speak?

LEWIS A. DRUMMOND



Spurgeon preaching to his largest audience ever: 23,654 assembled in the mammoth Crystal Palace for a national day of fasting and prayer (October 7, 1857).



he noted German pastor and theologian Helmut Thielicke once said, "Sell all [the books] that you have . . . and buy

Spurgeon."

Today—nearly a century after Spurgeon's death—there is more material in print by Charles Haddon Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, liv-

ing or dead.

What was it about the Victorian London orator that enabled him to captivate the minds and hearts of multitudes—then and now?

Speaking to the masses

Charles Spurgeon came to London as a mere lad, and no preacher received more criticism than the 19-year-old "boy preacher," as he was called. Becoming pastor of the historic New

Park Street Baptist Church, he found the press virtually at war with him. The *Ipswich Express* said his sermons were "Redolent of bad taste, vulgar, and theatrical."

Spurgeon replied, "I am perhaps vulgar, but it is not intentional, save that I must and will make the people listen. My firm conviction is that we have had quite enough polite preachers, and many require a change. God has owned me among the most de-

graded and off-casts. Let others serve their class; these are mine, and to them I must keep."

Spurgeon saw the value of preaching to the common people in their own language and in a way that captivated their interest. He well understood the sophistication of the Established Church and its irrelevance to his own social setting. One editorial cartoon depicted an Anglican rector driving an old stagecoach with two slow horses—named "Church" and "State." Racing ahead, however, is a young preacher with flowing hair, speeding on a locomotive engine. The title of the second cleric's locomotive? "The Spurgeon," of course.

Even British evangelicalism tended to be an upper-middle-class institution. With his "vulgar" style, however, Spurgeon spoke to the people of the street. Actually, Spurgeon's church became known as a "church of shopkeep-

"I take my text and make a bee-line to the cross."—Spurgeon

ers," but the criticism still mounted. Spurgeon finally said in exasperation, "Scarcely a Baptist minister of standing will own me." But multitudes came to hear him preach.

It would not be fair to say that Spurgeon was the only evangelical preacher who took this approach and was criticized for it. Yet Spurgeon was the most successful in preaching to the common culture. When Spurgeon was 20 years old, he wrote to his future wife, Susannah Thompson, about an open-air sermon to a multitude: "Yesterday I climbed to the summit of a minister's glory . . . the Lord was with me, and the profoundest silence was observed; but oh, the closeness—never did mortal man receive a more enthusiastic ovation! I wonder that I am alive! . . . Thousands of heads and hands were lifted, and cheer after cheer was given. Surely amid these adulations I can hear the low rumbling of the advancing storm of reproach. But even this I can bear for the Master's sake."

When it came to declaring the gospel in a relevant fashion to the common masses, Spurgeon was a master. He was a nineteenth-century reflection of George Whitefield.

Focusing on Christ

Spurgeon once described his approach to preaching by saying, "I take my text and make a bee-line to the cross." He burned with a desire to preach the Good News and see people won to faith in Jesus Christ. Spurgeon declared that "Saving faith is an immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, resting upon Him alone, for justification, sanctification, and eternal life by virtue of the covenant of grace." He fervently urged people to enter into this faith relationship.

What may seem paradoxical to some today is that theologically, Spurgeon tenaciously clung to traditional Calvinism. Evangelistic appeals came from this preacher who adhered to the traditional five doctrinal points of the Synod of Dort, including unconditional election.

Spurgeon was once asked how he could reconcile his stance between Calvinistic theology and his fervent preaching of the gospel. He replied, "I do not try to reconcile friends."

Spurgeon stood on the precarious razor's edge between High Calvinism and Arminianism and preached the Word of God as he understood it. Thus, *The World Newspaper* reported that "Mr. Spurgeon is nominally a Calvinist." He was rejected by many of the high Calvinistic churches. The pastor of the Surrey Chapel, for example, spent time every Sunday criticizing Spurgeon's previous sermon because it was not Calvinistic enough. At the same time, Spurgeon was certainly not admitted to Arminian circles because he was far too Calvinistic for them.

Why this paradox? Spurgeon preached what he found in the Word of God and was not overly concerned to systematize everything. A reading of just a scattering of his sermons makes it obvious that when Spurgeon took a text, he took it seriously. And he used it to point people to Christ—not to establish or reestablish a formal doctrinal system.

Developing dramatic gifts

Spurgeon was endowed with a beautiful speaking voice—it had melody, depth, and a resonance that could



An editorial cartoon that likened Spurgeon's preaching to the new steam engines: exciting and risky, but infinitely superior to the old mode of transportation.

be heard by many thousands of people. Yet he never seemed to be straining.

He also had a dramatic flair and style that was captivating. The manager of London's Drury Lane Theater said, "I would give a large amount of money if

Good tidings of great joy.

Somewhere religion has come to be associated with fear.

The revelation of the Lord overcame so

But this is joy.

It is a joy for the religion of Jesus sets free the mind.

It delivers from superstition

It frees from fear

It teaches goodwill among men.

Joy to those who receive the福音.

Joy must to those who know him best

He came not to spy out + accuse
not to certify + furnish
not to threaten + alarm.

Not in pomp
Not in form
Not in philosophy
Not in superstition
Not in wealth.

To save
To teach
To govern

God comes down to man as man
The command is fulfilled.
The Saviour is come
He is omniscient. Prophet, Priest, King.
He is Lord of God's universe.

I The joy.
II The people.
III The sign.

To you, ye poor, shepherds, become personally
to the people, at first, once, yet to come
to all people set free from superstition
from fear
from pain
from sorrow
abolishes cruelty, slavery, war,
No power to crush the poor to beggary.
No wealth to bribe. No superstition to awe
No philosophy to juggle.

Children, virgins, shepherds, wise men, aged men, Simon, Joseph

Spurgeon's notes for a sermon on Luke 2:10-12. Notice his three-point outline and constant use of parallelism.

I could get Spurgeon on the stage." Not that Spurgeon was superficially theatrical; it was his real self that gave him such a dramatic style in his preaching.

Spurgeon also had an eloquence that gives the impression he labored hours over his similes, metaphors, and dramatic illustrations. Yet he prepared his Sunday morning sermon Saturday night, and his Sunday night sermon on Sunday afternoon. He would walk into the pulpit with a simple, small outline, sometimes written on the back of an envelope, and from that extemporaneously pour forth eloquence almost equal to Shakespeare's.

At the same time, it is only fair to say that Spurgeon studied diligently and read avidly. He amassed a personal library of over twelve thousand volumes, and he had a virtually photo-

graphic memory to call up his hours of study when he needed them in the pulpit.

Bringing innovations

The question is raised, Was Spurgeon an innovator in his preaching?

Spurgeon broke with tradition and convention; he would not preach stilted sermons. As pointed out he spoke in common language to common people—in a dramatic, eloquent, even humorous way. He painted word pictures.

If there was "newness" about Spurgeon's method, it was that he strove to be a communicator. Spurgeon never forgot that if a preacher fails to communicate—regardless of ability, sincerity, theology or natural gifts—a preacher has failed. So he addressed people where they were and spoke simply to their deepest needs. That is innovation

at its best and would make a preacher effective in any age.

Drawing on a deep spirituality

Foremost of all, Spurgeon was a man of God. The depth and breadth of his spirituality was profound. He quoted medieval mystics as well as John Law, John Wesley, and other spiritual giants of European Christianity. He was devoted to prayer.

When people would walk through the Metropolitan Tabernacle (as New Park Street Church became known), Spurgeon would take them to a basement prayer room where people were always on their knees interceding for the church. Then the pastor would declare, "Here is the powerhouse of this church."

Devoted to the Scriptures, to disciplined prayer, and to godly living, Spurgeon exemplified Christian commitment when he stood in the pulpit. This itself gave power to his preaching.

The one thing he lacked

Perhaps it is correct to say that as a preacher, Spurgeon had everything—except good health. He suffered constantly from various ailments and fell into serious depression at times. He had rheumatic gout that eventually took his life at the age of 57.

Yet Spurgeon overcame physical limitations and relentless criticism to be established as the greatest Victorian preacher. He went to New Park Street Baptist Church as a teenager and on his first Sunday preached to eighty people. Yet during his thirty-seven years of ministry there, the congregation grew to become the largest evangelical church in the world.

When one considers Spurgeon's great heart, biblical exposition of the gospel, cultural relevance, dramatic flair, and eloquence, it's little wonder he took the country by storm.

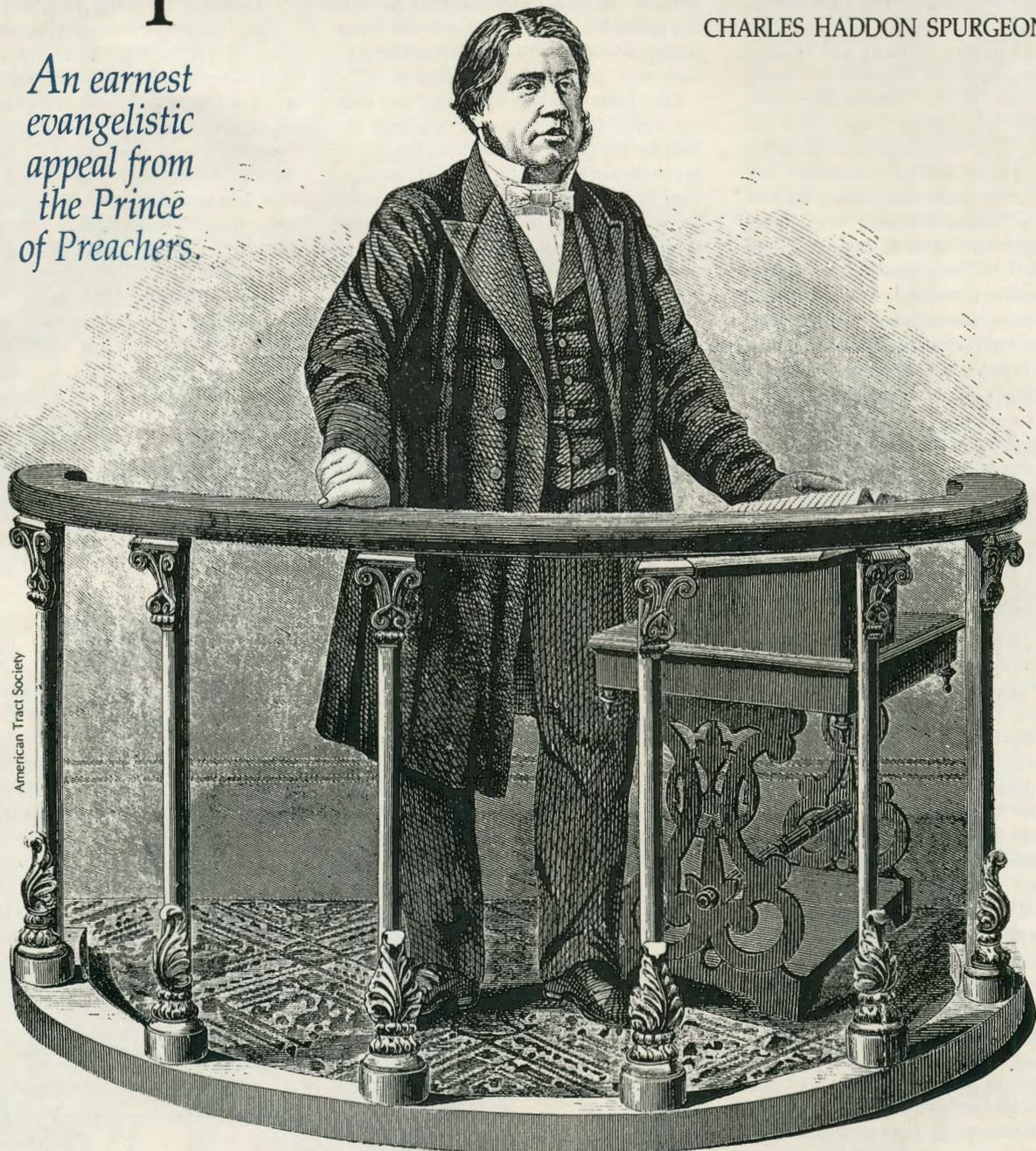
He preached a relevant gospel in such a way that common people heard him gladly. This is the essence of great preaching, and it was the genius of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. □

Lewis A. Drummond is president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

"Compel Them To Come In"

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

*An earnest
evangelistic
appeal from
the Prince
of Preachers.*



American Tract Society



his sermon was preached by Charles Spurgeon at the Royal Surrey public amusement hall on Sunday morning, December 5, 1858. The hall was a popular public amusement hall capable of holding 10-12,000 people, and Spurgeon drew not only religious people, but also thousands of curious onlookers. His message, which is lightly condensed here, was based on Luke 14:23. The original punctuation has been retained.

I feel in such a haste to go out and obey this commandment this morning, by compelling those to come in who are now tarrying in the highways and hedges, that I cannot wait for an introduction, but must at once set about my business.

Here then, O ye that are strangers to the truth as it is in Jesus—hear then the message that I have to bring you. Ye have fallen, fallen in your father Adam; ye have fallen also in yourselves, by your daily sin and your constant iniquity; you have provoked the anger of the Most High; and as assuredly as you have

sinned, so certainly must God punish you if you persevere in your iniquity, for the Lord is a God of justice, and will by no means spare the guilty.

But have you not heard, hath it not long been spoken in your ears, that God, in his infinite mercy, has devised a way whereby, without any infringement upon his honour, he can have mercy upon you, the guilty and the undeserving? To you I speak; and my voice is unto you, O sons of men; Jesus Christ, very God of very God, hath descended from heaven, and was made in the likeness of

sinful flesh. Begotten of the Holy Ghost, he was born of the Virgin Mary; he lived in this world a life of exemplary holiness, and of the deepest suffering, till at last he gave himself up to die for our sins, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." And now the plan of salvation is simply declared unto you—"Whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved." For you who have violated all the precepts of God, and have disdained his mercy, and dared his vengeance, there is yet mercy proclaimed, for "whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." . . . "Whosoever cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out, for he is able also to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us." Now all that God asks of you—and this he gives you—is that you will simply look at his bleeding, dying son, and trust your souls in the hands of him whose name alone can save from death and hell.

Is it not a marvellous thing, that the proclamation of this gospel does not receive the unanimous consent of men? One would think that as soon as ever this was preached, "That whosoever believeth shall have eternal life," every one of you, "casting away every man his sins and his iniquities," would lay hold on Jesus Christ, and look alone to his cross. But alas! such is the desperate evil of our nature, such the pernicious depravity of our character, that this message is despised, the invitation to the gospel feast is rejected, and there are many of you who are this day enemies of God by wicked works, enemies to the God who preaches Christ to you to-day, enemies to him who sent his Son to give his life a ransom for many. Strange I say it is that it should be so, yet nevertheless it is the fact, and hence the necessity for the command of the text,—"*Compel them to come in.*"

Children of God, ye who have believed, I shall have little or nothing to say to you this morning; I am going straight to my business—I am going after those that will not come—those that are in the byways and hedges, and God going with me, it is my duty now to fulfill this command, "*Compel them to come in.*"

First, I must *find you out*; secondly, I will go to work to *compel you to come in*.

Finding you out

I. First, I must FIND YOU OUT. If you read the verses that precede the text, you will find an amplification of this command: "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the

blind;" and then, afterwards, "Go out into the highways," bring in the vagrants, the highwaymen, "and into the hedges," bring in those that have no resting place for their heads, and are lying under the hedges to rest, bring them in also, and "*compel them to come in.*"

Yes, I see you this morning, you that are *poor*. I am to compel *you* to come in. You are poor in circumstances, but this is no barrier to the kingdom of heaven, for God hath not exempted from his grace the man that shivers in rags, and who is destitute of bread. In fact, if there be any distinction made, the distinction is on your side, and for your benefit— . . . "For the poor have the gospel preached unto them."

But especially I must speak to you who are *poor, spiritually*. You have no faith, you have no virtue, you have no good work, you have no grace, and what is poverty worse still, you have no hope. Ah, my Master has sent *you* a gracious invitation. Come and welcome to the marriage feast of his love. "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life freely." Come, I must lay hold upon you, though you be defiled with foulest filth, and though you have nought but rags upon your back, though your own righteousness has become as filthy clouts, yet must I lay hold upon you, and invite you first, and even compel you to come in.

And now I see you again. You are not only poor, but you are *maimed*. There was a time when you thought you could work out your own salvation without God's help, when you could perform good works, attend to ceremonies, and get to heaven by yourselves; but now you are

maimed, the sword of the law has cut off your hands, and now you can work no longer; you say, with bitter sorrow—

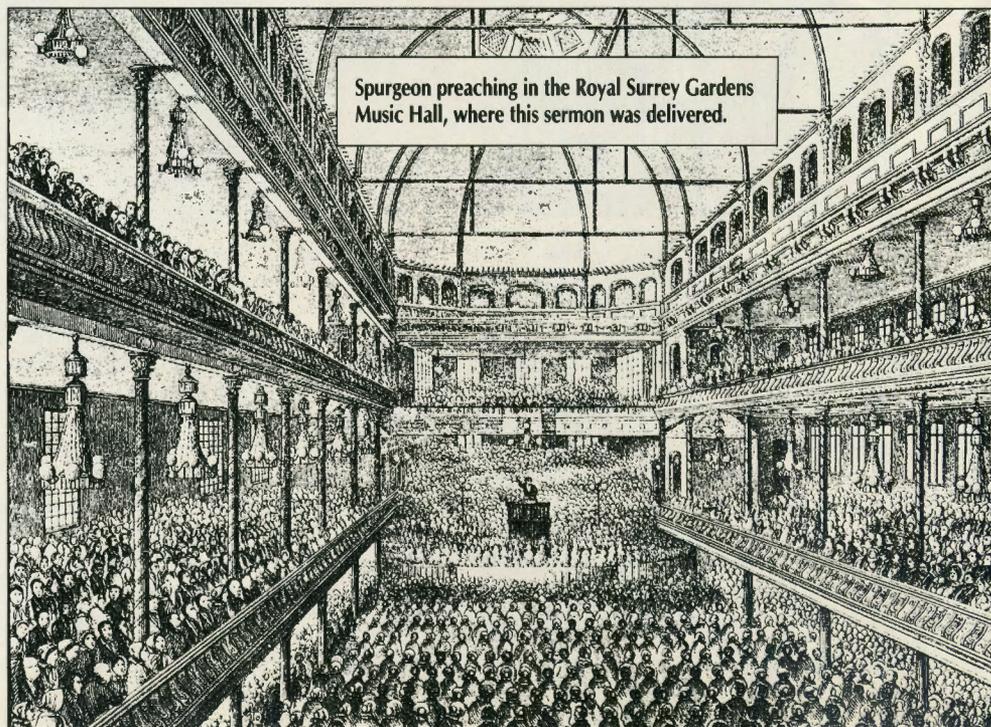
*"The best performance of my hands,
Dares not appear before thy throne."*

. . . But you are worse off than that, for if you could not work your way to heaven, yet you could walk your way there along the road by faith; but you are maimed in the feet as well as in the hands; you feel that you cannot believe, that you cannot repent, that you cannot obey the stipulations of the gospel. You feel that you are utterly undone, powerless in every respect to do anything that can be pleasing to God. In fact, you are crying out—

*"Oh, could I but believe,
Then all would easy be,
I would, but cannot, Lord relieve,
My help must come from thee."*

To you am I sent also. Before *you* am I to lift up the blood-stained banner of the cross, to you am I to preach this gospel, "Whoso calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved;" and unto you am I to cry "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."

There is yet another class. You are *halt*. You are halting between two opinions. You are sometimes seriously inclined, and at another time worldly gaiety calls you away. What little progress you do make in religion is but a limp. You have a little strength, but that is so little that you make but painful progress. Ah, limping brother, to you also is the word of this salvation sent. Though you halt between two opinions, the master sends me to you with this message: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if God be God, serve him; if Baal be God, serve him."



Consider thy ways; set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live. Because I will do this, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel! Halt no longer, but decide for God and his truth.

And yet I see another class,—*the blind*. . . . You, blind souls that cannot see your lost estate, that do not believe that sin is so exceedingly sinful as it is, and who will not be persuaded to think that God is a just and righteous God, to you am I sent. To you too that cannot see the Savior, that see no beauty in him that you should desire him; who see no excellence in virtue, no glories in religion, no happiness in serving God, no delight in being his children; to you, also, am I sent.

Ay, to whom am I not sent if I take my text? For it goes further than this—it not only gives a particular description, so that each individual case may be met, but afterwards it makes a general sweep, and says, "Go into the highways and hedges." Here we bring in all ranks and conditions of men. . . . This is the universal command—compel them to come in. . . .

Compelling you to come in

II. And now to the work—directly to the work. Unconverted, unreconciled, unregenerate men and women, I am to COMPEL YOU TO COME IN. Permit me first of all to accost you in the highways of sin and tell you over again my errand. The King of heaven this morning sends a gracious invitation to you. He says, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he should turn unto me and live"; "Come now and let us reason together saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson they shall be whiter than snow." Dear brother, it makes my heart rejoice to think that I should have such good news to tell you, and yet I confess my soul is heavy because I see you do not think it good news, but turn away from it, and do not give it due regard. Permit me to tell you what the King has done for you. He knew your guilt, he foresaw that you would ruin yourself. He knew that his justice would demand your blood, and in order that this difficulty might be escaped, that his justice might have its full due, and that you might yet be saved, *Jesus Christ hath died*.

Will you just for a moment glance at this picture. You see that man there on his knees in the garden of Gethsemane, sweating drops of blood. You see this next; you see that miserable sufferer tied to a pillar and lashed with terrible scourges, till the shoulder bones are seen like white islands in the midst of a sea of

blood. Again you see this third picture; it is the same man hanging on the cross with hands extended, and with feet nailed fast, dying, groaning, bleeding; me thought the picture spoke and said, "It is finished." Now all this hath Jesus Christ of Nazareth done, in order that God might consistently with his justice pardon sin; and the message to you this morning is this—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." That is trust him, renounce thy works, and thy ways, and set thine heart alone on this man, who gave himself for sinners.

Well brother, I have told you the message, what sayest thou unto it? Do you turn away? You tell me it is nothing to you; you cannot listen to it; that you will

You and the grim monster—death—must face each other.

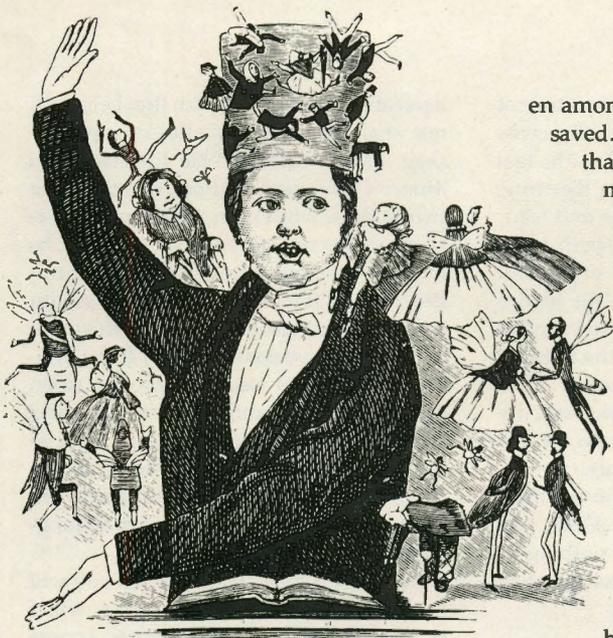
hear me by-and-bye; but you will go your ways this day and attend to your farm and merchandize. Stop brother, I was not told merely to tell you and then go about my business. No; I am told to compel you to come in; . . . You may despise your own salvation, but I do not despise it; you may go away and forget what you shall hear, but you will please to remember that the things I now say cost me many a groan ere I came here to utter them. My inmost soul is speaking out to you, my poor brother, when I beseech you by him that liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore, consider my master's message which he bids me now address to you.

But do you spurn it? Do you still refuse it? Then I must change my tone a minute. . . . Sinner, in God's name I *command* you to repent and believe. Do you ask me whence my authority? I am an ambassador of heaven. My credentials, some of them secret, and in my own heart; and others of them open before you this day in the seals of my ministry, sitting and standing in this hall, where God has given me many souls for my hire. As God the everlasting one hath given me a commission to preach his gospel, I command you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; not on my own authority, but on the authority of him who said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature;" and then annexed this solemn sanction, "He that believeth and is bap-

tized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Reject my message, and remember "He that despised Moses's law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God." An ambassador is not to stand below the man with whom he deals, for we stand higher. If the minister chooses to take his proper rank, girded with the omnipotence of God, and anointed with his holy unction, he is to command men, and speak with all authority compelling them to come in: "command, exhort, rebuke with all long-suffering."

But do you turn away and say you will not be commanded? Then again will I change my note. . . . My brother, I come to you simple of speech, and I *exhort* you to flee to Christ. O my brother, dost thou know what a loving Christ he is? Let me tell thee from my own soul what I know of him. I, too once despised him. He knocked at the door of my heart and I refused to open it. He came to me, times without number, morning by morning, and night by night; he checked me in my conscience and spoke to me by his Spirit, and when, at last, the thunders of the law prevailed in my conscience, I thought that Christ was cruel and unkind. O I can never forgive myself that I should have thought so ill of him. But what a loving reception did I have when I went to him. I thought he would smite me, but his hand was not clenched in anger but opened wide in mercy. I thought full sure that his eyes would dart lightning-flashes of wrath upon me; but, instead thereof, they were full of tears. He fell upon my neck and kissed me; he took off my rags and did clothe me with his righteousness, and caused my soul to sing aloud for joy; while in the house of my heart and in the house of his church there was music and dancing, because his son that he had lost was found, and he that was dead was made alive. I exhort you, then, to look to Jesus Christ and to be lightened. Sinner, you will never regret it . . . The trials of Christian life you shall find heavy, but you will find grace will make them light. And as for the joys and delights of being a child of God, if I lie this day you shall charge me with it in days to come. If you will taste and see that the Lord is good, I am not afraid but that you shall find that he is not only good, but better than human lips ever can describe.

I know not what arguments to use with you. I appeal to your own self-interests. Oh my poor friend, would it not be better for you to be reconciled to the God of



"Catch 'em alive, O!"

The crowd-drawing appeal of Spurgeon was mockingly compared to the attraction of flypaper in this 1855 caricature.

heaven, than to be his enemy? What are you getting by opposing God? Are you the happier for being his enemy? Answer, pleasure-seeker: hast thou found delights in that cup? . . . Ah, my friend, "Wherefore dost thou spend thy money for that which is not bread, and thy labour for that which satisfieth not; hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." I exhort you by everything that is sacred and solemn, everything that is important and eternal, flee for your lives, look not behind you, stay not in all the plain, stay not until you have proved, and found an interest in the blood of Jesus Christ, that blood which cleanseth us from all sin.

Are you still cold and indifferent? . . . Must I use some other compulsions to compel you to come in? Sinners, this one thing I am resolved upon this morning, if you be not saved you shall be without excuse. Ye, from the grey-headed down to the tender age of childhood, if ye this day lay not hold on Christ, your blood shall be on your own head. If there be power in man to bring his fellow, (as there is when man is helped by the Holy Spirit) that power shall be exercised this morning, God helping me. Come, I am not to be put off by your rebuffs: if my exhortation fails, I must come to something else. My brother I ENTREAT you, I entreat you stop and consider. Do you know what it is you are rejecting this morning? You are rejecting Christ, your only Savior. "On her foundation can no man lay;" "there is none other name giv-

en among men whereby we must be saved." My brother, I cannot bear that ye should do this, for I remember what you are forgetting: the day is coming when you will want a Savior. It is not long ere weary months shall have ended, and your strength begin to decline; your pulse shall fail you, your strength shall depart, and you and the grim monster—death, must face each other.

. . . Death-beds are stony things without the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an awful thing to die anyhow; he that hath the best hope, and the most triumphant faith, finds that death is not a thing to laugh at. . . . I cannot help thinking of you. I see you acting the suicide this morning, and I picture myself standing at your bedside and hearing your cries, and knowing that you are dying without hope. I cannot bear that. I think I am standing by your coffin now, and looking into your clay-cold face, and saying, "This man despised Christ and neglected the great salvation." I think what bitter tears I shall weep then, if I think that I have been unfaithful to you, and how those eyes fast closed in death, shall seem to chide me and say, "Minister, I attended the music hall, but you were not in earnest with me; you amused me, you preached to me, but you did not plead with me. You did not know what Paul meant when he said, 'As though God did beseech you by us we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.'" "

I entreat you let this message enter your heart for another reason. I picture myself standing at the bar of God. . . . I see you standing in the midst of that throng, and the eye of God is fixed on you. It seems to you that he is not looking anywhere else, but only upon you, and he summons you before him; and he reads your sins, and he cries, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire in hell!" My hearer, I cannot bear to think of you in that position; it seems as if every hair on my head must stand on end to think of any hearer of mine being damned. . . . Do you see the pit as it opens to swallow you up? Do you listen to the shrieks and the yells of those who have preceded you to that eternal lake of torment? . . . I should be destitute of all humanity if I should see a person about to poison himself, and did not dash away the cup; or if I saw another about to plunge from Lon-

don Bridge, if I did not assist in preventing him from doing so; and I should be worse than a fiend if I did not now, with all love, and kindness, and earnestness, beseech you to "lay hold on eternal life," "to labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life."

Some hyper-calvinist would tell me I am wrong in so doing. I cannot help it. I must do it. As I must stand before my Judge at last, I feel that I shall not make full proof of my ministry unless I entreat with many tears that ye would be saved, that ye would look unto Jesus Christ and receive his glorious salvation.

But does not this avail? are all our entreaties lost upon you; do you turn a deaf ear? Then again I change my note. Sinner, I have pleaded with you as a man pleadeth with his friend, and were it for my *own* life I could not speak more earnestly this morning than I do speak concerning *yours*. . . . therefore, if ye put away these entreaties I have something else;—I must *threaten* you. You shall not always have such warnings as these. A day is coming, when hushed shall be the voice of every gospel minister, at least for you; for your ear shall be cold in death. It shall not be anymore threatening; it shall be the fulfillment of the threatening. There shall be no promise, no proclamations of pardon and of mercy; no peace-speaking blood. . . . I charge you then, listen to this voice that now addresses your conscience; for if not, God shall speak to you in his wrath, and say unto you in his hot displeasure, "I called and ye refused; I stretched out my hand and no man regarded; therefore will I mock at your calamity; I will laugh when your fear cometh." . . .

You imagine that your life will be long, but do you know how short it is? Have you ever tried to think how frail you are? Did you ever see a body when it has been cut in pieces by the anatomist? . . . let but a mouthful of food go in the wrong direction, and you may die. The slightest chance, as we have it, may send you swift to death, when God wills it. Strong men have been killed by the smallest and slightest accident, and so may you. . . . How often do we hear of men falling in our streets—rolling out of time into eternity, by some sudden stroke. And are you sure that heart of your's is quite sound? Is the blood circulating with all accuracy? Are you quite sure of that? And if it be so, how long shall it be? O, perhaps there are some of you here that shall never see Christmas day; it may be the mandate has gone forth already, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die

and not live." Out of this vast congregation, I might with accuracy tell how many will be dead in a year; but certain it is that the whole of us shall never meet together again in any one assembly. Some out of this vast crowd, perhaps some two or three, shall depart ere the new year shall be ushered in. I remind you, then, my brother, that either the gate of salvation may be shut, or else you may be out of the place where the gate of mercy stands. Come, then, let the threatening have power with you. I do not threaten because I would alarm without cause, but in hopes that a brother's threatening may drive you to the place where God hath prepared the feast of the gospel.

And now, *must I turn hopelessly away?* Have I exhausted all that I can say? No, I will come to you again. Tell me what it is, my brother, that keeps you from Christ. I hear one say, "Oh, sir, it is because I feel myself too guilty." That cannot be, my friend, that cannot be. "But, sir, I am the chief of sinners." Friend, you are not. The chief of sinners died and went to heaven many years ago; his name was Saul of Tarsus, afterwards called Paul the apostle. . . . You must, at least, be sec-

*The trials of
Christian life
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ond worst. . . . But suppose you are the worst, is not that the very reason why you should come to Christ. The worse a man is, the more reason he should go to the hospital or physician. The more poor you are, the more reason you should accept the charity of another. Now, Christ does not want any merits of yours. He gives freely. The worse you are, the more welcome you are. But let me ask you a question: Do you think you will ever get better by stopping away from Christ? If so, you know very little as yet of the way of salvation at all. No, sir, the longer you stay the worse you will grow; your hope will grow weaker, your desire will become stronger; the nail with which Satan has fastened you down will be more firmly clenched, and you will be less hopeful

than ever. Come, I beseech you, recollect there is nothing to be gained by delay, but by delay everything may be lost.

"But," cries another, "I feel I cannot believe." No, my friend, and you never will believe if you look first at your believing. Remember, I am not come to invite you to faith, but am come to invite you to Christ. . . . Come, I beseech you, on Calvary's mount, and see the cross. Behold the Son of God, he who made the heavens and the earth, dying for your sins. Look to him, is there not power in him to save? Look at his face so full of pity. Is there not love in his heart to prove him *willing* to save? Sure sinner, the sight of Christ will help thee to believe. Do not believe first, and then go to Christ, or else thy faith will be a worthless thing; go to Christ without any faith, and cast thyself upon him, sink or swim.

But I hear another cry, "Oh sir, you do not know how often I have been invited, how long I have rejected the Lord." . . . You may have rejected a thousand invitations; don't make this the thousandth-and-one. You have been up to the house of God, and you have only been gospel hardened. But do I not see a tear in your eye; Come my brother don't be hardened by this morning's sermon. Oh, Spirit of the living God come and melt this heart for it has never been melted, and compel him to come in! I cannot let you go on such idle excuses as that; if you have lived so many years slighting Christ, there are so many reasons why now you should not slight him.

But did I hear you whisper that this was not a convenient time? Then what must I say to you? When will that convenient time come? Shall it come when you are in hell? Will that time be convenient? Shall it come when you are on your dying bed, and the death throttle is in your throat—shall it come then? . . . When pains are racking you, and you are on the borders of the tomb? No, sir, this morning is the convenient time. May God make it so. . . . You may never have so earnest a discourse addressed to you. You may not be pleaded with as I would plead with you now. You may go away, and God may say, "He is given unto idols, let him alone." He shall throw the reins upon your neck; and then, mark—your course is sure, but it is sure damnation and swift destruction. . . .

Will you not now come to Christ? Then what more can I do? I have but one more resort, and that shall be tried. I can be permitted to weep for you; I can be allowed to pray for you. You shall scorn the address if you like; you shall laugh at the preacher; you shall call him fanatic if

you will; he will not chide you, he will bring no accusation against you to the great Judge. Your offence, so far as he is concerned, is forgiven before it is committed; but you will remember that the message that you are rejecting this morning is a message from one who loves you, and it is given to you also by the lips of one who loves you. You will recollect that you may play your soul away with the devil, that you may listlessly think it a matter of no importance; but there lives at least one who is in earnest about your soul, and one who before he came here, wrestled with his God for strength to preach to you, and who when he has gone from this place will not forget his hearers of this morning. I say again, when words fail us we can give tears—for words and tears are the arms with which gospel ministers compel men to come in. . . . is it not strange that we should be ready to move heaven and earth for your salvation, and that still you should have no thought for *yourselves*, no regard to eternal things? . . .

Now does anything else remain to the minister besides weeping and prayer? Yes, there is one thing else. God has given to his servants not the power of regeneration, but he has given them something akin to it. . . . We can now appeal to the Spirit. I know I have preached the gospel, that I have preached it earnestly. I challenge my Master to honour his own promise. He has said it shall not return unto me void, and it shall not. It is in his hands, not mine. I cannot compel you, but thou O Spirit of God who hast the key of the heart, thou canst compel. Did you ever notice in that chapter of the Revelation, where it says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock," a few verses before, the same person is described, as he who hath the key of David. Now if the knocking of an earnest minister prevail not with you this morning, there remains still that secret opening of the heart by the Spirit so that you shall be compelled.

I thought it my duty to labour with you as thought I must do it; now I throw it into my Master's hands. It cannot be his will that we should travail in birth, and yet not bring forth spiritual children. It is with *him*; he is master of the heart, and the day shall declare it, that some of you constrained by sovereign grace have become the willing captives of the all-conquering Jesus, and have bowed your hearts to him through the sermon of this morning. □

The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon

DARREL W. AMUNDSEN

Debilitating gout, poisonous slander, recurring depression—Spurgeon suffered them all. What happened to his faith as a result?



Spurgeon's friends and even casual acquaintances remarked on his hearty laughter. His humor also found expression in his sermons and writings, for which he was sometimes criticized. Spurgeon responded that if his critics only knew how much humor he suppressed, they would keep silent.

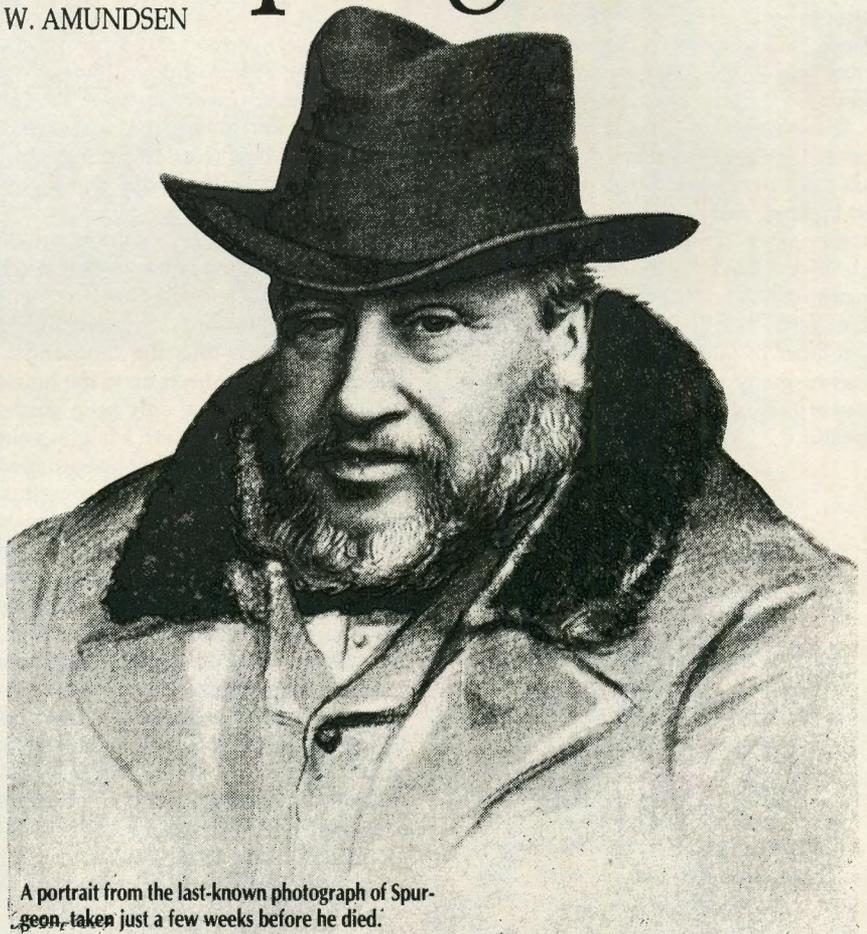
At the same time, Spurgeon's life was saturated with suffering. We know about his sufferings intimately owing to his frequent and candid descriptions of them.

What torments did Spurgeon suffer? How did he reconcile his painful experiences with his view of a gracious God?

Spiritual agonies

At the risk of oversimplifying, we can categorize Spurgeon's sufferings as spiritual, emotional, and physical—although recognizing the interplay of categories.

Spurgeon's spiritual suffering began most markedly five years prior to his conversion. Throughout his ministry, he referred to the horrors he had felt



A portrait from the last-known photograph of Spurgeon, taken just a few weeks before he died.

for five years while under deep conviction of sin, intellectually aware of the gospel, yet blind to its personal application. "The justice of God, like a ploughshare, tore my spirit," he recalled. "I was condemned, undone, destroyed—lost, helpless, hopeless—I thought hell was before me. . . . I prayed, but found no answer of peace. It was long with me thus."

To Spurgeon, no suffering he later endured could equal this devastating bitterness of soul. These spiritual sufferings taught him to loathe the foulness of sin and to cherish the holiness of God. And they engendered within him a seraphic joy in his salvation.

Slander and scorn

During his early years in London, Spurgeon received intense slander and scorn. In 1881 he could look back at those years and say, "If I am able to say in very truth, 'I was buried with Christ thirty years ago,' I must surely be dead. Certainly the world thought so, for not long after my burial with Jesus I began to preach his name, and by that time the world thought me very far gone, and said, 'He stinketh.' They began to say all manner of evil against the preacher; but the more I stank in their nostrils the better I liked it, for the surer I was that I was really dead to the world."

At the time, however, Spurgeon wavered between rejoicing in such persecution and being utterly crushed by it. In 1857 he wrestled with his feelings:

"Down on my knees have I often fallen, with the hot sweat rising from my brow under some fresh slander poured upon me; in an agony of grief my heart has been well-nigh broken; . . . This thing I hope I can say from my heart: If to be made as the mire of the streets again, if to be the laughing stock of fools and the song of the

"Often, in coming down to this pulpit, have I felt my knees knock together." —Spurgeon

drunkard once more will make me more serviceable to my Master, and more useful to his cause, I will prefer it to all this multitude, or to all the applause that man could give."

The weight of preaching

From the beginning of his ministry, Spurgeon attracted vast audiences in such establishments as Exeter Hall and the Royal Surrey Gardens Music Hall. While to all appearances he brimmed with self-assurance, in reality he was filled with trepidation. In 1861 he remarked, "My deacons know well enough how, when I first preached in Exeter Hall, there was scarcely ever an occasion, in which they left me alone for ten minutes before the service, but they would find me in a most fearful state of sickness, produced by that tremendous thought of my solemn responsibility. . . ."

Spurgeon felt great anxiety, but it stemmed not so much from the multitudes as from the awesome responsibility of being accountable to God for the souls of so many. This remained a hearty source of spiritual suffering throughout his career. He remarked in 1883: "I have preached the gospel now these thirty years and more, and . . . often, in coming down to this pulpit, have I felt my knees knock together, not that I am afraid of any one of my hearers, but I am thinking of that account which I must render to God,

whether I speak his Word faithfully or not."

Emotional trial by "Fire!"

On the evening of October 19, 1856, Spurgeon was to commence weekly services at the Royal Surrey Gardens Music Hall. That morning he preached at New Park Street Chapel on Malachi 3:10: "Prove me now." With chillingly prophetic voice he declared, ". . . I may be called to stand where the thunderclouds brew, where the lightnings play, and tempestuous winds are howling on the mountain top. Well, then, I am born to prove the power and majesty of our God; amidst dangers he will inspire me with courage; amidst toils he will make me strong. . . . We shall be gathered together tonight where an unprecedented mass of people will assemble, perhaps from idle curiosity, to hear God's Word; and the voice cries in my ears, 'Prove me now.' . . . See what God can do, just when a cloud is falling on the head of him whom God has raised up to preach to you. . . ."

That evening Surrey Hall, capable of holding up to twelve thousand, was overflowing with an additional ten thousand people in the gardens. The service was underway when, during Spurgeon's prayer, several malicious

miscreants shouted, "Fire! The galleries are giving way!" In the ensuing panic, seven people died and twenty-eight were hospitalized with serious injuries. Spurgeon, totally undone, was literally carried from the pulpit and taken to a friend's house where he remained for several days in deep depression.

Later he remarked, "Perhaps never soul went so near the burning furnace of insanity, and yet came away unharmed." At last he found comfort in the verse "Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name." Spurgeon was but a soldier; the Lord was the Captain of the host, hence victory was assured. Yet until Spurgeon's death, the spectre of the calamity so brooded over him that a close friend and biographer surmised: "I cannot but think, from what I saw, 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."

Depression

If Spurgeon was acquainted with depression before, following the Surrey Hall disaster, it became a more frequent and perverse companion. In October 1858 he had his first episode of incapacitating illness since coming to



The Royal Surrey Gardens Music Hall, a popular amusement hall that Spurgeon's congregation rented when they had outgrown their building and had not completed a new one. On Sunday night, October 19, 1856, Spurgeon's first service there was interrupted by false (probably premeditated) cries of "Fire!" In the ensuing melee, 7 people were trampled to death. Spurgeon, only 22 years old, was so distressed he was unable to preach for several weeks and later said the experience was "sufficient to shatter my reason" and might have meant his ministry "was silenced for ever."

London. Having been absent from his pulpit for three Sundays, when he returned he preached on 1 Peter 1:6: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." In the sermon, entitled "The Christian's Heaviness and Rejoicing," Spurgeon said that during his illness, when "my spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for . . . a kind friend was telling me of some poor old soul living near, who was suffering very great pain, and yet she was full of joy and rejoicing. I was so distressed by the hearing of that story, and felt so ashamed of myself. . . ." While he was struggling with the contrast between his depression and the joy evinced by this woman who was afflicted with cancer, "this text flashed upon my mind, with its real meaning . . . that sometimes the Christian should not endure his sufferings with a gallant and a joyous heart" but "that sometimes his spirits should sink within him, and that he should become even as a little child smitten beneath the hand of God."

Spurgeon was indeed frequently "in heaviness." Sometimes Spurgeon's depression was the direct result of his various illnesses, perhaps simply psychologically, and in the case of his gout, probably physiologically as well. Despite this, Spurgeon thought of his own depression as his "worst feature" and once commented that "despondency is not a virtue; I believe it is a vice. I am heartily ashamed of myself for falling into it, but I am sure there is no remedy for it like a holy faith in God."

Spurgeon comforted himself with the realization that such depression equipped him to minister more effectively: "I would go into the deeps a hundred times to cheer a downcast spirit. It is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might know how to speak a word in season to one that is weary."

Labors of ministry

Spurgeon's recurring bouts of depression were exacerbated by his numerous responsibilities. He once remarked: "No one living knows the toil and care I have to bear. I ask for no sympathy but ask indulgence if I sometimes forget something. I have to look

after the Orphanage, have charge of a church with four thousand members, sometimes there are marriages and burials to be undertaken, there is the weekly sermon to be revised, *The Sword and the Trowel* to be edited, and besides all that, a weekly average of five hundred letters to be answered." In 1872 he asserted that "the ministry is a matter which wears the brain and strains the heart, and drains out the life of a man if he attends to it as he should."

Yet he declined to slow down. During his first significant illness (October 1858) Spurgeon wrote to his congregation and readers: "Do not attribute this illness to my having laboured too hard for my Master. For his dear sake, I would that I may yet be able to labour more." Later, in a sermon, he stated: "I look with pity upon people who say 'Do not preach so often; you will kill

"Did you ever lie a week on one side? Did you ever try to turn, and find yourself quite helpless?" —Spurgeon

yourself.' O my God! what would Paul have said to such a thing as that?"

Spurgeon determined that this labor and anguish, though physically damaging, must be undertaken: "We are all too much occupied with taking care of ourselves; we shun the difficulties of excessive labour. And frequently behind the entrenchments of taking care of our constitution, we do not half as much as we ought. A minister of God is bound to spurn the suggestions of ignoble ease, it is his calling to labour; and if he destroys his constitution, I, for one, only thank God that he permits us the high privilege of so making ourselves living sacrifices."

Gout

The disease that most severely afflicted Spurgeon was gout, a condition that sometimes produces exquisite pain. What can clearly be identified as

gout had seized Spurgeon in 1869 when he was 35 years old. For the remainder of his life he would be laid aside for weeks or even months nearly every year with various illnesses. Space does not permit even an abridged chronicling of his physical sufferings. Some appreciation of them comes from this article in *The Sword and the Trowel* in 1871: "It is a great mercy to be able to change sides when lying in bed. . . . Did you ever lie a week on one side? Did you ever try to turn, and find yourself quite helpless? Did others lift you, and by their kindness reveal to you the miserable fact that they must lift you back again at once into the old position, for bad as it was, it was preferable to any other? . . . It is a great mercy to get one hour's sleep at night. . . . What a mercy have I felt to have only one knee tortured at a time. What a blessing to be able to put the foot on the ground again, if only for a minute!"

A few months later he described in a sermon one experience during this period of affliction: "When I was racked some months ago with pain, to an extreme degree, so that I could no longer bear it without crying out, I asked all to go from the room, and leave me alone; and then I had nothing I could say to God but this, 'Thou art my Father, and I am thy child; and thou, as a Father, art tender and full of mercy. I could not bear to see my child suffer as thou makest me suffer, and if I saw him tormented as I am now, I would do what I could to help him, and put my arms under him to sustain him. Wilt thou hide thy face from me, my Father? Wilt thou still lay on a heavy hand, and not give me a smile from thy countenance?' . . . so I pleaded, and I ventured to say, when I was quiet, and they came back who watched me: 'I shall never have such pain again from this moment, for God has heard my prayer.' I bless God that ease came and the racking pain never returned." He regularly referred to this incident, although it is impossible to determine whether his gout was never as excruciating as it was during that episode.

Spurgeon was seldom free from pain from 1871 on. The intervals between times of forced rest became increasingly shorter, and his condition became more complex as symptoms of Bright's disease (chronic inflammation of the kidneys) began to develop. Beginning in the 1870s, Spurgeon regu-



Susannah Spurgeon, with twin sons Charles (left) and Thomas, at about the time she began experiencing periods of invalidism. Like her husband, she found ways to be amazingly productive despite her illnesses. For example, she founded and operated a book fund that distributed countless theological works to pastors who could not afford to buy them.

larly sought recovery and recuperation in Mentone, in southern France.

Spurgeon's last years of physical suffering must be seen through the grid of the Down-Grade Controversy. Early in this controversy he commented that he had "suffered the loss of friendships and reputation, and the infliction of pecuniary withdrawals and bitter reproach. . . . But the pain it has cost me none can measure." To a friend in May 1891 he said, "Goodbye; you will never see me again. This fight is killing me."

Where is God during suffering?

Spurgeon maintained that since God is sovereign, there are no such things as accidents. This, however, is not fatalism: "Fate is blind; providence has eyes." Unwavering belief in God's sovereignty was essential for Spurgeon's well-being: "[I]t would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, not

sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity."

Consequently, he tended to look very little at proximate causality. "If you drink of the river of affliction near its outfall," he preached in 1868, "it is brackish and offensive to the taste, but if you will trace it to its source, where it rises at the foot of the throne of God, you will find its waters to be sweet and health-giving." He explained in 1873: "As long as I trace my pain to accident, my bereavement to mistake, my loss to another's wrong, my discomfort to an enemy, and so on, I am of the earth, earthy, and shall break my teeth with gravel stones; but when I rise to my God and see his hand at work; I grow calm, I have not a word of repining."

Confidence in God's sovereignty and paternal love did not prevent Spurgeon from sometimes asking "Why?", however—especially when he was laid aside during times that he viewed as crucial for his work. In *The Sword and the Trowel* in 1876 he asked the question in an article entitled "Laid Aside. Why?" Spurgeon answered his own question by concluding that such times are "the surest way to teach us that we are not *necessary* to God's work, and that when we are most useful he can easily do without us."

Here and elsewhere Spurgeon noted the potential benefits of pain. In a sermon published in 1881 he maintained, "In itself pain will sanctify no man: it may even tend to wrap him up within himself, and make him morose, peevish, selfish; but when God blesses it, then it will have a most salutary effect—a suppling, softening influence." Less than a year before he died Spurgeon discussed that process in a sermon entitled "God's People Melted and Tried." Here he asks, "Were you ever in the melting pot, dear friends? I have been there, and my sermons with me, and my frames and feelings, and all my good works. They seemed to quite fill the pot till the fire burned up, and then I looked to see what there was unconsumed; and if it had not been that I had a simple faith in my Lord Jesus Christ, I am afraid I should not have found anything left. . . . The result of melting is that we arrive at a true valuation of things [and] we are poured out into a new and better fashion. And, oh, we may almost wish for the melting-pot if we may but get rid of the dross, if we may but be pure, if we

may but be fashioned more completely like unto our Lord!"

Here we see a marvelous paradox in Spurgeon's experiential theology. He candidly admits that he dreaded suffering and would do whatever he legitimately could do to avoid it. Yet when not suffering acutely, he longed for it. "The way to stronger faith usually lies along the rough pathway of sorrow," he said. ". . . I am afraid that all the grace that I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours, might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable. . . . Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best book in a minister's library."

We cannot hope to understand Spurgeon's sufferings unless we glimpse the experiential intimacy of his relationship with his Savior. On June 7, 1891, in extreme physical pain from his illnesses, Spurgeon preached what, unknown to him, proved to be his last sermon. His concluding words in the pulpit were, as usual, about his Lord: "He is the most magnanimous of captains. There never was his like among the choicest of princes. He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold he always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on his shoulders. If he bids us carry a burden, he carries it also. If there is anything that is gracious, generous, kind, and tender, yea lavish and superabundant in love, you always find it in him. These forty years and more have I served him, blessed be his name! and I have had nothing but love from him. I would be glad to continue yet another forty years in the same dear service here below if so it pleased him. His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter on it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day! Amen." □

Dr. Darrel W. Amundsen is professor of classics at Western Washington University and co-editor of *Caring and Curing* (Macmillan, 1988).

The Prince of Preachers

J. J. Brown



1830s

1834: Charles Haddon Spurgeon born June 19 at Kelvedon, Essex (1st of 17 children).

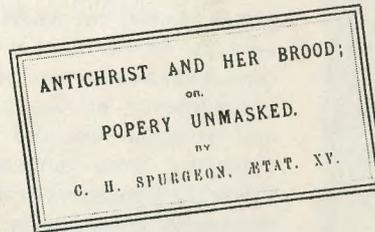
1835: Taken to Stambourne to live with grandparents.



1840s

1841: Moves back home to Colchester.

1849: First book, the 295-page *Popery Unmasked*, wins prize in writing contest.



1850s

1850: Converted to Christ on January 6. Baptized at Isleham Ferry. Joins Baptist church in Cambridge.

1851: Preaches first sermon, at Taversham. Becomes pastor at Waterbeach Chapel in Cambridge.

1854: Begins pastoral ministry at New Park Street Church in London, at age 19. Congregation approximately 200 members.

1855: Publication of sermons begins. First service at Exeter Hall. Works with first ministerial student.

1856: Marries Susannah Thompson. Twin sons Charles and Thomas born. 7 killed in Surrey Gardens disaster; ministry almost ended.



Bob L. Ross

1857: Pastors' College founded.

WORLD EVENTS

1853: Livingstone treks across Africa.

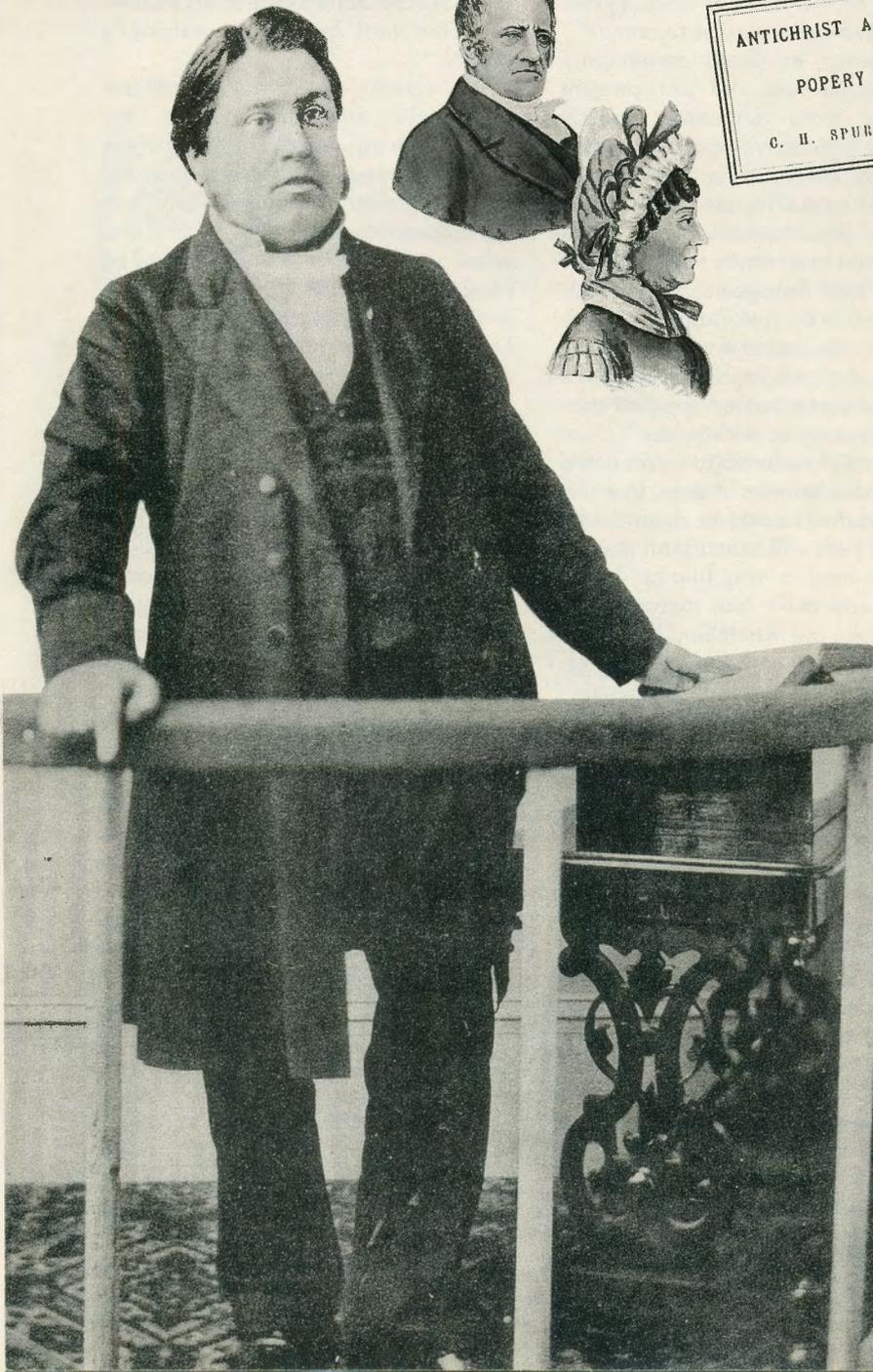
1854: "Immaculate Conception" dogma.

1854-6: Florence Nightingale serves in Crimean War.

1856-60: Anglo-Chinese War.

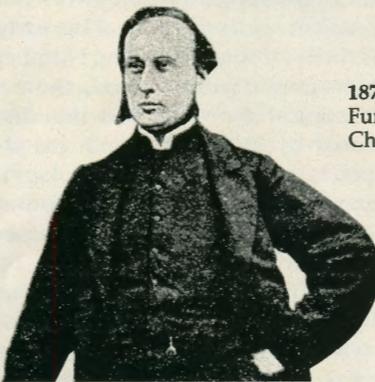
1857: Livingstone's *Missionary Travels*. Indian mutiny.

1859: Darwin's *Origin of Species*.



1860s

- 1860: Preaches in Calvin's gown and pulpit at Geneva.
- 1861: Preaches to largest indoor crowd: 23,654 at Crystal Palace, London. The Metropolitan Tabernacle, with seating for approximately 5,600, opens "debt-free" at cost of just over £31,000.
- 1864: Preaches controversial sermon on "Baptismal Regeneration" (350,000 copies sold).
- 1865: Begins publishing a monthly magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel*.
- 1866: Founds Metropolitan Tabernacle Colportage Association to distribute Christian literature.
- 1867: D. L. Moody attends services for first time. Ground breaking for Stockwell Orphanage (boys' side).



1868: James Spurgeon, his brother, becomes associate pastor at Tabernacle. Wife Susannah becomes an invalid.

1870s

1874: Baptizes his twin sons.

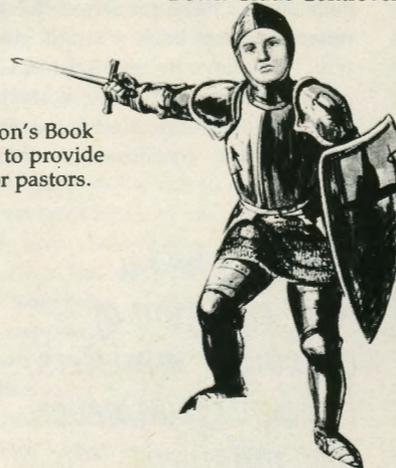


1875: Mrs. Spurgeon's Book Fund inaugurated to provide Christian books for pastors.

1879: Girls' Orphanage founded.

1880s

- 1880: Moves to new home in Westwood.
- 1885: Last volume of *The Treasury of David* (7 vols.).
- 1887: Commencement of the "Down-Grade Controversy."



1888: Baptist Union votes to censure Spurgeon.

1890s

- 1891: Last sermon at Tabernacle on June 7.
- 1892: Dies at Mentone, France, on Jan. 31. Buried at West Norwood Cemetery, London, on Feb. 12.



1894: Son Thomas chosen as pastor at Metropolitan Tabernacle.

1897-1900: Four-volume *Autobiography* published.

C.H. SPURGEON'S
Last Words of the Tabernacle

If you wear the livery of Christ, you will find Him so meek and lowly of heart that you will find rest unto your souls. He is the most magnanimous of captains. There never was His like among the choicest of princes. He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold He always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on His shoulders. If He bids us carry a burden. He carries it also. If there is anything that is gracious, generous, kind and tender, yea lavish and superabundant in love, you always find it in Him. His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter on it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of JESUS CHRIST!

- 1861-65: U.S. Civil War.
- 1864: "In God We Trust" first put on U.S. coins.
- 1866: "Black Friday" on London stock exchange.
- 1867: Russia sells Alaska to U.S.
- 1868: First U.S. professional baseball team (Cincinnati Reds). Gladstone becomes Prime Minister (until 1874).
- 1869: First Vatican Council. Suez Canal opens.

- 1870: Papal infallibility promulgated. Trade unions legalized in England.
- 1871: Population of Britain hits 26 million; U.S. 39 million.
- 1875: Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health*.
- 1876: Bell invents telephone.
- 1878: Electric lights in London.

- 1881: Population of London: 3.3 million.
- 1884-90: Africa divided by European powers.
- 1885: First gas-driven auto.
- 1886: Coca-Cola® invented.
- 1887: Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

- 1890: Cardinal Newman dies.
- 1895: Freud's first work on psychoanalysis published.
- 1896: Church attendance begins decline in London.

Dr. John H. Armstrong is pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Wheaton, Illinois.

What Did Spurgeon Believe?

He insisted on thinking through his theology for himself—and often found himself out of step with his age.

MARK HOPKINS



Charles Spurgeon thought through his theology for himself. Taking over ideas he had not sifted and mastered was foreign to him. When Spurgeon reached unconventional conclusions, he did not shrink from implementing them, even when this was quite difficult.

Baptists had a long tradition of ordaining ministers, for example, but Spurgeon managed to get his church to omit this step—he never was ordained. He campaigned arduously to do without the customary title, *Reverend*, and he eventually succeeded in replacing it with *Pastor*.

Features of his theology

Spurgeon considered his objections to ordination and the title *Reverend* as being scripturally based, a constant feature of his theology. As he put it, "I like to read my Bible so as never to have to blink when I approach a text. I like to have a theology which enables me to read [the Bible] right through from beginning to end, and to say, 'I am as pleased with that text as I am with the other.'"

Next, Spurgeon's theology was all the more radically biblical for being un-systematic. In the late 1850s he tried to dovetail biblical teaching on human responsibility with his doctrine of election. By 1860 he became convinced it couldn't be done; something had to yield. Since both doctrines were woven

into the fabric of his Bible, however, Spurgeon decided to not sacrifice either. Instead, he sacrificed the possibility of a thoroughly systematic theology.

Spurgeon expressed his approach in a forthright introduction to a sermon on election (no. 303):

"It has been my earnest endeavor ever since I have preached the Word, never to keep back a single doctrine which I believe to be taught of God. It is time that we had done with the old and rusty systems that have so long curbed the freeness of religious

Baptists had a long tradition of ordaining ministers, but Spurgeon never was ordained.

speech. The Arminian trembles to go an inch beyond Arminius or Wesley, and many a Calvinist refers to John Gill or John Calvin as any ultimate authority. It is time that the systems were broken up, and that there was sufficient grace in all our hearts to believe everything taught in God's Word, whether it was taught by either of these men or not. . . . If God teaches it, it is enough. If it is not in the Word, away with it! Away with it! But if it be in the Word,

agreeable or disagreeable, systematic or disorderly, I believe it."

This was not a momentary conviction. Some years later Spurgeon said, "Angels may, perhaps, be systematic divines; for men it should be enough to follow the Word of God, let its teachings wind as they may."

Finally, the basic, organizing principle of Spurgeon's theology was not rational but *spiritual*. Some of his early published sermons, including Number 1 on the immutability of God, show a philosophical approach. But this disappeared by 1860 (along with his attempts to systematize his theology), leaving the field free for his profound spiritual experience to find deeper expression.

William Robertson Nicoll, an influential Nonconformist newspaper editor who knew Spurgeon's sermons about as well as anyone, perceptively bracketed Spurgeon with John Bunyan as the two greatest evangelical mystics. Many of the finest passages in Spurgeon's sermons draw on spiritual exploration into God's mysteries that his theological mind was unable to map. Robertson Nicoll quoted a memorable example from an 1886 sermon on "The Three Hours' Darkness":

"This darkness tells us that the Passion is a great mystery into which we cannot pry. I try to explain it as a substitution, and I feel that where the language of Scripture is explicit, I may and must be explicit too. But yet I feel that the idea of substitution does not cover the whole of the matter, and that no

Jerusalem, by the trees, and by the
hills of the field, that ye stir not up,
nor awake my love: till he please.

10 My beloved is like a roe or a
young hart: behold, he standeth be-
hind our wall, he looketh forth at the
windows, showing himself through
the lattice.

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10 My beloved spake, and said
unto me, Rise up, my love; my fair
one, and come away.

11 For, lo, the winter is past, the
rain is over and gone:

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12 The flowers appear on the earth:
the time of the singing of birds is
come, and the voice of the turtle is
heard in our land:

13 The fig tree putteth forth her
green figs, and the vines with the
tender grape give a good smell:
Arise, my love, my fair one, and
come away.

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14 O my dove, that art in the
clefts of the rock, in the secret places
of the stairs, let me see thy counte-
nance, let me hear thy voice: for
sweet is thy voice, and thy counte-
nance is comely.

15 Take us the foxes, the little
foxes, that spoil the vines: for our
vines have tender grapes.

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xi

16 My beloved is mine, and I
am his: he feedeth among the lilies.

17 Until the day break, and the
shadows fly away, turn my beloved,
and be thou like a roe or a young
hart upon the mountains of Bethel.

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CHAPTER III.

1 BY night on my bed, I sought
him whom my soul loveth: I
sought him, but I found him not.

2 I will arise now, and go about the
city in the streets, and upon the
high ways I will seek him whom my soul
loveth: I sought him, but I found
him not.

3 The watchmen that go about the
city found me: to whom I said, Saw
ye him whom my soul loveth?

4 It was but a little that I passed
from them, but I found him whom
my soul loveth: I held him, and would
not let him go, until I had brought
him into my mother's house, and
into the chamber of her that con-
ceived me.

5 I charge you, O ye daughters of
Jerusalem, by the roses, and by the
hills of the field, that ye stir not up,
nor awake my love, till he please.

6 Who is this that cometh out of
the wilderness like pillars of smoke,
perfumed with myrrh and frankin-
cense, with all pounders of the mor-
chant?

7 Behold his bed, which is Solo-
mon's; threescore valiant men are
about it, of the valiant of Israel.

8 They all hold swords, being ex-
pert in war: every man hath his
sword upon his thigh because of
fear in the night.

9 King Solomon made himself a
chariot of the wood of Lebanon;

10 He made the pillars thereof of
silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the
covering of it of purple, the midst
thereof being paved with love, for
the chambers of Jerusalem.

11 Go forth, O ye daughters of
Zion, and behold King Solomon with
the crown wherewith his mother
crowned him in the day of his es-
pousals, and in the day of the glad-
ness of his heart.

CHAPTER IV.

1 I charge you, O ye daughters of
Jerusalem, by the doves, and by the
swallows, that ye stir not up,
nor awake my love, till he please.

2 BEHOLD, thou art fair, my sister:
behold, thou art fair, thou hast
doves' eyes within thy locks: thy
hair is as a flock of goats, that ap-
pear from mount Gilead.

3 Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep,
that are even shorn, which came up
from the washing: whereof every one

beet twins, and none is barren among
them.

3 Thy lips are like a thread of scar-
let, and thy speech is comely: thy
temples are like a piece of a pome-
granate within thy locks.

4 Thy neck is like the tower of Da-
vid builded for an armoury, where-
in there hang a thousand bucklers,
all shields of mighty men.

5 Thy two breasts are like two
young roes that are twins, which feed
among the lilies.

6 Until the day break, and the
shadows flee away, I will get me in
the mountain of myrrh, and to the
hill of frankincense.

7 Thou art all fair, my love; there
is no spot in thee.

8 Come with me from Lebanon,
my spouse, with me from Lebanon,
look from the top of Amanah, from
the top of Seneir and Hermon, from
the lions' dens, from the mountains
of the leopard.

9 Thou hast ravished my heart, my
sister, my spouse: thou hast ravished
my heart with one of thine eyes, with
one chain of thy neck.

10 How fair is thy love, my sister,
my spouse! How much better is thy
love than wine, and the smell of
thine ointments than all spices!

11 Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as
the honeycomb: honey and milk
are under thy tongue; and the smell
of thy garments is like the smell of
Lebanon.

12 A garden inclosed is my sister,
my spouse: a spring shut up, a foun-
tain sealed.

13 Thy plants are an orchard of
pomegranates, with pleasant fruits,
camphire, with spikenard:

14 Saffron and saffron; calams
and cinnamon, with all trees of frank-
incense; myrrh and aloes, with all
the chief spices:

15 A fountain of gardens, a well of
living waters, and streams from Le-
banon.

16 Awake, O north wind: and
awake, O south wind: blow upon my
garden, that the spices thereof may
flow out. Let my beloved come into
his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

come, thou south: blow upon my
garden, that the spices thereof may
flow out. Let my beloved come into
his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

CHAPTER V.

1 I AM come into my garden, my
sister, my spouse: I have gather-
ed my myrrh with my spice: I have
eaten my honeycomb with my honey:

2 I have drunk my wine with my milk:
eat, O friends: drink, ye that drink
abundantly. O beloved,

3 I sleep, but my heart waketh: it
is the voice of my beloved that knock-
eth, saying, Open to me, my sister,
my love, my dove, my undefiled: for
my head is filled with dew, and my
locks with the drops of the night.

4 I have put off my coat: how shall
I put it on? I have washed my feet:
how shall I defile them?

5 I beloved put in his hand by
the hole of the door, and my bowels
were moved for him.

6 I rose up to open to my beloved;
and my hands dropped with myrrh:
and my fingers with sweet smelling
myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.

7 I opened to my beloved: but my
beloved had withdrawn himself, and
was gone: my soul failed when he
spoke: I sought him, but I could
not find him: I call'd him, but he
gave me no answer.

8 The watchmen that went about
the city, found me, they smote me,
they wounded me: the keepers of the
walls took away my rest from me.

9 I charge you, O daughters of Je-
rusalem, if ye find my beloved, that
ye tell him, that I am sick of love.

10 What is that which ye beloved more than
another beloved, O thou fairest
among women? what is thy beloved
more than another beloved, that thou
dost so charge us?

11 My beloved is white and ruddy,
the chief among ten thousand.

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human conception can completely grasp the whole of the dread mystery. It was wrought in darkness because the full, far-reaching meaning and result cannot be beheld of finite mind.

"Tell me the death of the Lord Jesus was a grand example of self-sacrifice—I can see that and much more. Tell me it was a wondrous obedience to the will of God—I can see that and much more. Tell me it was the bearing of what ought to have been borne by myriads of sinners of the human race as the chastisement of their sin—I can see that, and found my best hope upon it. But do not tell me that this is all that is in the Cross. No, great as this would be, there is much more in the Redeemer's death. God veiled the Cross in darkness, and in darkness much of its deep meaning lies, not because God would not reveal it, but because we have not capacity to discern it all."

These adjectives, then—*biblical, un-systematic, and spiritual*—characterize Spurgeon's theology.

Coming to Calvinism

What was the content of that theology? It is well known that Spurgeon was a Calvinist. He stood out from the contemporary trend toward abandoning and often denouncing Calvinism.

In fact, Spurgeon gave his Calvinism a high profile. When his great, new Metropolitan Tabernacle opened in 1861, a series of sermons was preached on the "five points of Calvinism"—human depravity, election, particular redemption, effectual calling, and final perseverance.

What is not widely known, however, is that Spurgeon's Calvinism was adopted rather than inherited. He came by it some months after his conversion. As Spurgeon told the story a few years later:

"Born, as all of us are by nature, an Arminian, I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit and did not see the grace of God. I remember sitting one day in the house of God and hearing a sermon as dry as possible, and as worthless as all such sermons are, when a thought struck my mind—How came I to be converted? I prayed, thought I. Then I thought, How came I to pray? I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came I to read the Scriptures? Why—I did read them; and what led me to that? And then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of all, and that he was the author of faith. And then the whole doctrine opened up to me, from which I have not departed."

Two pages from Spurgeon's study Bible, showing the many cross-references and notations he made as he studied. "The kind of sermons that people need to hear are outgrowths of Scripture," he told students at his Pastors' College. "If they do not love to hear them, there is all the more reason why they should be preached to them."

Development in his thinking

It is difficult, however, to trace much development in Spurgeon's theology. Spurgeon shared the common conservative view that "there is nothing new in theology save that which is false." When revising his early published sermons, he boasted that though he might alter some expressions, there was no need to change any doctrine. The most change one can observe in his weekly published sermons is that he overcame, by 1860, his early hesitancy about inviting everyone, without distinction, to respond to the gospel.

The reason for Spurgeon's stability was that he found in the Puritans' theology ample material to help him fashion his own—although his own Bible study was always his main resource. A fast reader with extraordinary powers of retention, Spurgeon devoured vast quantities of verbose Puritan theology while still a teenager. Partly because of

this influence, his theological emphases were different from those of most evangelicals of the period. In the Puritans' writings, Spurgeon found three things he thought were in short supply in contemporary evangelicalism: rigorous theology, warm spirituality, and down-to-earth practicality.

Topics he tended to avoid

Spurgeon's opinion on the practical relevance of a subject largely determined the amount of attention he devoted to it. Most doctrines passed his "practicality test," and the doctrines of atonement and Scripture gained especially high marks. But the areas he tended to avoid reveal as much as anything about his theology.

Eschatology, for example, fared badly. His lack of interest is all the more striking since many evangelicals at the time were preoccupied with the doctrine. During the vast majority of Spurgeon's ministry the return of Christ seemed to him a distant prospect. His initial postmillennial views gave way to premillennialism early on, but he was wary of prophetic passages that acted as a magnet to others. He never felt able to endorse any of the specific premillennial positions then current.

Nor did Spurgeon participate in the holiness movements popular among late nineteenth-century evangelicals. He had a strong doctrine of sanctification, but he was quite scathing about perfectionism: "Though they persuade themselves that their sins are dead, it is . . . highly probable that the rest of their sins are only keeping out of the way to let their pride have room to develop to ruinous proportions."

A third area Spurgeon avoided was biblical criticism. He held a straightforward doctrine of biblical infallibility; he had no time for the higher criticism spreading from Germany. Instead of attempting to fight the critics on their ground, however, he steered clear of



Spurgeon's study in his "Westwood" estate. The walls are lined by some of the estimated 12,000 volumes he owned, many from Puritan writers. Spurgeon began reading Puritan theology when he was a boy, and it influenced him throughout his life.

William E. Partee Center for Baptist Historical Studies, William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri.

that entire branch of theological literature. In that, he was probably wise, for he was not really equipped for that battlefield. Spurgeon was not a complete theologian; though his mind had many strengths, it was relatively weak in logic and analysis.

Out of sympathy with his age

As a theologian, then, Spurgeon was in many ways out of sympathy with his age. He protested its widespread adoption of liberalism. And his Puritan-inspired Calvinism stood at variance with contemporary evangelicalism.

But in several important respects, Spurgeon was representative of his generation, the English Nonconformists most completely influenced by the Romantic movement. The hallmarks are plainly discernible in him: a desire for reality, life, and spirituality; an impatience with the merely rational; guidance by moral imperatives issued from an authoritative conscience.

Before his conversion, for example, Spurgeon struggled to understand how God could justly remove people's sin. He had the same difficulty understanding the righteousness of atonement as did the contemporary pioneers of liberalism. Later on, however, Spurgeon defended objective

atonement in language as imperiously ethical as any used by its attackers: "I cannot help holding that there must be an atonement before there can be pardon, because my conscience demands it, and my peace depends on it. The little court within my own heart is not satisfied unless some retribution be exacted for dishonour done to God."

Ultimately, however, in the Down-Grade controversy [see article on page 31], Spurgeon issued a massive protest against liberalism. The crucial point at which Spurgeon's path diverged from the liberals' was not philosophical, methodological, critical, or ethical. It was spiritual.

Nourished by his profound submission to Scripture, Spurgeon deeply appreciated God's transcendent holiness, the vast gulf separating it from man's sinfulness, and the atonement that spanned that gulf. He had a truly three-dimensional theology. □

Mark Hopkins is lecturer in church history at Theological College of Northern Nigeria.

The Down-Grade Controversy

What caused Spurgeon to start the most bitter fight of his life?

In March 1887, Spurgeon published in his monthly magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel*, an article titled "The Down Grade." The article, published anonymously but written by Spurgeon's friend Robert Shindler, declared that some ministers were "denying the proper deity of the Son of God, renouncing faith in his atoning death. . . ." They were, Shindler said, on a slippery slope, or "Down Grade," away from essential evangelical doctrines.

In the following month's *Sword and Trowel*, Spurgeon wrote, "We are glad that the article upon 'The Down Grade' has excited notice. . . . Our warfare is with men who are giving up the atoning sacrifice, denying the inspiration of Holy Scripture, and casting slurs upon justification by faith." That summer Spurgeon wrote further on Shindler's theme. Controversy developed, Spurgeon became the focal point of the charges, and the Baptist Union, which was bitterly divided over the question, ultimately voted to censure him.

Explaining the tangled affair is Dr. Mark Hopkins, lecturer in church history at Theological College of Northern Nigeria.



First cover of *The Sword and the Trowel*, the monthly magazine founded by Spurgeon in 1865. During the height of the Down-Grade Controversy, in 1887–8, every issue contained something about the dispute.



he Down-Grade Controversy of 1887–88 was the most dramatic and the most disastrous episode in Spurgeon's career. It was also the severest crisis ever faced by the Baptist Union, the body to which Spurgeon belonged.

In the flurry of charges, none of the principal players cared to expose key information that lay hidden from public view. However, some important missing pieces of the jigsaw have turned up recently. It is now possible to sketch the story more accurately.

Why did Spurgeon start it?

Spurgeon launched the controversy, and so the first question must be,

"What was he trying to do?"

Spurgeon was not campaigning for an evangelical basis for the Baptist Union, nor attempting to expel its liberals. He saw that liberalism would grow and prevail for a while to come, and he was not so naive as to suppose that it could be stopped by resolutions. Again, he was not trying to engineer a schism and start an evangelical union: the idea did not appeal to him, and he did not think this could be a permanent solution.

Lacking a positive program of any kind, Spurgeon had just two things in mind: (1) to warn against the rise of liberalism (he was more concerned about Congregationalism, in which it had taken deeper root, than about his own denomination); and (2) having thus satisfied his conscience, to retreat into the private world of his church and associated enterprises, which kept him more than busy and fulfilled.

The controversy: Phase 1

In 1887, in his magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel*, Spurgeon delivered a wide-ranging but superficial critique. His message was that Nonconformists were on a slippery slope away from biblical doctrine and standards of behavior. Three doctrines, Spurgeon said, were being abandoned: biblical infallibility, substitutionary atonement, and the finality of judgment for those who died outside Christ. His passionate and outspoken language helped arouse attention. But perhaps the decisive factor in provoking an extensive debate was Spurgeon's unfavorable comparison between Nonconformity [Protestant dissenters such as the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists] and the Church of England. This was a potent bait, and when the Baptist Union met in October, the "Down Grade" was the main topic of conversation. Yet fear of troubling the theological waters kept the subject off the official program—Baptist leaders hoped the debate would fizzle out. The few references that were made dismissed Spurgeon, and he felt it time for the more congenial part of his plan: he resigned from the Baptist Union.

The controversy: Phase 2

If Spurgeon had had his way, the controversy would have ended at that point; but he was not to be let off so easily. When Spurgeon resigned, the controversy narrowed into an intra-Baptist dispute, but its intensity re-

doubled—Spurgeon's national fame ensured that his resignation dealt a heavy blow to the reputation of the Baptist Union.

The Council of the Baptist Union met in December to deliberate on the crisis. Spurgeon's hard-line opponents, incensed by the damage Spurgeon had done to the Union's standing, poured cold water on Spurgeon's claims to have done all he could to combat the evils he was lamenting before resigning. They hoped their next goal—to get Spurgeon to withdraw his charges or furnish evidence against named individuals—could be achieved in a meeting with a delegation from the Union. These uncompromising opponents formed an unlikely alliance with a well-intentioned but unrealistic group that thought all might be settled if only the two sides would talk. Together the two groups passed a resolution appointing a delegation to confer with Spurgeon on "How the unity of our Denomination in truth, love, and good works may best be maintained."

For his part, Spurgeon was determined *not* to name anyone—he was well aware of the backlash he would face if he created martyrs. He carefully negotiated the meeting's terms to rule out any discussion of his previous actions. The meeting would simply discuss what the Union might do to put its house in order.

Spurgeon was stunned, then, when his charges and resignation were brought up at the meeting (held on January 13, 1888). Following this *coup de main*, the Council passed a resolution known as the "vote of censure," which said that since Spurgeon declined to give names and supporting evidence, the Council considered that his charges ought not to have been made. Spurgeon felt bitterly betrayed.

The deepening cycle of confrontation was broken when Spurgeon dissuaded his supporters from trying to reverse the vote of censure, and when a more severe censure motion was defeated in the February Council meeting.

The controversy: Phase 3

The third and final phase of the controversy revolved around competing declarations of the Union's faith. The Council passed a resolution that had the delicate double aim of vindicating the evangelical cre-



dentials of the Union while not straining the consciences of its more liberal members. Meanwhile, supporters of Spurgeon's protest, as surprised and shocked by his resignation as were his critics, finally began to make an impact under the leadership of Spurgeon's brother James. A few had resigned and joined their leader on the sidelines, but the majority campaigned for the adoption of doctrinal declarations that would restore the Baptist Union to an unequivocally evangelical allegiance. Spurgeon supported them, not because he had become more optimistic about the prospects for success, but because he thought it only right that they should attempt to do something about the "Down Grade" before resigning, just as he had done earlier.

At a Council meeting just before the Annual Assembly, efforts were made to bridge the gap between two sets of doctrinal declarations, one more evangelical than the other. Negotiations were finally successful just five minutes before the crucial session was due to open (on the afternoon of April 23, 1888). Delegates and spectators, who had expected to witness the rending of the Baptist denomination, were astonished to learn that James Spurgeon would be seconding an amended resolution. It was a strange scene: the proposer had no time to rewrite his fighting speech, and James Spurgeon's contribution was suffused by doubt as to

Spurgeon depicted as Great-heart, the character from *Pilgrim's Progress* who conquered the Giant Grim. Unfortunately, in the true-to-life Down-Grade Controversy, Spurgeon did not emerge unscathed. During the controversy his health deteriorated, so that his wife, Susannah, wrote following his death that "his fight for the faith . . . cost him his life."

the wisdom of his action. Indeed, the last-minute concessions he gained amounted to little; he was outmaneuvered.

Had the vote taken place, what would the result have been? Both factions had slates of candidates for the Council elections that took place on the same day; the results of these would indicate support for Spurgeon in the region of 25 to 30 percent.

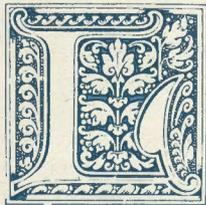
Spurgeon was devastated when he learned what had happened. A dark shadow was cast over his last few years. The Baptist Union's supporters could be relieved by the reprieve, but beyond that they had little cause for satisfaction.

The basic problem with the Down-Grade Controversy was that the central theological issues were never really addressed. And Spurgeon, who had generated more heat than light, was partly to blame. □

Caring for Children

Spurgeon did more than preach. He launched significant—and lasting—homes for orphans.

IAN F. SHAW



London of the 1860s was, to borrow Charles Spurgeon's expressive humor, "the city of Gog, Magog, and Fog!" Early optimism about the Industrial Revolution was now fading. An urban underclass was growing rapidly. Within this context evangelical Christians struggled—

with varying degrees of success—to work out the social responsibilities of their faith. Spurgeon declared that he and his congregation were determined "to show our love of truth by truthful love."

By any standards, the involvement of Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle congregation in social ministries was outstanding. In 1867, £23,360 was voluntarily given to the various causes of

the church—the Pastors' College, Alms-houses, and the Sunday and Ragged Schools among them. But £7,000 went to one of the most interesting, significant, and least understood of these causes—the Stockwell Orphanage.

A new enterprise

The summer of 1866 found Spurgeon looking for a new work in which to engage. Concerned about the advances of Tractarianism [a High-Church movement within the Church of England], he wanted to establish a Christian school. An unexpected gift of £20,000 from Anne Hillyard, the widow of an Anglican clergyman, led him

Orphans show off their skimmer hats and cricket bats in front of the boys' homes at the Stockwell Orphanage. Headmaster Vernon Charlesworth is in the center.

Craig Skinner



in a different direction. By the end of 1867, four boys' houses had been opened at Stockwell, followed during the 1880s by five houses for girls. Located on the Clapham Road, south of the River Thames, the row of boys' houses faced a similar row of girls' houses across an area of lawns and

Spurgeon insisted that admission should be on the basis of need—not limited by social background or religious allegiance.

open play areas. Both the boys' and girls' institutions aimed to provide for the "free and gratuitous residence, maintenance, clothing, instruction, and education of destitute, fatherless children."

Spurgeon believed that Christians could cooperate on matters of social concern, when theological differences might exclude cooperation on other issues. At the laying of Stockwell's foundation stone in 1867 he declared, "On these occasions we do not meet either as Church [of England] people or as Dissenters. When we aim to help orphans or to take care of the poor, we lay aside all that."

This was not an argument for working with all people who loosely described themselves as Christians. In his later years, as theological liberalism and Christian socialism arose, Spurgeon increasingly put forward the orphanage as a testimony to opponents of the gospel. "The orphanage is an eloquent answer to the sneers of infidels and scoffers of the modern school who would fain make it out that our charity lies in bigoted zeal for doctrines but does not produce practical results. Are any of the new theologians doing more than those of the old orthodox faith? . . . What does their Socialism amount to beyond words and theory? At any rate, we care for both the bodies and souls of the poor, and try to show our love of truth by truthful love."

Three goals for the orphanages

The annual reports of the orphanage set forth three broad principles for the work.

Need-based admission. The orphanage was to be open to all classes of the community, and patronage from subscribers holding votes was rejected. In this Spurgeon followed the pioneering example of George Müller of Bristol.

Nonsectarian admission. "More concerned that the children should become disciples of Christ than devotees of a sect," trustees admitted children from any or no denominational background. "No child is prejudiced as a candidate by the creed of his parents. . . . [If] Christian principles were lacking in the father, the child should not be punished on that account."

Non-institutionalized care. The Stockwell houses aimed to provide a kinder alternative to the Poor Law workhouses. Much emphasis was placed on locating children in "large families instead of massing them together on the workhouse system." Spurgeon also determined that children should not endure "this common piece of folly" of being dressed in uniforms.

Goals realized

To what extent was Spurgeon successful in achieving these aims?

The formal procedure for admitting children rested with a small committee acting on the report of a "messenger." In establishing this, Spurgeon by and large avoided the abuses of the patronage system. And Spurgeon probably was justified in his frequent claims that children came from all social backgrounds. Farmer, railway worker, customs officer, accountant, clerk, waterman, cabbie, laborer, missionary, shopkeeper, and teacher were among the occupations of deceased fathers. Children from very poor backgrounds, however, tended to be under-represented; and children with a record of ill health or delinquency were generally excluded because "the Institution is not a Hospital, or a Reformatory, or an Idiot Asylum."

Spurgeon claimed that no child was prejudiced as a candidate by the denominational allegiance of the parents. How far did Spurgeon translate this claim into action? The chart below shows the number of children admitted to Stockwell between 1867 and 1892, according to the religion of their fathers:

	Number	Pct.
Church of England	609	38
Baptist	405	25
Congregational	168	11
Methodist	143	9
Presbyterian	28	2
Others	23	2
Unspecified	200	13
TOTAL	1,576	100

From what we know about religious observance during the period, candidates for Stockwell were slightly more likely to have a denominational tie than were others in society. Baptists were over-represented, and Roman Catholics were under-represented. There is no evidence that the trustees regarded this as a problem. However, in general terms, Spurgeon's claim of avoiding discrimination is substantially justified by the facts.

Goal unrealized

However, perhaps the major criticism that can be brought against Stockwell is its failure to realize to any marked degree Spurgeon's aim of providing substitute family care. Influenced by Wichern's Rauhe Haus (Ragged House) in Hamburg, Spurgeon planned to provide units of no more than twelve children cared for by a married couple. This combination of residential care and fostering never succeeded for various reasons.

First, there was only a partial commitment to the model. The homes were not physically separate from one another, and single-sex homes were accepted as axiomatic. Children had few of the unspoken rights of childhood. For example, it was agreed by the trustees early in 1869 "that the boys take off their shoes before going upstairs. No boy to go upstairs between morning and night, unless sent up by the Matron."

Everyday routine was far from easy and was typical of child care of the period. "A bit too spartan life" as people living there at the turn of the century recalled. "With the exception of Sunday, . . . we arose at 6 a.m. and scrubbed our dormitories, stairs, dining tables and forms, in fact, everything that could be scrubbed, while others peeled potatoes, cleaned boots, etc."

Food, recreation, and education were probably no worse and no better

Spurgeon surrounded by boys from the Stockwell Orphanage. The orphans came to services at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. At Christmas, Spurgeon bought each child a present.



than much mainline voluntary care of the period, though the trustees probably exercised a conservative influence in these areas.

Second, there was never any serious attempt to keep the size of the homes as low as twelve. The houses catered to an average of more than forty children, with only two caregivers. The trustees also failed to keep to their decision about staffing the homes, overturning their commitment to having married couples caring for the children. Part of the reason was that the system had been initially "forced upon the Trustees by financial circumstances," and economic reasons continued to dilute the plan's effectiveness. Significantly, fostering was rejected because it was "impractical," not because it was undesirable.

One man recalled his tears on arrival at Stockwell, and "the feeling of bewilderment and utter loneliness that came upon me when I stood within the great playhall. . . . How strange, too, and unlike anything I had ever known before, the dining room seemed, with its long tables, spread with row after row of mugs and slices of bread and butter; and the dormitories, neat, clean and comfortable, but so different to the little bedroom I had been accustomed to at home."

Spurgeon insisted that "the children

are not dressed in a uniform to mark them as recipients of charity." In words of continuing relevance he argued just three years before his death that "orphanhood is a child's misfortune, and should not be treated as though it were his fault. In a garb which is a symbol of dependence it is difficult, if not impossible, for an orphan to preserve a feeling of self-respect."

However, uniformity of dress did tend to emerge. In an illuminating entry in the Master's Report Book in 1882, Vernon Charlesworth, the head of the establishment, wrote, "With regard to the dress of the children the president's wish has been regarded and we have striven to avoid the monotony of an institution badge." Charlesworth had originally written, "We have avoided the monotony of . . ." but deleted this in favor of the significantly weaker statement. As this illustrates, an *ad hoc* pattern of rule making dominated Stockwell's formative years and diluted the principles upon which the work was founded.

Insights from the orphanages

Spurgeon did not set out to innovate. He failed to develop a radical critique of contemporary orphanage practice. His opposition to the voting system (a common practice in which an

orphan was admitted upon the votes of wealthy subscribers) is a case in point. Unlike George Müller, who was writing on this in the 1830s, Spurgeon refused to press for its general abolition. The fact that at least one of his deacons held votes for another orphanage must have influenced him at this point.

Further, the trustees often showed themselves oddly out of touch. Charlesworth, with Spurgeon's backing, carried out a running battle with the trustees for a decent asphalt surface; the existing one was either black dust or semi-liquid paste according to the weather. An unknown trustee has added the almost incredible note in the margin of the Master's Report Book, "Master to use the blacking for Boys' boots!"

And paternalism and sentimentality were too often present. "This great Hostelery of the All Merciful" was scarcely a description with which Stockwell's residents would concur.

However, the value of Spurgeon's initiatives should not be underestimated. His realization that social work carried out in the name of Christianity must be articulated with the doctrine of salvation was important at a time when liberal criticism was growing and evangelicalism was in decline.

Spurgeon's insistence that admission should be on the basis of need—not limited by social background or religious allegiance—set an example that is ever relevant.

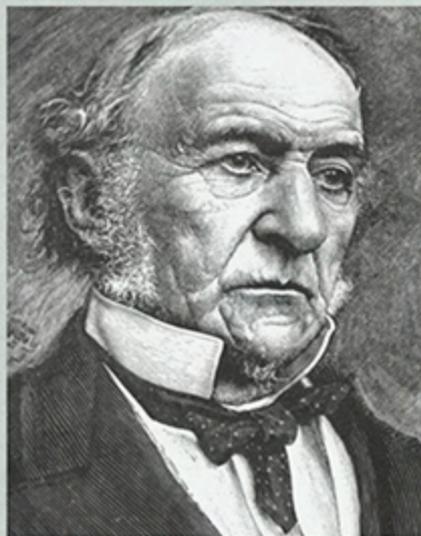
Above all, Spurgeon's social ministries reveal the possibilities of powerful preaching. It was his preaching of the doctrines of grace that drew a congregation that could finance an operation of this scale almost single-handedly. And in changed form, Spurgeon's Homes still provide a child-care service today. □

Acknowledgments: This article draws upon the author's article "Charles Spurgeon and the Stockwell Orphanage: A Forgotten Enterprise" that appeared in *Christian Graduate*, 29 (1976). Portions of that material are used by permission of Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship. The author also acknowledges his indebtedness to David Kingdon, who permitted him to draw upon his manuscript history of the Homes, and to those elderly former residents who originally recorded their impressions for David Kingdon. The heart of the material is provided by the Trustees' Minutes Books, Annual Reports of Stockwell Orphanage, the Master's Report Book, and the Admissions and Dismissals Book of the Homes.

Dr. Ian F. Shaw is lecturer in social work at University of Wales College of Cardiff.

Famous Friends of Spurgeon

ERIC W. HAYDEN



Wokeley, William Ewart Gladstone, 1898

W. E. GLADSTONE

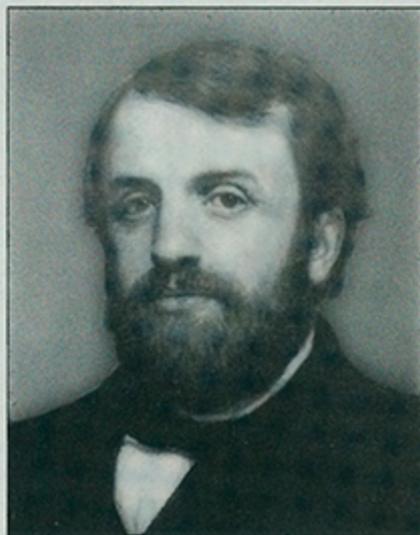
Four times Prime Minister

The Prime Minister of England (W. E. Gladstone) and the "Prime Minister" of the Baptists (C. H. Spurgeon) were similar in many ways. Gladstone was known as "The Grand Ol' Man"; Spurgeon was called "The Gov'nor." Of Gladstone it was said, "He was religious, and his religion was the secret of his power." Both were men of principle, prayer, and belief in God.

Gladstone was educated at Eton and Oxford and became a Conservative Member of Parliament for Newark. His first important speech called for the emancipation of slaves. He became leader of the Liberal Party in 1867 and Prime Minister four times between 1868 and 1894.

In January 1882 Gladstone requested a reserved seat in the Tabernacle to hear his friend Spurgeon preach. He arrived early with his son and sat in the vestry with Spurgeon until the service. Following the visit, the Prime Minister's enemies criticized him because he was a member of the Church of Eng-

land visiting a Dissenting Chapel. This did not deter Gladstone from inviting Spurgeon, on several occasions, to Downing Street for breakfast or lunch. In 1886, however, Gladstone and Spurgeon split politically over giving Home Rule to Ireland. In 1898, when Gladstone died, a writer remarked, "Were not C. H. Spurgeon in his youth and W. E. Gladstone in his old age the most wonderful phenomena of the nineteenth century?"



Moody Bible Institute

D. L. MOODY

Great American revivalist

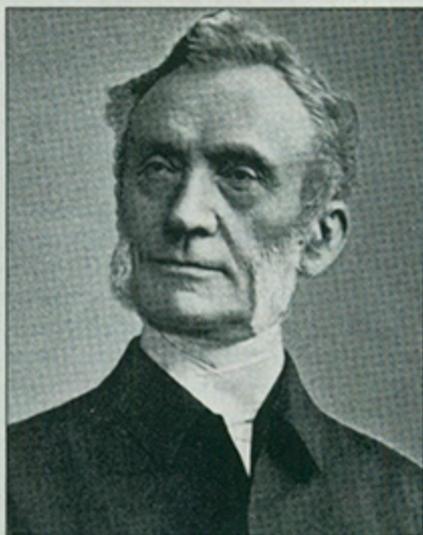
Both Moody and Spurgeon were stocky and bearded. Both looked physically weary until they began preaching, when their faces became transfigured. Both could use humor and pathos to good effect. Both founded colleges, and both men began their Christian service among children. They both had a deep experience of the Holy Spirit.

On arriving in England for the first time, in 1867, Moody made straight for the Tabernacle and sat in the gallery,

drinking in all he heard. Back home, asked if he had seen this or that cathedral he said, "No, but I've heard Spurgeon!" He only wished he could have taken the gallery seat home with him.

Moody heard Spurgeon again in the Agricultural Hall, Islington, and went back to America "a better man." He returned to the same Tabernacle seat in 1872 when "heaven came down on his soul" and many more times later on, and on each occasion he learned more about preaching. After reading Spurgeon's sermons for twenty-five years, Moody concluded, "If God could use Spurgeon, why not the rest of us?"

In spite of Moody's Arminian views, Calvinistic Spurgeon preached for Moody and Sankey at their Bow Road Hall in London. And Moody was invited to preach in the Tabernacle on Spurgeon's Jubilee (50th birthday celebrations in 1884). Spurgeon wrote of Moody that year, "He is a king of men; commanding and finding everybody eager to obey; and all the while utterly lost in his work, and as devoid of self-importance as a new-born babe."



Bob L. Ross

GEORGE MÜLLER

Famous orphanage founder

Spurgeon paid more than one visit to Ashley Down, Bristol, to talk with Müller, that "heavenly-minded man," about his orphanage. He was astounded by Müller's stories of living by faith, waiting for God to answer the needs of the orphans in response to his prayers.

Spurgeon met several times with Müller and with Hudson Taylor, the missionary to China, at Mentone, in the south of France.

In 1875 Müller preached at Spurgeon's Thursday night service, and it was "a sermon long to be remembered," commented the Prince of Preachers. Spurgeon once said that if he could change bodies with anyone it would be with George Müller—for time and eternity. They often spent whole days together, stimulating each other's faith by discussing the unfulfilling promises of God. Perhaps Spurgeon was influenced more by Müller than Müller was by Spurgeon.

In 1867, Spurgeon was offered £20,000 to start an orphanage. He suggested the donor give it to George Müller instead. She insisted Spurgeon keep the gift, however, and so Spurgeon launched new homes patterned largely upon Müller's.



LORD SHAFTESBURY
Tireless social reformer

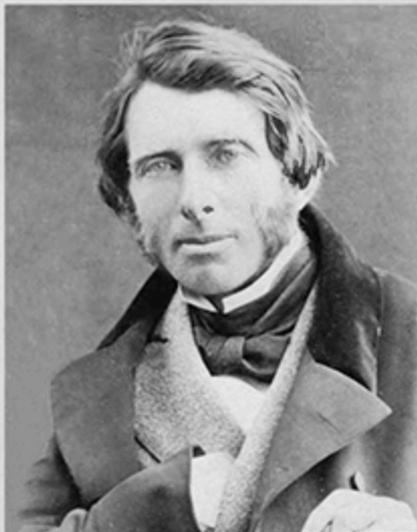
The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury was the best-loved benefactor and politician of the nineteenth century. Tireless and compassionate on behalf of the poor and oppressed, he earned the title, "The Poor Man's Earl." He greatly improved the lot of women and children in mines and factories, besides advocating foreign missions.

Although Shaftesbury was thirty-three years Spurgeon's senior, they were firm friends. Both suffered criticism and bouts of depression. Shaftesbury declared that a half-hour's conversation with Spurgeon always raised his spirits. They corresponded frequently and met at Spurgeon's London home and at Mentone in the south of France. Shaftesbury would stay after

tea to join in family prayers.

Spurgeon described Shaftesbury as "a real nobleman and a man of God." Shaftesbury became president of a mission associated with Spurgeon's Tabernacle that ministered to London's costermongers [street vendors], a large group of people dear to Spurgeon.

Shaftesbury chaired Spurgeon's 50th birthday celebrations in the Tabernacle, and Spurgeon was present at Shaftesbury's 80th birthday.



JOHN RUSKIN

Renowned art critic and reformer

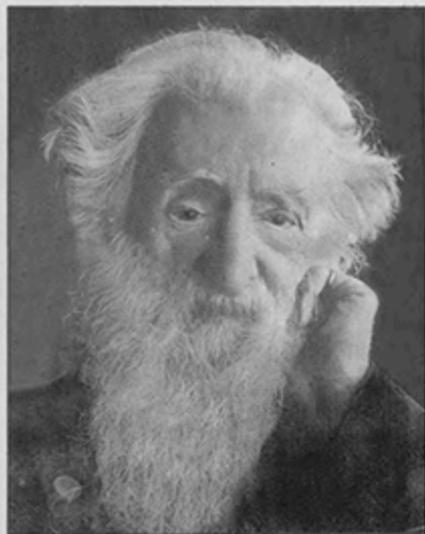
John Ruskin was educated at Christ Church, Oxford and four years later published volume one of *Modern Painters* (ultimately five volumes over seventeen years), which brought him to prominence as an art critic. A later work, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, encouraged a Gothic revival.

In spite of their educational differences, Ruskin and Spurgeon shared social concerns, and they were firm friends. Ruskin regularly attended Spurgeon's Surrey Gardens Music Hall services, and when Spurgeon was ill he visited him with gifts of pictures. Ruskin gave Spurgeon a complete set of *Modern Painters*, which the preacher annotated and frequently quoted.

Letters and visits were exchanged over the years, and when the Metropolitan Tabernacle was being built, Ruskin contributed £100, a considerable sum in those days.

The two would often talk of God's providence and sovereignty. Ruskin once told a dramatic example of divine intervention in which some children's

lives were saved by a vision of their dead mother. Spurgeon used the anecdote when lecturing to his students. Spurgeon also provided Ruskin with a satisfactory explanation of the death of the physical body and the continued existence of the soul.



WILLIAM BOOTH

Founder of the Salvation Army

William Booth was converted, like Spurgeon, in his teens. Both became workers for the Lord within days of their new birth.

Their friendly acquaintanceship began when Booth learned that Spurgeon would be lecturing to open-air workers. He wrote Spurgeon and apologized that he could not be present. Later Booth requested an audience with Spurgeon, but, uncharacteristically, arrived late. Spurgeon, who thought of Booth's methods as "playing soldiers," chided him: "General, military men should be punctual!"

William Booth paid a visit to Spurgeon's Pastors' College in the early 1870s, and Spurgeon paid high tribute to his guest. Booth was also encouraged when Spurgeon gave his celebrated "Lecture on Candles" at his mission hall in Whitechapel, and then in one of his tents to three or four thousand people. In spite of their differing emphases, Spurgeon mentioned Booth's "holy activities" in *The Sword and the Trowel* and commended him for "stirring the masses of London." □

Eric W. Hayden, formerly minister at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, is the author of numerous books on Spurgeon.

The Political Force

Spurgeon often got in the middle of hot national issues.

DAVID W. BEBBINGTON



Spurgeon believed that religion should be carried into politics.

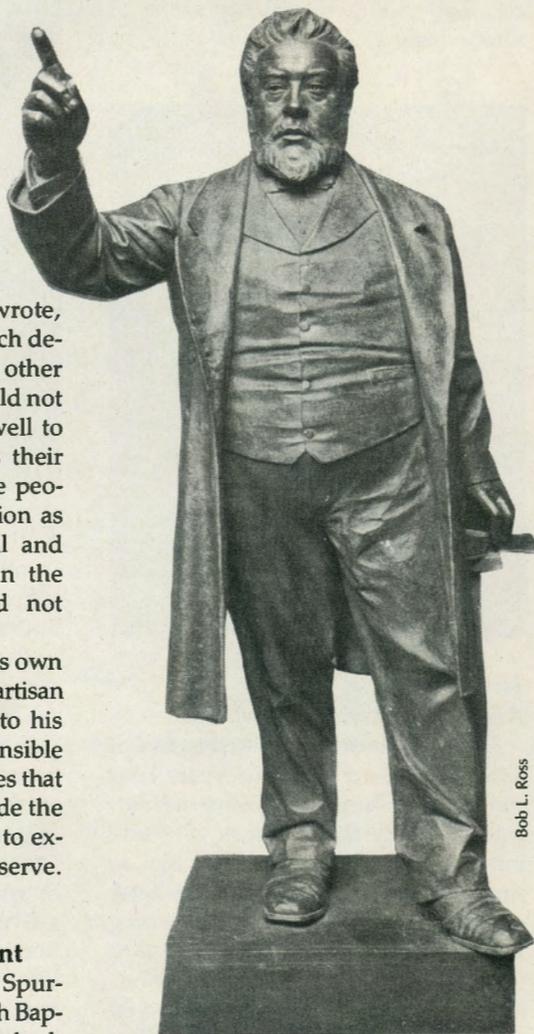
"Every God-fearing man," he wrote, "should give his vote with as much devotion as he prays." On the other hand, Spurgeon felt politics should not invade religion. "Ministers do well to give their votes and to express their opinions for the guidance of the people," he wrote, "but in proportion as the preaching becomes political and the pastor sinks the spiritual in the temporal, strength is lost and not gained."

Spurgeon normally observed his own principles. Although politically partisan statements occasionally crept into his sermons, they were always defensible as pronouncements on moral issues that had caught the public eye. Outside the pulpit, however, he was willing to express his party views without reserve. Spurgeon was a political force.

Spurgeon's political alignment

What was his party allegiance? Spurgeon was like almost all the English Baptists, Congregationalists, and Methodists of his day in supporting the Liberal Party. These denominations—the chief Nonconformist bodies—were excluded from the privileges of the Church of England. Nonconformists naturally favored reforms to reduce their handicaps, and their reforming sympathies aligned them with the Liberals. No professional group was more likely to vote Liberal than Nonconformist ministers.

That set Spurgeon and his colleagues in opposition to the other political force in nineteenth-century England, the Conservatives. The role of the Conservatives was to defend existing institu-



Bob L. Ross

tions—the monarchy, the House of Lords, and the Church of England. Liberals, while not wanting to abolish any of them, wished to ensure that none of them exceeded their reasonable powers. Spurgeon supported what was often called "the party of progress."

Spurgeon's identification with the Liberal Party is well illustrated by an address to local voters that he issued at the 1880 general election. "Are we to go on slaughtering and invading in order to obtain a scientific frontier and feeble neighbours?" he asked. "Shall all great questions of reform and progress be utterly neglected for years? . . .

Shall the struggle for religious equality be protracted and embittered? . . . Shall our National Debt be increased?"

Spurgeon was advocating four great principles. First, he was protesting against the recent imperialistic ventures of a Conservative government; that was a stand for *peace*. Second, he was calling for measures of change that would benefit the common people; that was a commitment to *reform*. Third, he was urging *religious equality*, the distinctive aim of Nonconformists. Fourth, he was demanding a decrease in wasteful public spending; that was a recommendation of *retrenchment*.

If religious equality is left aside for the moment, Spurgeon's principles were *peace*, *reform*, and *retrenchment*. Those were the three campaigning watchwords of the Liberal Party under W. E. Gladstone. Spurgeon could hardly have been closer to the heart of Liberalism.

Religion rubbing against politics

Adding the distinctive Nonconformist principle, religious equality, put Spurgeon on the more advanced wing of the party. He was an outspoken champion of the disestablishment of the Church of England. Nonconformists, he insisted, must be allowed to enjoy all the advantages of Anglicans. They should be permitted, for example, to conduct their own burial services in parish graveyards. They should be able to take degrees at the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge. And the bond between church and state must be severed, as it had been in the United States. Spurgeon was for many years a prominent member of the Liberation Society, a pressure group aiming for disestablishment. In fact, his church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, was regularly used for the society's annual meeting.

In his later years, however, Spurgeon

became dismayed that freethinkers were also prominent in the society. In 1891 he decided to discontinue his subscription. "We will not," he wrote, "by this question be brought into apparent union with those from whom we differ in the very core of our souls upon matters vital to Christianity." The interests of the faith took precedence over matters of political strategy. Religion was ultimately the determinant of Spurgeon's politics.

Who should run the schools?

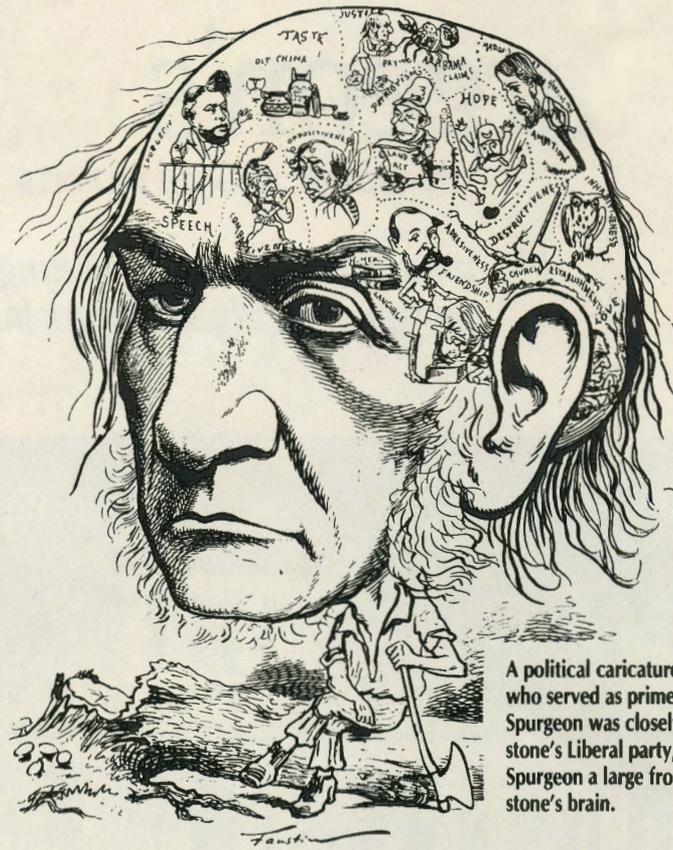
The same point is evident in the preacher's attitude to education policy, a central political issue for much of the nineteenth century. Like most Baptists in the 1850s, Spurgeon believed at first that the state should not meddle with education. The provision of schools should be left to private initiative—to individuals, societies, and churches. The young needed to be taught the Christian faith, and the state had no more business to take up the religious instruction of children than it had to undertake the religious instruction of adults through an established church.

By the late 1860s, however, population growth was hopelessly outstripping the ability of private initiative to provide for education. Baptists reluctantly accepted that the state must set up the necessary schools. To avoid state interference in religious instruction, however, most Baptists decided that schools must be secular. Christian education should be left to the home and the church.

Spurgeon could not stomach this conclusion. In 1870 he presided at a London rally calling for the retention of Bible teaching in state schools. A total severance of church and state in the schools, he argued, was nonsense. "How can religion be eliminated from education," he asked, "unless it be eliminated from the teacher himself?" Spurgeon judged the welfare of the Christian faith to be at stake, and so he was willing to diverge from the prevailing view in his denomination. And in the end, Spurgeon's policy was put into practice. The government permitted local school boards to include the Bible in the curriculum.

Hotly contested "Home Rule"

A more drastic divergence took place in 1886. Gladstone, the Liberal leader, proposed in that year that Ireland should be given Home Rule [limited



A political caricature of W. E. Gladstone, who served as prime minister four times. Spurgeon was closely aligned with Gladstone's Liberal party, so the cartoonist gave Spurgeon a large frontal lobe in Gladstone's brain.

political autonomy]. Agrarian unrest was persistent, and the great majority of Irish Members of Parliament were calling for a separate (though subordinate) legislative body.

This alarmed Protestants in Ireland. About 80 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, and so, Protestants feared, the new parliament would discriminate against them. Home Rule, they said, would mean *Rome Rule*.

Spurgeon, who always had a lively sense of the historic gulf separating Catholics from Protestants, agreed with them. "The whole scheme," he wrote in a private letter, "is as full of dangers and absurdities as if it came from a madman." Soon the opponents of Home Rule were publicizing Spurgeon's view and claiming that he had charged Gladstone with madness. Spurgeon's reputation, it was confidently believed, would sway electors against the Liberal scheme. Although Spurgeon publicly denied supposing Gladstone to be mad, he remained adamantly hostile to Home Rule. That meant separation from the Liberal Party, which Nonconformists generally continued to support. Just as the Down-Grade Controversy divided Spurgeon from his colleagues in the religious sphere, so the Home Rule issue divided him from partners

in politics.

Outspoken Spurgeon

On many other issues Spurgeon was outspoken. He supported measures to ensure the observance of the Sabbath; he favored restrictions on the availability of alcohol; and he offered public prayer against the appalling housing conditions of central London. In 1860 he denounced American slavery, declaring that civil war was preferable to the perpetuation of the "peculiar institution" in the South. His American publishers began to edit out references to the subject in his sermons, but Spurgeon insisted on calling slavery "a soul-destroying sin."

The great preacher did not shun political questions as a diversion from spiritual religion. Although he kept political ventures within limits, especially in his sermons, he urged others to go further. "I often hear it said," runs one passage in a sermon, "Do not bring religion into politics.' This is precisely where it ought to be brought, and set there in the face of all men as on a candlestick." □

Dr. David W. Bebbington is senior lecturer in history at University of Stirling in Stirling, Scotland.

Spurgeon's College

MICHAEL KENNETH NICHOLLS

His innovative school for training pastors continues nearly 150 years later.



The main building of Spurgeon's College as it appears today in South Norwood.

J. J. Brown



Charles Haddon Spurgeon has been described in various ways—preacher, pastor, evangelist, philanthropist, man of prayer—but the ascription *educator* is not a frequent one.

Yet Spurgeon began speaking publicly when teaching a Sunday school class. (He ended up ministering not only to the children, but also to adult teachers eager to hear his exposition of Scripture.) Later, he ran his own children's school for a while. As the state school system emerged in the nineteenth century, Spurgeon urged his

church members to be involved in the emerging school boards.

As an educator, he is best remembered, however, for founding a theological college that trained nearly 900 pastors during his lifetime and that continues today.

How the school began

That Spurgeon would found a pastors' college is somewhat surprising, since he received no formal theological training. Spurgeon received his education through his parents, his grandfather's library, occasional dame schools (neighborhood schools taught by a woman in her home), and a year at Maidstone Agricultural College. He

entered pastoral ministry as a self-made man. Nevertheless, within two years of coming to New Park Street Chapel in London, Spurgeon drew to himself a number of men who were eager and gifted to preach, yet whose abilities and eloquence could be improved by basic education.

The work began when Thomas Medhurst, a rope maker in his early twenties who had come to Christ through hearing Spurgeon, began to preach in the open air. Some church members complained to Spurgeon about Medhurst's evident lack of education and asked Spurgeon to stop him. "I had a talk with the earnest young brother," Spurgeon later recalled, "and while he

did not deny that his English was imperfect, and that he might have made mistakes in other respects, yet he said, 'I must preach, sir; and I shall preach unless you cut off my head.' " Since Spurgeon and the offended members were unwilling to do that, Spurgeon concluded, "I must do what I can to get him an education that will fit him for the ministry."

At Spurgeon's direction, in 1855 Medhurst was given a preliminary education under C. H. Hosken, a Baptist pastor at Crayford in Kent, and then began theological studies with a Congregational minister, George Rogers, in South London. A year later a second student was added, and in the first five years (when the college met in the manse of the Calvinistic Congregationalist church) fifteen students received training. In 1862 the Pastors' College moved to the halls of the Metropolitan Tabernacle and twelve years later moved into its own facilities at the rear of the church. The number of students rose steadily until 1877, when 110 were in training.

What set the college apart

Many aspects of the Pastors' College were modeled on earlier Dissenting academies. Yet Spurgeon's new venture was founded upon three clear principles that together distinguished it from other schools.

Educational openness: The College had no entrance examination, and it provided a general education as well as a specialization in theology. For men in their early twenties who had slender academic attainments and educational opportunities, this was an open door. The policy stood in direct contrast to more prestigious London colleges, such as the Baptist College at Regent's Park. Other Nonconformist colleges took advantage of the proximity of London University, and from the 1840s they entered students there for examinations. Spurgeon never adopted this method.

All examinations in the Pastors' College were set and marked internally, and each student developed as he was able. Many prospective students received preliminary training through evening classes in English, science, foreign languages, mathematics, and classics. These classes were free and open to all Christian workers, but many then entered the two-year



Left: Thomas Medhurst, whose zealous but erratic preaching forced Spurgeon to provide some means of theological training. Medhurst became the first student in the Pastors' College. Right: C. H. Hosken, a Baptist pastor who was Medhurst's first instructor.

course at the college. Thus, no student was debarred through a lack of academic attainment.

Financial support: No student was debarred on the grounds of financial handicap. The college held that "When God's work is done in God's way, it never lacks God's supply." Spurgeon brought into theological education the faith-mission principle that George Müller had brought to Christian philanthropy and Hudson Taylor had applied to missionary service.

In the early days, "God's supply" came from the Spurgeon family budget. From the early 1860s onward the college was administered by the Metropolitan Tabernacle's deacons, and its main source of income was offerings from church members and friends. There were no endowments and no list of subscribers. The needs were made known, and in earnest prayer the people looked to God to supply. The students received hospitality in the homes of Tabernacle members, and only where their families or friends could contribute anything to the cost of the course was money solicited. Many students were given fifteen shillings a week pocket money, and there were no set fees.

This meant the college's finances were precarious, and only from the 1870s onward were they placed on a more secure basis. In reality the whole venture depended a great deal on Spurgeon's personality, and when he died, the college faced a period of severe financial deprivation. Nevertheless, if a gifted man could show

evidence of God's call, he would be accepted for training whatever his financial circumstances, and this remains a principle of the college.

Theological commitment: The college was founded in stirring times. Traditional beliefs were being challenged by the emerging theories of evolution and biblical criticism. Spurgeon was antipathetic to emerging theological novelties. He also was utterly committed to the traditional Calvinistic interpretation of substitutionary atonement, biblical inspiration and authority, and eternal punishment. Although Spurgeon wanted his students to be alert, relevant, and lively in the context of late nineteenth-century life, he wanted them to be committed to Calvinistic orthodoxy and to be in the vanguard of the fight against modernism.

To ensure this, all college tutors were required to be committed to the doctrines of grace and to teach them with dogmatism, enthusiasm, and clarity. (Although Spurgeon and George Rogers, his principal, differed on the manner of baptism, they held unity on central doctrines.) All the tutors were working pastors and thus provided a combined academic-pastoral model for the students.

In short, the college's admissions policy, broad curriculum, practical emphasis, and short course provided a unique contribution to contemporary theological training.

How was Spurgeon involved?

Spurgeon was crucial to the success of the college in a number of ways.

Teaching: The highlight of the students' week was Friday afternoon, when Spurgeon informally lectured on pastoral theology and practice. These informative, inspirational addresses became the basis of Spurgeon's published *Lectures to My Students*. They describe the pastor's many duties in realistic detail, emphasizing the work of the pastor-evangelist, whose job was to save souls through the preaching of the gospel. Spurgeon was the instrument of the conversion of over twelve thousand people, and because the college and the Metropolitan Tabernacle were inseparably linked in pre- and post-ordination training, most students learned both in the classroom and in practical experience to be church-planting soul winners.

Admissions: When a student applied to the college, Spurgeon conducted the interview, and he determined whether the student would be accepted. No one was refused on educational or financial grounds, so what were the criteria for acceptance? Clearly students had to be committed to the theological standpoint of the college and be prepared for a vigorous two-year course. (This was lengthened to three years after 1880, but many students left before completing the course because of their churches' needs.) In general, however, Spurgeon wanted people who had been preaching for two years and who had shown proven fruitfulness. He looked for zeal, common sense, humility, and bright personalities. He also wanted students from a range of abilities so that they could minister to the sophisticated of the West End of London and the needy poor of the East End. Thus, spiritual qualities and a proven record were the key requirements.

Policy: The administration of the college was in the hands of Spurgeon's half brother, James Archer Spurgeon. There were no formal staff meetings and no formal council or board of trustees. Thus, Charles Spurgeon's word was the final authority.

Placement: Spurgeon placed his graduates according to requests he received from churches needing pastors. Young men on the point of leaving the college were summoned by "the Governor," as he was known, and Spurgeon would indicate where he felt it was God's will that a particular student should go. In this way nearly two hundred churches were planted, and a



Spurgeon poses with some graduates of his Pastors' College at an 1888 conference. Thomas Medhurst, the college's first student, is seated at the far right.

number of others were revived. After 1880 an increasing number of graduates went overseas to plant churches in the British colonies.

Spurgeon did not leave students to sink or swim on their own. Since there was no denominational provision for post-ordination care, Spurgeon sent boxes of books (Puritan literature and his own works) so that working ministers could keep up-to-date with their reading. Twice a year, he also hosted a conference of former students for encouragement, prayer, and discussion on topical issues. Spurgeon was also a prolific letter writer, signing most of them "Yours heartily."

Life after Spurgeon

When Spurgeon died suddenly in 1892, it became obvious that the Pastors' College had depended too much on his personality, generosity, and influence in the evangelical world. The college faced years of crisis and had to adjust its admissions, financial provision, requirements, and curriculum. In 1917 the college almost closed.

In 1923, however, through the generosity of a family who had been converted through Spurgeon's preaching, the college was offered the opportuni-

ty to become residential. The school moved six miles south to its present home at Falkland Park, South Norwood. Gradually the college's links with the Metropolitan Tabernacle diminished as it developed its own ethos, council, and curriculum. In the 1940s students began to take university examinations, and the academic repute of the college has grown ever since. The college's links with the British Baptist Union have also developed, and now most of its students train to be recognized Baptist ministers in the British Isles. The keynote emphases of the college, however, remain the same: evangelical commitment, preaching, and evangelism. In some ways the college is returning to its roots with a new course emphasizing church planting and evangelism.

Today there are more students than there were in 1877. The college that Spurgeon founded nearly a century and a half ago continues to make its unique contribution to British theological education. □

Michael Kenneth Nicholls is vice-principal of Spurgeon's College in London.

Learn More About . . . C. H. SPURGEON

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. If Spurgeon were alive today, what questions would you ask him?
2. What do you consider to be C. H. Spurgeon's greatest contribution to Christianity in his day? In our day?
3. Spurgeon was criticized for using humor in the pulpit. In your view, what kinds of humor are appropriate in preaching? Inappropriate?
4. Spurgeon frequently suffered ill health and depression. How did he view these trials? In what ways was his view of suffering different from yours?
5. In the Down-Grade Controversy, Spurgeon split from fellow Baptists. Which issues should be jointly held for Christian union? Which do you consider nonessential?
6. Spurgeon preached a message of personal conversion yet actively engaged in social ministry. Which aspect of Christianity—personal or social—gets more emphasis today? How would you describe the ideal balance?
7. Today, Spurgeon has more words in print than any other Christian author. How would you explain his broad, long-lasting appeal?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Books by and about Spurgeon are numerous, so only a select list can be offered here. Providing the recommendations is Bob L. Ross, founder and director of Pilgrim Publications in Pasadena, Texas. Unless otherwise indicated, all books by Spurgeon were originally published in London by Passmore and Alabaster and are now available through Pilgrim Publications.

By Spurgeon

The New Park Street Pulpit and Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, years 1855–1917, volumes 1–63. Spurgeon's sermons, the longest continuous weekly sermon publication in history. (Sermons published after his death were previously unpublished evening messages.)

The Treasury of David.^{1,3} A seven-volume commentary on the Psalms, regarded as Spurgeon's greatest written work.

The Sword and the Trowel magazine,

years 1865–1892. The monthly magazine edited by Spurgeon, containing miscellaneous writings, sermons, editorials, book reviews, and letters.

Lectures to My Students.⁸ Four volumes (some modern reprintings include only two of the four) of Spurgeon's addresses to students in his Pastors' College. Mrs. Spurgeon inaugurated her book fund by distributing free copies of these books to needy pastors.

All of Grace.^{4,7} Spurgeon's most famous book, which deals with the theme of salvation. The first book published by D. L. Moody's Bible Institute Colportage Association, it remains Moody Press's all-time best-seller.

Morning by Morning,⁷ *Evening by Evening*,⁷ and *Cheque-book of the Bank of Faith*.^{2,4,5} Each book offers daily devotional readings. The first two have often been combined into one volume, *Morning and Evening*.^{3,6,8}

C. H. Spurgeon's Prayers. Published posthumously, a collection of prayers from services in the Tabernacle.

John Ploughman's Talk and *John Ploughman's Pictures*. Homespun wisdom from a mythical farmer. Two of Spurgeon's most popular works.

The Greatest Fight in the World. Known as Spurgeon's "final manifesto," this message was delivered at his last pastors' conference in 1891.

About Spurgeon

C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, Compiled from his Diary, Letters, and Records by his Wife and his Private Secretary, 4 vols. (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897–1900). Profuse with photographs and engravings, this is the best single source on Spurgeon's life. An abridged edition in two volumes (*The Early Years* and *The Mature Harvest*) is now available from The Banner of Truth Trust (Carlisle, PA, or Edinburgh, Scotland).

The Life and Work of C. H. Spurgeon by G. Holden Pike (London: Cassell and Company, 1892). By a

close friend who served as a "sub-editor" of *The Sword and the Trowel* the last twenty years of Spurgeon's life.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, A Biography by W. Y. Fullerton (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920; now Moody Press, 1980). The author was one of Spurgeon's students who later assisted in preparing Spurgeon's sermon manuscripts for publication.

From the Usher's Desk to the Tabernacle Pulpit by Robert Shindler (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1892). By the friend whose articles launched the "Down-Grade Controversy."

The Life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon by Charles Ray (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1903). Also, *A Marvellous Ministry* by Charles Ray (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1905; Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1985). Records interesting stories about the influence of Spurgeon's printed sermons.

Life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the World's Greatest Preacher by Russell Conwell (New York: Edgewood Publishing, 1892). At the time, the most popular biography of Spurgeon.

Searchlight on Spurgeon by Eric W. Hayden (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1973). Quotations from Spurgeon's sermons are used to create an "autobiography."

¹also published by Baker Book House

²also published by Bridge Publishing

³also published by Hendrickson Publishers

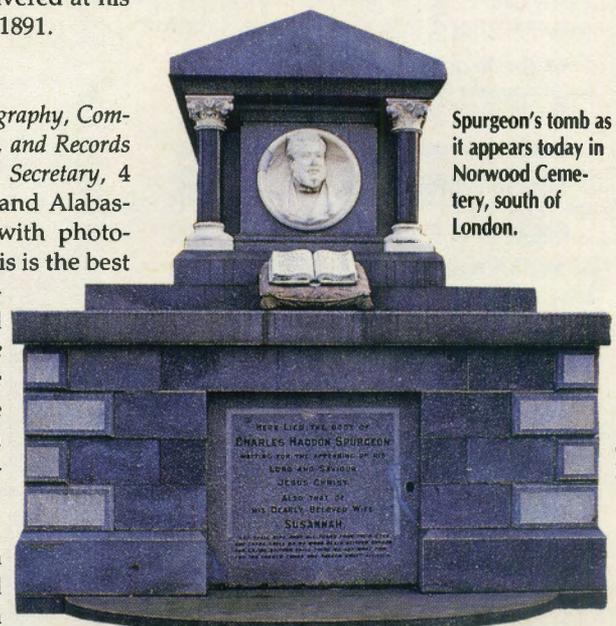
⁴also published by Moody Press

⁵also published by Small Helm Publishers

⁶also published by Sovereign Grace Trust Fund

⁷also published by Whitaker House

⁸also published by Zondervan Publishing House



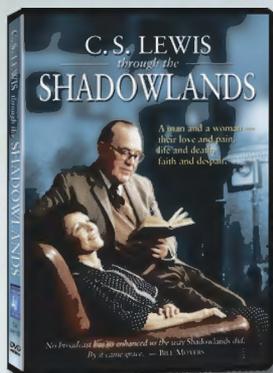
Spurgeon's tomb as it appears today in Norwood Cemetery, south of London.

J. J. Brown

C.S. Lewis DVD Collection for \$29.99!

C.S. Lewis through the Shadowlands

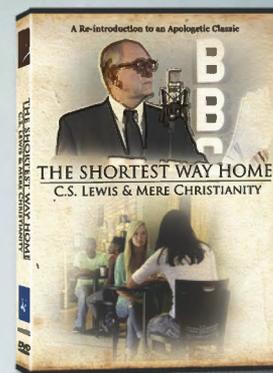
This film is about the agonizing spiritual crisis of C. S. Lewis when his wife died from cancer. The love, grief, pain, and sorrow were so shattering to Lewis that his basic Christian beliefs, magnificently communicated in his many books, were now called into serious doubt. Relive the journey of C. S. Lewis during the days prior to and after the cancer-related death of his wife Joy in this film that captures both heart and mind. You will be able to see his commitment to Christ despite severe trials. He picked up the pieces and moved out of the depressing "shadowlands," realizing that "real life has not even begun yet." Starring Joss Ackland and Claire Bloom. Winner of over a dozen prestigious international awards. Drama, includes 90-minute and 73-minute versions.



DVD - #4813D, \$14.99

The Shortest Way Home: C.S. Lewis and Mere Christianity

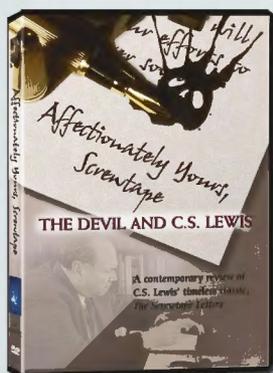
Doubt and disbelief live in the hearts of many people as they wrestle with the questions of good and evil and the existence of God. Those who embrace Christianity as a way of life must then learn how to live out their faith as a transformed individual in an imperfect and difficult world. But how is this accomplished? *The Shortest Way Home: C.S. Lewis and Mere Christianity* is an introductory review to Lewis's classic work on issues of faith and reason. Viewers will find honest discussion and helpful insights for the tough questions asked by believers and skeptics alike. Documentary, 56 minutes.



DVD - #501563D, \$19.99

Affectionately Yours, Screwtape

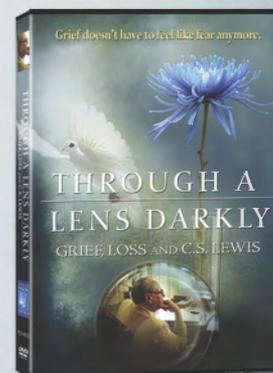
The Screwtape Letters, a thin volume of imaginative letters between two devils, has given millions of readers insight into conquering everyday spiritual struggles. Join us as we explore the Biblical, historical and cultural depictions of Satan and hell and gain a deeper understanding of the nature of temptation and redemption. Whether you're a devoted C.S. Lewis fan or just reading his work for the first time, you're sure to develop a new appreciation for *The Screwtape Letters* through this modern look at his timeless classic. This DVD can be viewed as a documentary or as a five-part study for small groups. Documentary, 52 minutes.



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Loss comes in many forms: the grief over the death of a loved one, the devastation of a physical or mental impairment, the pain of divorce or separation, or the distress of job loss and foreclosure. So where does a person turn for answers and encouragement in a time of despair, doubt, or fear? *Through a Lens Darkly* will uplift the soul with moving stories of individuals and families touched by significant loss who have begun their journey to recovery, and who share their thoughts on the timeless wisdom of C.S. Lewis's most personal and reflective book, *A Grief Observed*. Documentary, 56 minutes.



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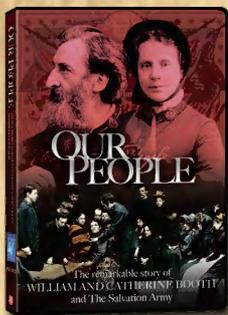
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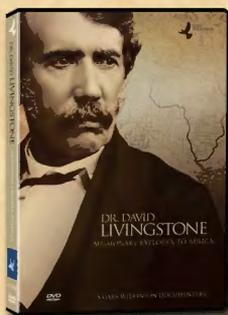
FASCINATING BIOGRAPHIES ON DVD



Our People: The Story of William and Catherine Booth

This is the story of how one couple took God's love to the poor. Walking the poverty-stricken streets of Whitechapel late one night in the summer of 1865, William Booth observed neglected children, drunken women, unemployed men, and prostitutes plying their trade. That night he decided, "These will be our people." What followed makes an enthralling story of spiritual passion, courage, and faith leading to the birth of The Salvation Army. This DVD features historians, period music, rare archival footage, and recordings from two Booth grandchildren. 74 minutes.

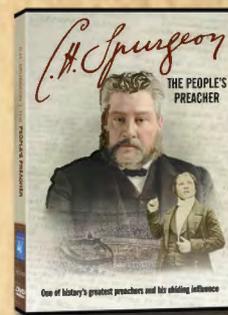
DVD - #501342D, ~~\$19.99~~ SALE! \$14.99



Dr. David Livingstone: Missionary Explorer to Africa

In the nineteenth century, Dr. David Livingstone took the Gospel to Africa in word and deed. As a medical doctor he treated the sick, earning him the necessary trust and respect to teach the love of Christ. Then Livingstone turned his attention to exploration, seeing this work as much a spiritual calling as traditional missionary work. Hailed as one of the greatest European explorers of all time, Livingstone's commitment and eventual martyrdom helped bring an end to the slave trade and opened a continent to the Gospel. 59 minutes.

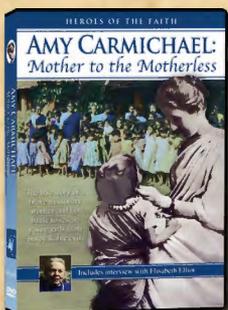
DVD - #501458D, ~~\$14.99~~ SALE! \$11.99



C.H. Spurgeon: The People's Preacher

Here is the intimate story of one of the greatest preachers in the history of the church. We follow him from his youth where, as a young preacher he is surprisingly called to minister in London and soon captures the love and respect of the nation. He goes on to become one of its most influential figures. This powerful, inspirational docu-drama faithfully recreates the times of C.H. Spurgeon and brings the "people's preacher" to life as it follows his trials and triumphs with historical accuracy. Filmed on location in England, Scotland, France, and Germany. 70 minutes.

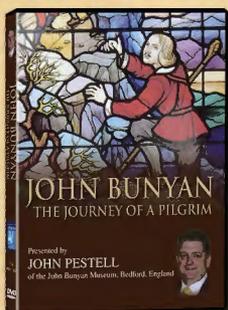
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Amy Carmichael: Mother to the Motherless

In 1903 Amy Carmichael shocked the Christian community with the publication of her book *Things As They Are*. Refusing to sugarcoat her experience as a missionary in India, she gave an accurate picture of the desperate plight of the Indian people as well as the tremendous challenges that missionaries faced. Her most shocking revelation, however, was the plight of the temple girls, who were doomed to a life of abuse as they were "married" to the gods of the land. Hear Amy's amazing story through this in-depth look at her life and ministry. 58 minutes.

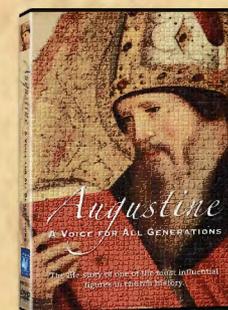
DVD - #501385D, ~~\$14.99~~ SALE! \$12.99



John Bunyan: Journey of a Pilgrim

This documentary, filmed at the John Bunyan Museum in Bedford, England, presents a fascinating look at the life of John Bunyan, chronicled by Bunyan expert John Pestell, author of *Travel with John Bunyan*. During the twelve years Bunyan spent in prison for preaching illegally, he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the story of Christian on his journey of life. When Bunyan was finally released from prison, he took his finished manuscript to a printer, saying, "I have a manuscript of little worth." It became an instant bestseller and remains the world's most circulated book, next to the Bible. 42 minutes.

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Augustine: A Voice for All Generations

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is one of the greatest theologians of the Christian Church. His works have had an inestimable impact on the Church and, by extension, on Western Civilization at large. Yet, where did such faith begin? After rejecting his mother's Christianity as simplistic and restraining, Augustine embarked on a path towards self-gratification, marked by the pursuit of money, political power, and sexual pleasure. Travel back to the fourth century with host Mike Aquilina and discover why Augustine has become a "Voice for All Generations." 55 minutes.

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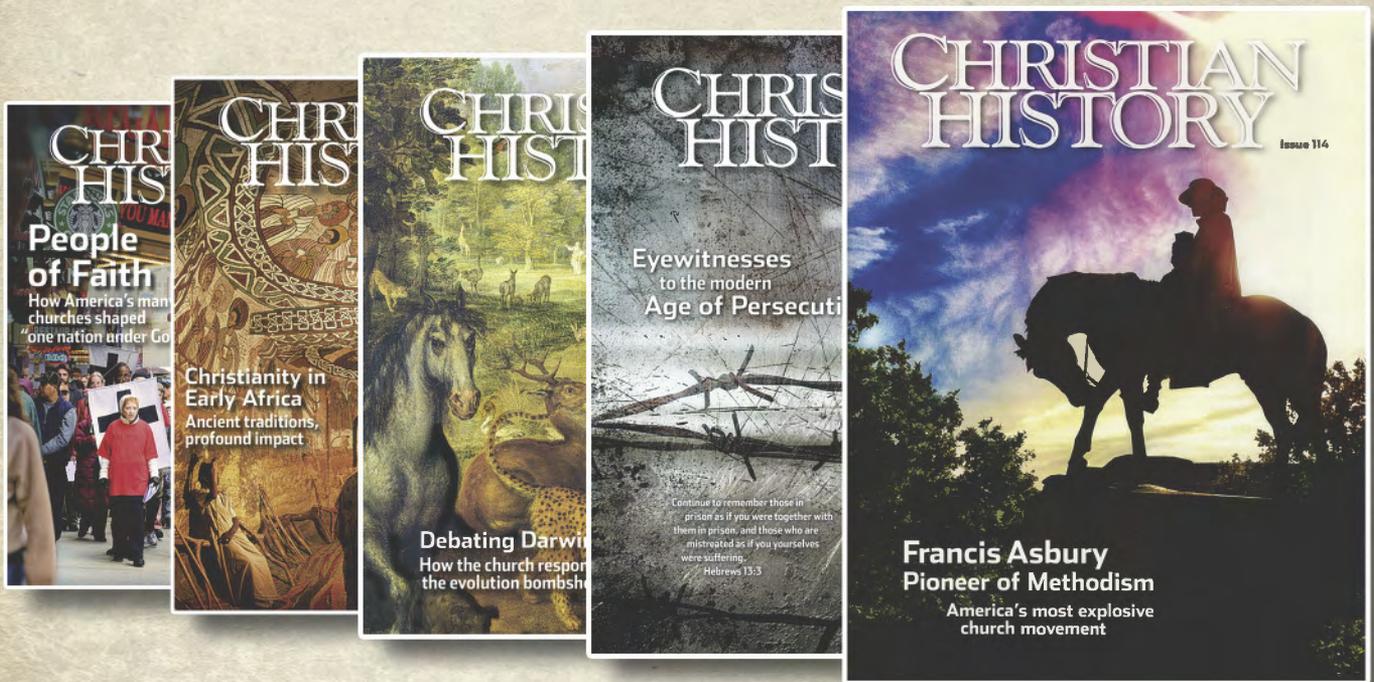
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