

## CHAPTER LV.

### “Helensburgh House” and Garden (*Continued*).



FATHER AND SONS IN THE GARDEN.

I took my little boys, a few years ago, to a churchyard, and we carried with us a piece of tape. I told them to measure some of the little graves, for I wanted them to learn practically how soon they might die. They found there were several which were shorter than they themselves were. Ah! there are many who are taken away before they are your age, my young friends, and why may not you be so taken? It is early with you, but it is not too early for Death to be even now pointing his darts at you.—C. H. S., *in sermon to senior scholars, at John Street Chapel, Bedford Row, May 1, 1867.*



WE lived in the dear old house in Nightingale Lane for many happy years; and, looking back upon them from this distance of time, I think they must have been the least shadowed by care and sorrow of all the years of our married life. We were both young, and full of high spirits. We had fairly good health, and devoutly loved each other. Our children grew apace in the sweet country air, and my whole time and strength were given to advance my dear husband's welfare and happiness. I deemed it my joy and privilege to be ever at his side, accompanying him on many of his preaching journeys, nursing him in his occasional illnesses,—his delighted companion during his holiday trips, always watching over and tending him with the enthusiasm and sympathy which my great

love for him inspired. I mention this, not to suggest any sort of merit on my part, but simply that I may here record my heartfelt gratitude to God that, for a period of ten blessed years, I was permitted to encircle him with all the comforting care and tender affection which it was in a wife's power to bestow. Afterwards, God ordered it otherwise. He saw fit to reverse our position to each other; and for a long, long season, suffering instead of service became my daily portion, and the care of comforting a sick wife fell upon my beloved. How lovingly he fulfilled so sorrowful a duty, will be fully seen in future pages.



HUSBAND AND WIFE AT HOME.

I have already said what a great joy the garden was to us. At first, there was always something fresh and new to interest us; and when, by degrees, the novelty of its possession wore off, then we loved it all the better, because we knew more about it. Here my dear husband enjoyed, not only rest and recreation for the body, but stimulus and quickening for the mind. Original illustrations for sermons,—side-lights on texts,—metaphors and parables, whereby the hearts of hearers might be moved or impressed,—all these Mr. Spurgeon found ready to his hand in this old pleasaunce, which ungrudgingly laid its stores at his feet. It mattered not to him how commonplace was the figure which could supply a barb or a feather to the arrow which he designed to send straight home to the heart of a saint or a sinner.

He did not disdain to employ the simplest incidents or similes to further the important purposes of illustration and instruction.

He himself gives a notable instance of the working of this life-long habit, in one of the lectures to his students, where he says:—"If you keep your eyes open, you will not see even a dog following his master, nor a mouse peeping up from his hole, nor will you hear even a gentle scratching behind the wainscot, without getting something to weave into your sermons if your faculties are all on the alert. When you go home to-night, and sit by your fireside, you ought not to be able to take up your domestic cat without finding that which will furnish you with an illustration. How soft are pussy's pads, and yet, in a moment, if she is angered, how sharp will be her claws! How like to temptation, soft and gentle when it first cometh to us, but how deadly, how damnable the wounds it causeth ere long!

"I recollect using, with very considerable effect in a sermon in the Tabernacle, an incident that occurred in my own garden. There was a dog which was in the habit of coming through the fence, and scratching in my flower-beds, to the manifest spoiling of the gardener's toil and temper. Walking in the garden, one Saturday afternoon, and preparing my sermon for the following day, I saw the four-footed creature,—rather a scurvy specimen, by-the-by,—and having a walking-stick in my hand, I threw it at him with all my might, at the same time giving him some good advice about going home. Now, what should my canine friend do but turn round, pick up the stick in his mouth, bring it, and lay it down at my feet, wagging his tail all the while in expectation of my thanks and kind words! Of course, you do not suppose that I kicked him, or threw the stick at him any more. I felt quite ashamed of myself, and told him that he was welcome to stay as long as he liked, and to come as often as he pleased. There was an instance of the power of non-resistance, submission, patience, and trust, in overcoming even righteous anger. I used that illustration in preaching the next day, and I did not feel that I had at all degraded myself by telling the story."

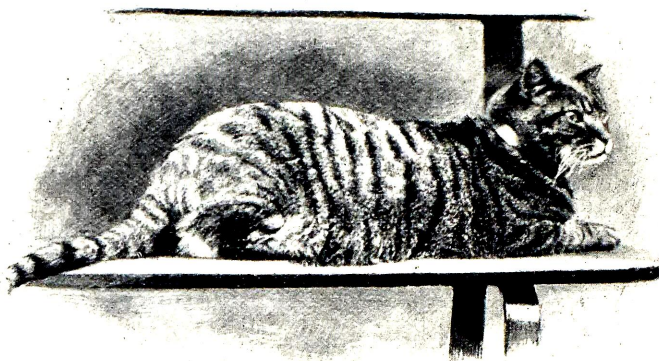
If my memory does not play me false, there used to be sundry crusts, or even bones, secretly conveyed to that mongrel cur after this memorable encounter.

Here, too, the young Pastor could peacefully enjoy all the ordinary sights and sounds of an open space in the country. The song of birds was sweetest music to him, and the commonest flowers gave him joy, because they both revealed to him the love of his Father's heart. "When I go into my garden," he once said, referring to this same old place of which I am writing, "I have a choir around me in the trees. They do not wear surplices, for their song is not artificial and official. Some of them are clothed in glossy black, but they carol like little angels; they sing the sun up, and wake me at break of day; and they warble on till the last red ray of the



sun has departed, still singing out from bush and tree the praises of their God. And all the flowers,—the primroses that are almost gone,—convey to my heart deep meanings concerning God till the last one shuts his eye. And now the mignonette, and the wallflowers, and the lilac, and the guelder-roses, and a host of sweet beauties are pouring out their incense of perfume, as if they said, ‘Thank the God that made us! Blessed be His Name! The earth is full of His goodness.’”

On another occasion he wrote :—“On summer evenings, the queen of our little kingdom spreads a banquet in our great green saloon which the vulgar call a lawn; it is opposite the parlour window, and her guests punctually arrive, and cheerfully partake, while their hostess rejoices to gaze upon them. Some of them are now so tame that, when fresh provision is brought out to them, they take no more notice of the lady-servitor than a child at table does of a servant who brings in a fresh joint. We do not allow a gun in our garden, feeling that we can afford to pay a few cherries for a great deal of music; and we have now quite a lordly party of thrushes, blackbirds, and starlings upon the lawn, with a parliament of sparrows, chaffinches, robins, and other minor prophets. Our summer-house is occupied by a pair of blue martins, which chase our big cat out of the garden by dashing swiftly across his head one after the other, till he is utterly bewildered, and makes a bolt of it.”



“DICK.”

He was no insignificant enemy, as the accompanying faithful likeness of him will prove; yet again and again have I, too, seen him reduced to abject fear by the little creatures who were bravely defending their home. He was a splendid specimen of *Felis domestica*, and a great favourite with his master. He weighed nearly eighteen pounds, and was singularly intelligent and affectionate. He had a trick of



helping himself to milk, which highly diverted Mr. Spurgeon. His depredations were carried on for some time before the culprit was discovered ; but there was so serious a loss of milk in the usual morning supply, that a watch was set to see what became of it, since a thief of some sort was an uncomfortable certainty. Judge of the spy's surprise, when he saw this great creature march slowly across the yard, push open the lid of the can, insert his huge paw into it, and deliberately lick the creamy member till it needed recoating by another dip ! This process was repeated till puss was satisfied, and all the while he showed no fear of punishment, or sense of wrong-doing.

When Mr. Spurgeon heard of this escapade, he was much amused, and had the cat and a can of milk brought to him that he might see "how it was done." Dick was nothing loth to show him, and thereafter became quite a hero in his master's eyes ! He would try to induce him to show off this trick at the tea-table, when guests were present ; and if Dick indulged him by a repetition of the performance, he would greatly applaud and pet him.

There were some curiosities of ornamentation in this old garden of ours. The pulpit stairs, pictured in Vol. I., page 367, led up to a breezy and delightful seat in the heart of the willow tree ; and there, in summer-time, we could always be sure of a shadow from the heat. However sultry the weather might be, there were cool and gentle zephyrs frolicking amid the branches, and waiting to fan the hot cheeks of those who cared to climb to their playground. We never knew the cause of this singular movement of the air in that particular spot, but it was a very pleasant fact, and "the sound of a going" in the big tree was one of our most delightful mysteries.

We had also what I should imagine must be a very unusual addition to the charms of a Baptist minister's garden,—the font out of a High Church building, which one of the early students secured for Dissenting worship when it was vacated by its Ritualistic congregation for a more imposing structure. My dear husband used to point it out to visitors, calling it "one of the spoils of the Holy War," and I am sure he heartily rejoiced that, in its changed position, it was at least unable ever again to assist in deluding people into the errors of baptismal regeneration.

As I am writing, there flashes across my mind the remembrance of a great surprise in the adornment (!) of our garden which once awaited us on our return from a Continental trip. After the bustle and joy of the home-coming, of asking and answering innumerable questions, of kissing and petting the boys, and generally making ourselves amiable, we strolled into the garden, to renew our acquaintance with its old-fashioned enticements and delights. We thought it looked very quiet, peaceful, and lovely ; and we felt the sweetness of God's mercy to us, in bringing us

back in safety to such a fair and comely home. But our serenity was to be quickly disturbed. Close by the spot where Mr. Spurgeon interviewed the little dog, there were some steps leading under an archway to slightly lower ground, and two large vases were placed, one on each side of the descent. When we came near to this turn in the path, we saw before us a sight which nearly took our breath away; our amazement was so great that we stood for a minute or two without speaking, looking from one to the other, and then at the innocent vases which caused us such consternation. Someone *had painted them a bright blue, relieved here and there with yellow!*

"Who could have been guilty of such Vandalism?" we wondered. Fresh from the land of art and artists, and from beholding all that skill and good taste combined could provide of beauty of design and charm of colouring in every small detail of decoration and embellishment, our recoil from our disfigured belongings can be easily imagined. Passing round the garden, we found more stone



THE GARDEN WHERE THE FONT STOOD.

or stucco work treated in the same way,—*the font included!* We made enquiries within the house, and learned that these brilliant tints were intended to be a special "Welcome Home" to the travellers from the hands of our gardener, who thought to

give us immense pleasure by the contemplation of his artistic skill ! Unfortunate man ! Still more unfortunate possessors of the too-gaily-bedecked garden ! I cannot remember when the gardener was shown his error, nor how soon the unsightly ornaments were restored to their original purity ; but I know that only dear Mr. Spurgeon could have successfully negotiated such a delicate piece of business as to secure for them a return to their former whiteness without, by a single word, hurting the feelings of the man who had unwittingly wrought the mischief.

Every Saturday morning, for a good many years, the quiet seclusion of our happy home was changed into a scene of rather noisy activity in consequence of the visits of the early students of the Pastors' College, who came to spend an hour or two with their President. First, one young brother ; then, two ; a little later, three ; and, by-and-by, quite a company of these good soldiers of Jesus Christ marched down to Nightingale Lane for a season of special drill under the direction of their loved and loving leader. They were the forerunners of successive generations of "our own men" who were to be influenced throughout their whole lives by being brought into close personal contact with him who was neither the last nor the least of the Puritans. The earliest "Record of the Lord's Work in connection with the Pastors' College," written in 1863 by Professor Fergusson, contained the following reference to these visits :—

"Whilst resident at Mr. Rogers' house, once every week the students assembled at that of the Pastor, and were there instructed in theology, pastoral duty, preaching, and other practical subjects. Here was the nucleus of the present Monday and Friday classes, conducted by Mr. Spurgeon himself, in which his wide experience in church matters is presented to the young men, and furnishes them with the most essential preparation for their future work." I may add, that here was also the nucleus of those never-to-be-forgotten *Lectures to my Students*, which still continue to be of untold value in the equipment of Christian ministers of all denominations, and which are among the most precious monuments of the peerless President's consecrated genius, wit, and wisdom.

As an appropriate ending to this chapter, I have inserted, in *facsimile*, the beautiful love-song which my dear husband wrote at Hull, during one of his many evangelistic journeys, and which reached me at "Helensburgh House," one happy morning in September, 1865. None can be expected to feel the same rapturous delight in the sweet verses as I did when I first read them ; I was far more proud of them than I should have been of chains of gold or strings of pearls ; and they



have still the power to move my soul to an overwhelming tenderness both of memory and anticipation ;—but they may at least touch a chord of sympathy in some loving heart, and set it trembling with the tones of the long-forgotten music of bygone years.

Married Love - To my wife <sup>by C. H. Spurgeon.</sup>

Over the space which parts us, my wife,  
I'll cast me a bridge of song,  
Our hearts shall meet, O joy of my life,  
On its arch unseen but strong

As the river never forgets the sea,  
But hastes to the ocean's breast,  
My constant soul flows onward to thee,  
And finds in thy love its rest.

The swallows must plume their wings to greet  
New summers in lands afar;  
But dwelling at home with thee I meet  
No winter my year to mar.

The wooer his new love's name may wear  
Engraved on a precious stone;  
But in my heart thine image I wear,  
That heart has been long thine own

The glowing colours on surface laid,  
Wash out in a shower of rain,  
Thou needst not be of rivers afraid,  
For my love is dyed in grain.

And as every drop of Gordan's lake  
Is tinged with the sapphire's blue,  
So all the powers of my mind partake  
Of joy at the thought of you.

The glittering dewdrops of dawning love  
Exhale as the day grows old,  
And fondness, taking the wings of a dove,  
Is gone like a tale of old;

But mine for thee, from the chambers of joy,  
With strength came forth as the sun;  
Nor life nor death shall its force destroy,  
For ever its course shall run.

All earthborn love must sleep in the grave,  
To its native dust return;

What God hath kindled shall death outbrave,  
And in Heaven itself shall burn.

Beyond & above the wedlock tie

Our union to Christ we feel,

Uniting bonds we were made on high  
Shall hold us when earth shall reel.

Think He, who chose us all worlds before,  
Must reign in our hearts alone,

We fondly believe that we shall adore,  
Together before His throne.