

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

A Double Silver Wedding.

It was right and seemly that, at the close of this period of twenty-five years, some testimonial should be offered to the Pastor. The like has been worthily done in other instances; and brethren have accepted a sum of money, which they well deserved, and which they have very properly laid aside as a provision for their families. In our case, it did not appear to us at all fitting that the offering should come into our own purse; our conscience and heart revolted from the idea. We could, without sin, have accepted the gift for our own need; but it seemed not to be right. We have been so much more in the hands of God than most,—so much less an agent, and so much more an instrument, that we could not claim a grain of credit. Moreover, the dear and honoured brethren and sisters in Christ, who have surrounded us these many years, have really themselves done the bulk of the work; and God forbid that we should monopolize honour which belongs to all the saints! Let the offering come, by all means; but let it return to the source from whence it came. There are many poor in the church,—far more than friends at a distance would imagine;—many of the most godly poor, “widows indeed,” and partakers of the poverty of Christ. To aid the church in its holy duty of remembering the poor, which is the nearest approach to remembering Christ Himself, seemed to us to be the highest use of money. The testimonial will, therefore, go to support the aged sisters in the Almshouses, and thus it will actually relieve the funds of the church which are appropriated to the weekly relief of the necessitous. May the Lord Jesus accept this cup of cold water, which is offered in His Name! We see the Lord’s servants fetching for us water from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate; and as we beheld them cheerfully and generously setting it at our feet, we thank them,—thank them with tears in our eyes,—but we feel that we must not drink thereof; it must be poured out before the Lord. So let it be. O Lord, accept it! —C. H. S., in *“The Sword and the Trowel,”* January, 1879.



AFTER the furlough described in the previous chapter, the first great historical event was the celebration of Mr. Spurgeon’s pastoral silver wedding,—the commemoration of the completion of the twenty-fifth year of his ministry in London. It was felt, by many of his friends, that so notable a period of Christian service should not be allowed to pass without due recognition, and many of them desired to avail themselves of the opportunity to present to their Pastor a testimonial of their loving esteem. As soon as the matter was mentioned to him, he resolutely refused to receive any personal presentation; but, feeling that the church’s gratitude to God for all the blessing vouchsafed during that memorable quarter of a century ought to find suitable expression, he suggested that efforts should be made to help the one portion of the work which had been a source of some anxiety to him, and might be more so in the future.

At the annual church-meeting, in January, 1878, the question assumed definite shape, as will be seen from Mr. Spurgeon’s own account of the proceedings:—“It was proposed, and heartily carried by all, that the deacons should consider how best to celebrate the Pastor’s silver wedding when the twenty-fifth year should close, if God should spare the senior Pastor to that time. Mr. Spurgeon then reminded the church that its heaviest burden was the Almshouses, which, having been scantily

endowed for six aged sisters, now accommodated seventeen, and made a heavy drain on the communion fund. It appeared, from the balance-sheet, that the alms given away to the poor annually exceeded £1,000; and, from the great number of the poor members, it had been needful for the Pastor to find £120, and for other friends to give privately in order to balance the account. This was principally due to the large item for support of almswomen; and Mr. Spurgeon said that, if friends would make an effort to raise about £5,000, this part of the church work would be put into proper shape, and he should regard it as a fit way of celebrating the anticipated event. He remarked that it was comparatively easy to carry the load *now*, but that he should not like to leave such a heavy burden for his successor. Should he himself be suddenly called away, the church might find it no great cause for blessing Mr. Spurgeon's administration if it found that houses had been built for the aged widows to starve in, but that their daily bread had been forgotten. He considered that the good ship was in trim condition from stem to stern with this exception, and he would like to see the matter done, and done well. From the enthusiasm of the meeting, there is little doubt that, by many hands, the needful amount will be brought in on or before January, 1879."

By that date, far more than the sum mentioned had been received. About half the amount was realized by a bazaar, for the Pastor had not then seen, as he did in later years, the evils necessarily associated with that method of raising money for the Lord's cause. The presentation had to be postponed, for a time, as Mr. Spurgeon was away at Mentone, seeking rest and restoration; but, at last, May 20, 1879, was fixed for the joyous event. It was preceded by special sermons on the Sabbath, in the course of which the following historical and autobiographical references were made by the preacher:—

"Under the present pastorate, we are like mariners in mid-ocean, distant twenty-five leagues, or rather years, from the place of our departure, and making all sail for the further shore. As to any service we may expect personally to render, we are certainly in the midst of the years, if not near to their end. In the course of nature, we could not expect that more than another twenty-five years of service could be compassed by us, nor are we so foolish as to reckon even upon that: we have, at any rate, come to middle life in our church-relationship, now that we celebrate our silver wedding. Brethren, there is about 'the midst of the years' a certain special danger, and this led the prophet, as it shall lead us at this time, to pray, in the words which I have selected for my text, 'O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known.' Youth has its perils, but these are past; age has its infirmities, but these we have not yet reached; it is ours then to pray against the dangers which are present with us 'in the midst of the

years.' The middle passage of life with us as individuals, and with us as a church, is crowded with peculiar perils.

"There is a certain spur and stimulus of novelty about religious movements which in a few years is worn out. I well recollect when we were called 'a nine days' wonder,' and our critics prophesied that our work would speedily collapse. Such excitement had been seen before, and had passed away; and this would be one among other bubbles of the hour. The nine days have lasted considerably long;—may nine such days follow them, in God's infinite mercy! Now, whatever detractors might say, we know that there was then a life, an energy, a freshness about everything which was done by us as a church which we could hardly expect to continue with us for all these years. From an admirable fervour, many cool down to a dangerous chill. This is to be bemoaned where it has occurred, and it is to be feared where as yet it has not happened, for such is the natural tendency of things. Beloved brethren, I have prayed to God that, when what is called the *esprit de corps* is gone from us, the *Esprit de Dieu* may still abide with us; that, when the spirit which grows out of our association with each other declines, we may be sustained by the Spirit which unites us all to the Lord Jesus.

"This very house of prayer has been to some of you a quiet resting-place. You have been more at home here than when you have been at home. I will be bound to say that you recollect more happy times that you have had here than anywhere else, and these have put out of your memory the sad records of your hard battling in the world, even for a livelihood. I know that many of you live by your Sabbaths. You step over the intervening space from Lord's-day to Lord's-day, as if the Lord had made a ladder of Sabbaths for you to climb to Heaven by; and you have been fed, as well as rested, in God's house. I know you have, for he who deals out the meat has had his own portion; and when he is fed, he knows that others have like appetites, and need like food, and know when they get it. You have clapped your hands for very joy when redeeming grace and dying love have been the theme, and infinite, sovereign, changeless mercy has been the subject of discourse.

"Well now, by every happy Sabbath you have had, my brethren; by every holy Monday evening prayer-meeting; by every occasion on which God has met with you in any of the rooms of this building, when a few of you, at early morning, or late in the evening, have gathered together for prayer; by every time in which the realization of Jesu's love has charmed your soul up to Heaven's gate, bless and magnify His Name, who has crowned the years with His goodness. There had been no food for us if the Lord had not given us manna from Heaven. There had been no comfortable rest for us if He had not breathed peace upon us. There had been no coming in of new converts, nor going out with rapturous joy of the perfected

ones up to the seats above, if the Lord had not been with us ; and, therefore, to Him be all the praise.

“ I do not suppose that any strangers here will understand this matter. It may even be that they will judge that we are indulging in self-gratulation under a thin disguise ; but this evil we must endure for once. You, my brothers and sisters, who have been together these many years, comprehend what is meant ; and you know that it is not within the compass of an angel's tongue to express the gratitude which many of us feel who, for these five-and-twenty years, have been banded together in closest and heartiest Christian brotherhood in the service of our Lord and Master. Strangers cannot guess how happy has been our fellowship, or how true our love. Eternity alone shall reveal the multitude of mercies with which God has visited us by means of our association in this church ; it is to some of us friend, nurse, mother, home, all in one. During all these years, the Lord has been pleased, in infinite mercy, to prepare men's hearts to listen to the Word. It was not possible, they said, that great places could be filled with crowds to hear the old-fashioned gospel. The pulpit had lost its power,—so unbelievers told us ; and yet, no sooner did we begin to preach in simple strains the gospel of Christ, than the people flew as a cloud, and as doves to their windows. And what listening there was at New Park Street, where we scarcely had air enough to breathe ! And when we got into the larger place, what attention was manifest ! What power seemed to go with every word that was spoken ; I say it, though I was the preacher ; for it was not I, but the grace of God which was with me. There were, stricken down among us, some of the most unlikely ones. There were brought into the church, and added to God's people, some of those who had wandered far away from the path of truth and righteousness ; and these, by their penitent love, quickened our life, and increased our zeal. The Lord gave the people more and more a willingness to hear, and there was no pause either in the flowing stream of hearers, or in the incoming of converts. The Holy Spirit came down like showers which saturate the soil till the clods are ready for the breaking ; and then it was not long before, on the right and on the left, we heard the cry, ‘What must we do to be saved?’ We were busy enough, in those days, in seeing converts ; and, thank God, we have been so ever since. We had some among us who gave themselves up to watch for the souls of men, and we have a goodly number of such helpers now, perhaps more than ever we had ; and, thank God, these found and still find many souls to watch over. Still the arrows fly, and still the smitten cry out for help, and ask that they may be guided to the great healing Lord. Blessed be God's Name for this ! He went with us all those early days, and gave us sheaves even at the first sowing, so that we began with mercy ; and He has been with us even until now, till our life has become one long harvest-home.

“I am bound to acknowledge, with deep thankfulness, that, during these twenty-five years, the Word has been given me to speak when the time has come for preaching. It may look to you a small thing that I should be able to come before you in due time ; but it will not seem so to my brethren in the ministry who recollect that, for twenty-five years, my sermons have been printed as they have been delivered. It must be an easy thing to go and buy discourses at sixpence or a shilling each, ready lithographed, and read them off, as hirelings do ; but to speak your heart out every time, and yet to have something fresh to say for twenty-five years, is no child's play. Who shall do it unless he cries unto God for help ? I read, but the other day, a newspaper criticism upon myself, in which the writer expressed his wonder that a man should keep on year after year with so few themes, and such a narrow groove to travel in ; but, my brethren, it is not so, our themes are infinite for number and fulness. Every text of Scripture is boundless in its meaning ; we could preach from the Bible throughout eternity, and not exhaust it. The groove narrow ? The thoughts of God narrow ? The Word of the Lord narrow ? They who say so do not know it, for His commandment is exceeding broad. Had we to speak of politics or philosophy, we should have run dry long ago ; but when we have to preach the Saviour's everlasting love, the theme is always fresh, always new. The incarnate God, the atoning blood, the risen Lord, the coming glory, these are subjects which defy exhaustion. When I recollect how, as a boy, I stood among you, and feebly began to preach Jesus Christ, and how these twenty-five years, without dissension, ay, without the dream of dissension, in perfect love compacted as one man, you have gone on from one work of God to another, and have never halted, hesitated, or drawn back, I must and will bless and magnify Him who hath crowned these years with His goodness.

“Now I come to my closing point. It is this,—the crowning blessing is confessed to be of God. Some churches have one crown, and some another ; our crown, under God, has been this,—the poor have the gospel preached unto them, souls are saved, and Christ is glorified. O my beloved church, hold fast that thou hast, that no man take this crown away from thee ! As for me, by God's help, the first and last thing that I long for is to bring men to Christ. I care nothing about fine language, or about the pretty speculations of prophecy, or a hundred dainty things ; but to break the heart and bind it up, to lay hold on a sheep of Christ and bring it back into the fold, is the one thing I would live for. You also are of the same mind, are you not ? Well, we have had this crowning blessing that, as nearly as I can estimate, since I came amongst you, more than nine thousand persons have joined this church. If they were all alive now, or all with us now, what a company they would be ! I find that, during these twenty-five years, there have gone from us, to the upper realms, about eight hundred who had named the Name

of Jesus. Professing their faith in Christ, living in His fear, dying in the faith, they gave us no cause to doubt their sincerity ; and, therefore, we may not question their eternal safety. Many of them gave us, in life and in death, all the tokens we could ask for of their being in Christ ; and, therefore, we sorrow not as those that are without hope. Why, when I think of them,—many of them my sons and daughters in the faith,—now before the throne, they fill me with solemn exultation ! Do you not see them in their white robes ? Eight hundred souls redeemed by blood ! These are only those whom we knew of, and had enrolled on our church-books. How many more there may have been converted, who never joined our earthly fellowship, but, nevertheless, have gone home, I cannot tell. There probably have been more than those whose names we know, if we consider the wide area over which the printed sermons circulate. They are gathering home one by one, but they make a goodly company. Our name is Gad, for ‘a troop cometh.’ Happy shall we be to overtake those who have outmarched us, and entered into the Promised Land before us. Let us remember them, and by faith join our hands with theirs. Flash a thought to unite the broken family, for we are not far from them, nor are they far from us, since we are one in Christ.”

Monday evening, May 19, was mainly devoted to praising the Lord for His goodness to both Pastor and people during the whole period of their union ; but, before the meeting closed, Mr. Spurgeon gave an address, as he felt that there would not be time, the following evening, for him to say all that he wanted. Among other things, he said :—“ I have, as you must imagine, felt the deepest emotion, at the end of these twenty-five years of your affectionate co-operation ; and especially an emotion, which I shall not attempt to express, of grateful affection to you all for the noble testimonial which you have raised to commemorate the event. I felt sure that you would take up the plan of providing for our aged sisters as soon as it was proposed to you by the deacons ; but I did not think that you could give me such a testimonial as you have prepared. The net sum which is to be handed to me is, I am informed, £6,238, (afterwards increased to £6,476 9s.,) the spontaneous giving—the universal giving—the delighted giving of the entire church and congregation. Everyone has seemed jealous of being excluded ; so all, both rich and poor, young and old, have pressed forward with their gifts. I certainly could not have imagined that you would so largely exceed the amount needed for the Almshouses ; and yet, when I remember your many other loving and generous acts, I cannot be surprised at anything. It is just like you ; your conduct to me is all of a piece, and may God bless you for it ! I was ill all the while you were doing this great deed of love, and I could not rise from my bed ; but, each day, I had tidings of some sort about you, and your words and acts of love ; and I hardly knew

how to bear it. It lifted me out of despondency, but it cast me down with exceeding gratitude. I scarcely like to speak upon the subject, because it has been a rule with me not to take a text which I could not hope to grasp. Little boats are safest while they keep in sight of shore. This subject is one of those upon which the more said the better, and yet it remains better than all that can be said. I condense my sermon into a sentence, and that sentence is a prayer,—May the God, whom I serve, bless you all a thousandfold for this token of your love and kindness towards me, which I know you have rendered for Christ's sake!"

On Tuesday evening, May 20, the Tabernacle was crowded in every part for the meeting at which the testimonial was to be presented. After prayer and praise, Mr. B. W. Carr read a long but interesting historical paper, entitled, "A Grateful Retrospect," summarizing the church's progress during Mr. Spurgeon's ministry; Dr. Charles Stanford followed with a choice composition upon "The Baptist Churches, twenty-five years ago and now;" a few brief addresses were delivered; and then, as a pleasant interlude before the presentation was made by Mr. William Olney, the Pastor said:—"Before we go to the business of the evening, we will sing our Tabernacle National Anthem, that glorious hymn,—

"Grace, 'tis a charming sound,—

to the tune 'Cranbrook', which a critic has called 'execrable.' I am such a heretic as to like 'Cranbrook'; and if you will only sing it as we generally do, we will make some of these heathen here to-night like it. The way of singing now (continued Mr. Spurgeon, in affected tones to imitate the parties to whom he alluded) is, 'Let us sing to the praise and glory of God, and rattle through it as fast as possible, with never a fugue or a repeat, and get it over and done, for we are sick to death of it.' In truth, I think some of the much-admired modern tunes might be very well represented under the following story:—"I hope you enjoyed our music this morning," said a gentleman of the High Church to a Presbyterian friend who was staying with him. 'Well, I cannot say that I admire your form of service at all; I like things much better as we have them in the old kirk.' 'No? But you are, after all, a gentleman of musical taste; did you not very much enjoy that *introit*?' 'I really don't know which it was.' 'But you must have been pleased with that *anthem*,' repeated the High Churchman. 'I don't know, I can't say much in its favour,' was the reply. 'Well, there was one very remarkable tune; didn't you notice it?' 'Oh!' was the response, 'I didn't think much of it.' 'Well, now, I am very sorry, because that is a very ancient tune, used by the early Church very often; indeed, I believe it was sung in the catacombs. I have even heard that this wonderful piece of music came from the Jews, and was no doubt chanted in the liturgical service of the Temple; for

you know the worship of the ancient Temple was liturgical, and not your bare Presbyterian form at all. There appears to be scarcely any doubt that the tune we had this morning was originally sung by David himself when he played on his harp.' 'Dear me,' said the Presbyterian, 'I never heard that before, but it throws great light upon Scripture. I never could make out why Saul threw a javelin at David; but if that was the tune which he sang when he played his harp before the king, I can understand Saul's ferocity, and justify it, too.' 'Cranbrook' is not the tune that was sung by David, but it is a good deal better than anything David ever sang; the tune is more musical, and the hymn has more gospel in it than was known under the law."

"Grace, 'tis a charming sound,"

was then sung, to the tune "Cranbrook", as only a Tabernacle audience of six thousand people could sing it. Then followed the presentation of the testimonial. The principal portions of Mr. Olney's address, and of Mr. Spurgeon's reply, were published in Vol. II., Chapter XLIV., and therefore need not be repeated here; but the record of that memorable meeting may be closed with the Pastor's allusions to his people's affection and his own resolve:—"I can only use over again the simile I have employed before. In the crystallizing of sugar, to make sugar candy, strings are stretched across the vessel in which the syrup is boiled; upon these strings, the sugar crystallizes. You are the sugar; the Divine life supplies the fire which melts your hearts; and I am the thread around which you crystallize. So be it still! But your love is to me an amazement; I am the most astonished person among you; I do not comprehend it; it seems a romance to me. What I have done, I shall do still; namely, love you with all my heart, and love my Lord as His grace enables me. I mean to go on preaching Jesus, and His gospel; and you may be sure that I shall not preach anything else, for with me it is Christ or nothing. I am sold up, and my stock-in-trade is gone if Jesus Christ is gone. He is the sum of my ministry, my All-in-all."

A pleasing sequel to the presentation was thus noted at the time by Mr. Spurgeon:—"The testimonial which celebrated our twenty-five years of pastoral work was presented on Tuesday, May 20, and there and then dedicated to the Lord. On the following Thursday evening, we commenced a new period in our church history; and it is a singularly pleasing coincidence that, at the church-meeting held on that evening, no less than thirty-seven candidates came before the church, and confessed their faith in Christ,—the largest number that we have ever received at one church-meeting. This was the more remarkable as it happened entirely without arrangement on the part of the Pastor or anyone else. We regard it as 'a token for good,' and look for 'greater things than these.'"



SILVER WEDDING PORTRAITS.

Only a brief mention of our personal silver wedding is necessary. There was some intention of holding a special meeting at the Tabernacle, to congratulate the Pastor and his wife, on Monday, January 10, 1881,—two days after the actual date; but, unhappily, Mr. Spurgeon was laid aside at the time, so that idea had to be abandoned, although we were both very sympathetically remembered in the supplications of those who were assembled, that evening, in the much-loved house of prayer. Ultimately, the commemoration took the form of a private gathering of friends, at "Westwood," on Wednesday, February 2. It was characteristic of my beloved's devotion to his Lord's service, and of the intimate union existing between himself and his church-officers, that such an event in our family history should have been celebrated in connection with a meeting of the deacons at our home. I might not have remembered that circumstance had I not

been favoured with the loan of one of the invitations issued by the dear Pastor, a *facsimile* of which is here reproduced. I am not aware that he ever signed

Westwood
Beulah Hill
Upper Norwood

Dear Friend, Jan. 31, 1881.

lest you should forget it, I beg to remind you that ^{the} weacons' meeting will commence here at 5 on Wednesday next.

At 6.30, we will meet for tea, & after tea, we hope to celebrate with you our silver wedding with great thankfulness to God.

Please come as early as you can that we may get through business before tea.

Yours heartily

C. H. Spurgeon

another letter with our united initials, and the date on which this one was written gives it now a specially tender interest. I have no very vivid recollections of the

evening's proceedings ; but I know that Mr. William Olney and Mr. Carr, as the spokesmen on behalf of their brother-deacons, made most sympathetic references to both the parents and their twin-sons, and that, after the interchange of many cheering reminiscences, and a time of holy fellowship, the whole household joined us for family worship, which was conducted by Mr. Spurgeon with his usual fervour and impressiveness.

Among my dear husband's papers, I find a letter, relating to this happy season, from his old Cambridge friend, Mr. J. S. Watts, of whom frequent mention was made in Vol. I. of the *Autobiography*. This epistle so sweetly links the beginning of our wedded life with the twenty-fifth anniversary of our marriage, that it appears to me to deserve a place in this chapter.

“ Regent Street,
“ Cambridge,
“ January 8, 1881.

“ My Dear Friend,

“ My mind reverts to the month of January, twenty-five years ago, when a certain newly-married juvenile Pastor and his wife came to me for a few days, and solaced themselves in their mutual love for each other at my house.

“ Many things have happened since that time ; but their faithfulness and their affection for each other have not been impaired ; and now that they are about to celebrate their silver wedding, I ask permission to remind them of those early days, and to add my hearty congratulations at this auspicious period.

“ May the 8th of January, 1881, ring in a strain of joyful music over the strings of the past, assuring them that ‘golden days’ are yet to come, even before they ‘walk the golden streets.’ So prays,—

“ Their old friend and well-wisher,
“ J. S. WATTS.”

Another loving letter, written at that period by Dr. W. Morley Punshon, is also worthy of preservation here :—

“ Tranby,
“ Brixton Rise, S.W.,
“ Jan., 1881.

“ My Dear Sir and Brother,

“ The papers tell us that the 8th inst. will be a memorable day to you ; and, amid hosts of greeting friends, my wife and I (than whom you have none truer, though our love can rarely exhibit itself but in wishful thought and prayer,) would fain express our good wishes in a line.

“We trust there is good foundation for the rumour, which has lately reached us, of great and permanent improvement in Mrs. Spurgeon's health; and we pray that, if it be the Lord's will, you may be continued to each other in happy fellowship until the ‘silvern’ shall have become ‘golden’ by the lapse of years.

“Like most of God's anointed, it seems as if you are to be ‘made meet by consecrated pain.’ May the Refiner sit always by the furnace! *You know* that the fire will never be kindled a whit too fiercely, nor burn a moment too long.

“There are many, whom you know not, who thank God, in these times of rebuke, for your fidelity to the old gospel, and who watch you with solicitude and prayer.

“Wishing, for Mrs. Spurgeon and yourself, happiness, and the blessedness which is better,—the Lord's unutterable peace, long and useful lives, and the ‘abundant entrance’ at last, I am, in my wife's name and my own,

“Yours very affectionately,

“W. MORLEY PUNSHON.”

“Rev. Chas. H. Spurgeon.”

Three months later, when Dr. Punshon was “called home,” Mr. Spurgeon gratefully referred to this letter, and sought to comfort the bereaved family in their season of sorrow.