

CHAPTER XXIII.

Reminiscences as a Village Pastor.

My witness is, and I speak it for the honour of God, that He is a good Provider. I have been cast upon the Providence of God ever since I left my father's house, and in all cases He has been my Shepherd, and I have known no lack. My first income as a Christian minister was small enough in all conscience, never exceeding forty-five pounds a year; yet I was as rich then as I am now, for I had enough; and I had no more cares, nay, not half as many then as I have now; and when I breathed my prayer to God then, as I do now, for all things temporal and spiritual, I found Him ready to answer me at every pinch,—and full many pinches I have had. Many a pecuniary trial have I had in connection with the College work, which depends for funds upon the Lord's moving His people to liberality: my faith has been often tried, but God has always been faithful, and sent supplies in hours of need. If any should tell me that prayer to God was a mere piece of excitement, and that the idea of God answering human cries is absurd, I should laugh the statement to scorn, for my experience is not that of one or two singular instances, but that of hundreds of cases, in which the Lord's interposition, for the necessities of His work, has been as manifest as if He had rent the clouds, and thrust forth His own naked arm and bounteous hand to supply the needs of His servant.—C. H. S.



WHEN I became Pastor at Waterbeach, the people could do very little for my support, and therefore I was an usher in a school at Cambridge at the same time. After a while, I was obliged to give up the latter occupation, and was thrown on the generosity of the people. They gave me a salary of £45 a year, but as I had to pay 12s. a week for two rooms which I occupied, my income was not sufficient to support me; but the people, though they had not money, had produce, and I do not think there was a pig killed by any one of the congregation without my having some portion of it, and one or other of them, when coming to the market at Cambridge, would bring me bread, so that I had enough bread and meat to pay my rent with, and I often paid my landlady in that fashion.

There was one old man at Waterbeach who was a great miser. On one of my visits to the place, after I had removed to London, I heard that, in his last illness, he had a bed made up in the sitting-room downstairs, and ordered his grave to be dug just outside the window, so as to reduce the cost of his funeral as much as possible. One of the friends who was talking about him said, "He was never known to give anything to anybody." "Well," I replied, "I know better than that, for, one Sunday afternoon, he gave me three half-crowns; and as I was wanting a new hat at the time, I got it with the money." "Well," rejoined the friend, "I am quite sure he never forgave himself for such extravagance as that, and that he must have wanted his three half-crowns back again." "Ah, but!" I answered, "you have not heard the whole of the story yet, for, the following Sunday, the old man came to

me again, and asked me to pray for him that he might be saved from the sin of covetousness, "for," said he, "the Lord told me to give you half-a-sovereign, but I kept back half-a-crown, and I can't rest of a night for thinking of it."

(Dr. D. A. Doudney, describing an interview with Mr. Spurgeon at "Westwood," wrote in *The Gospel Magazine* for March, 1892 :—"Among other subjects brought up was that of Dr. Gill's *Commentary*. I was asked by Mr. Spurgeon how it was that I was led to reproduce it. Its truthful character was urged as a reason, as well as its great price putting it beyond the power of ministers in general to possess it. My own copy—simply bound in plain canvas boards—had cost me £6 10s. Moreover, I was anxious to set up an Industrial School, and thus find occupation for the youths of the parish. 'In what volume,' asked Mr. Spurgeon, 'did the names of the subscribers appear?' I could not recollect, but, withdrawing for a moment to his study, he quickly reappeared with the fourth volume of the Old Testament,—the last issued upon the completion of the work,—and, pointing to his own name, said, 'You published it in half-crown parts, or else I could not have taken it in.' Here was a fair specimen of Mr. Spurgeon's character,—his proverbial simplicity and honesty. How few, in like manner, amid such surroundings, and having attained, as he had, to such a name, and such a popularity, would have made that frank statement, 'You published it in half-crown parts, or I could not have taken it in.'"

The following inscriptions, in Mr. Spurgeon's handwriting, are in his set of volumes of Dr. Gill's *Commentary* :—

In Vol. I.—"I subscribed for this, and took the monthly parts.

"C. H. SPURGEON, 1852.

"To this Author's Pulpit I was permitted to succeed in 1854.

"C. H. SPURGEON."

In Vol. V.—"I subscribed for these vols. of Gill in monthly parts, and had them bound. December, 1852.

"C. H. SPURGEON,

"living in Cambridge,

"Baptist Minister of Waterbeach.

"In April, 1854, unanimously elected Pastor of the same Church, which once met in Carter Lane, under Dr. Gill, and then Dr. Rippon,—now New Park Street, Southwark.

"In the year 1861, this Church migrated to the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington Butts, having far outgrown the space of New Park Street Chapel."

In Vol. VI.—“Many sneer at Gill, but he is not to be dispensed with. In some respects, he has no superior. He is always well worth consulting.

“C. H. S. 1886.”

In Vol. IV., as stated by Dr. Doudney, Mr. Spurgeon's name appears in the list of subscribers to the work :—

“Spurgeon, C., Union Road, Cambridge.”)

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Of late years, I have heard a great deal against deacons, and have read discussions as to their office, evidently suggested by no idolatrous reverence for their persons. Many of my brethren in the ministry bitterly rate them, others tremble at the mention of their very name ; and a few put on their armour, and prepare to do battle with them wherever they go, as if they were the dragons of ministerial life. I have been accused of saying that “a deacon is worse than a devil, for if you resist the devil, he will flee from you, but if you resist a deacon, he will fly at you.” This is no saying of mine ; I never had any cause to speak so severely ; and although, in some cases, it may be true, I have never had any experimental proof that it is so. Not one in a hundred of the sayings that are fathered upon me are mine at all ; and as to this one, it was in vogue before I was born. I pardon the man who preached from James i. 6 before that drunken Solomon, James I. of England and VI. of Scotland,—the temptation was too great to be resisted ; but let the wretch be for ever execrated, if such a man really lived, who celebrated the decease of a deacon by a tirade from the words, “It came to pass that the beggar died.” I forgive the liar who attributed such an outrage to me, but I hope he will not try his infamous arts upon anyone else.

My observation of deacons leads me to say that, as a rule, they are quite as good men as the pastors, and the bad and good in the ministry and the diaconate are to be found in very much the same proportions. If there be lordly deacons, are there not lordly pastors ? If there be ignorant, crotchety men among deacons, are there not their rivals in our pulpits ? The Church owes an immeasurable debt of gratitude to those thousands of godly men who study her interests day and night, contribute largely of their substance, care for her poor, cheer her ministers, and in times of trouble as well as prosperity, remain faithfully at their posts. Whatever there may be here and there of mistake, infirmity, and even wrong, I am sure, from wide and close observation, that the most of our deacons are an honour to our faith, and we may style them, as the apostle did his brethren, “the glory of Christ.” The deacons of my first village pastorate were in my esteem the excellent of the earth, in whom I took great delight. Hard-working men on the week-day, they spared no toil for their Lord on the Sabbath ; I loved them sincerely, and do love

them still. In my opinion, they were as nearly the perfection of deacons of a country church as the kingdom could afford.

Yet, good as my deacons were, they were not perfect in all respects. I proposed to them, on one occasion, that I should preach on the Sunday evening by the river side, and the remark was made by one of them, "Ah! I do not like it, it is imitating the Methodists." To him, as a sound Calvinist, it was a dreadful thing to do anything which Methodists were guilty of; to me, however, that was rather a recommendation than otherwise, and I was happy to run the risk of being Methodistical. All over England, in our cities, towns, villages, and hamlets, there are tens of thousands who never will hear the gospel while open-air preaching is neglected. I rejoice that God *allows* us to preach in churches and chapels, but I do not pretend that we have any apostolical precedent for it, certainly none for confining our ministry to such places. I believe that we are permitted, if it promotes order and edification, to set apart buildings for our worship; but there is no warrant for calling these places sanctuaries and houses of God, for all places are alike holy where holy men assemble. It is altogether a mischievous thing that we should confine our preaching within walls. Our Lord, it is true, preached in the synagogues, but He often spake on the mountain side, or from a boat, or in the court of a house, or in the public thoroughfares. To Him, an audience was the only necessity. He was a Fisher of souls of the true sort, and not like those who sit still in their houses, and expect the fish to come to them to be caught. Did our Lord intend a minister to go on preaching from his pulpit to empty pews, when, by standing on a chair or a table outside the meeting-house, he might be heard by hundreds? I believe not, and I held the same opinion at the very beginning of my ministry, so I preached by the river side, even though my good deacon thought that, by so doing, I was imitating the Methodists.

Another of those worthy brethren, a dear old Christian man, said to me, one day, when I was at his house to dinner, "My dear sir, I wish you would not preach those *invitation sermons*. You are too general in your appeals; you seem to press the people so much to come to Christ. I do not like it; for it is not at all consistent with my doctrinal views." "Well," I replied, "what would you have me preach?" "Well, sir," he said, "though I don't like such preaching, yet it is evident that the Lord does; for my son-in-law was converted to God under one of those sermons; and when I came home, the other Sunday, so angry with you for being such a Fullerite, there was my daughter crying fit to break her heart; so," he added, "don't you take any notice of an old man like me. As long as God blesses you, you go on in your own way." I said to him, "But, my dear brother, don't you think, if God approves of this kind of preaching, that you ought to like it, too?" "Well," he answered, "perhaps I ought; but I am an old man, and I have always been

brought up in those views. I am afraid I shall not get out of them ; but don't you take the slightest notice of what I say." That was exactly what I had determined in my own mind that I would do, so we agreed after all.

One of my Waterbeach deacons was named King. He was a very methodical man, and kept the accounts and the church-books in admirable order. He was a calm, thoughtful, judicious brother ; but he had a full proportion of zeal and warmth. His wife was made to match, and the pair were second to none in the village for grace and wisdom. Mr. King was a miller ; and in his cottage by the mill I have often spent a happy night, and have met his excellent son, who was then the Pastor of the Baptist Church in Aldreth, Cambridgeshire. I remember our hearty laugh at the junior King, for borrowing a horse to ride to a preaching engagement, and then appearing at the place *leading the horse*, having only ridden him a very little way, and walked with him all the rest of the road because he seemed skittish. The elder Mr. King once gave me a kindly hint in a very delicate manner. He did not tell me that I should speak more guardedly in the pulpit ; but when I left his house, one Monday morning, I found a pin in my Bible, stuck through Titus ii. 8 : " Sound speech, that cannot be condemned ; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." Nothing could have been in better taste. The wise rebuke was well deserved and lovingly taken. It was so deftly given that its value was thereby increased indefinitely. Mr. King was a deacon of deacons to me, and to the Waterbeach Church ; and his son was worthy of such a father.

On one occasion, there had been a meeting to raise money for home-mission work ; the collection had just been made, and the deacons had brought all the plates to the table-pew, when an old gentleman entered. He could not help being late at the meeting, though his heart was there all the time. His feet would have carried him down to the chapel two hours before, only duty forbade. As soon, however, as he had concluded his business, off he walked, saying to himself, " I'm afraid I shall be too late, but I shall at least hear how they have got on. The Lord grant a blessing on the meeting, and on the good work in hand ! " It was Father Sewell,—an Israelite indeed,—the very image of Old Mr. Honest in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. As soon as I caught sight of my aged friend, I said, " Our brother who has just come in will, I am sure, close the meeting by offering prayer for God's blessing on the proceedings of this evening." He stood up, but he did not pray. He did not shut his eyes ; but, on the contrary, he seemed to be looking for something. He did not clasp his hands, but put them into his pockets, and fumbled there with much perseverance. " I am afraid," I said, " that my brother did not understand me. Friend Sewell, I did not ask you to *give*, but to *pray*." " Ay, ay ! " replied the straightforward, bluff old saint, " but I could not pray till I had given ; it would be hypocrisy to ask a blessing on that which I did not think worth

giving to." There was not the least ostentation in the good man ; it was his honest heart pouring out its true feelings ; and, odd as his behaviour seemed, his conduct preached the whole congregation such a sermon as they would not readily forget.

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In my first pastorate, I had often to battle with Antinomians,—that is, people who held that, because they believed themselves to be elect, they might live as they liked. I hope that heresy has to a great extent died out, but it was sadly prevalent in my early ministerial days. I knew one man, who stood on the table of a public-house, and held a glass of gin in his hand, declaring all the while that he was one of the chosen people of God. They kicked him out of the public-house, and when I heard of it, I felt that it served him right. Even those ungodly men said that they did not want any such "elect" people there. There is no one who can live in sin,—drinking, swearing, lying, and so on,—who can truly declare that he is one of the Lord's chosen people. I recollect one such man,—and he was a very bad fellow,—yet he had the hardihood to say, "I know that I am one of God's dear people." "So you are," said I ; "dear at any price, either to be given or thrown away!" He did not like my plain speaking, but it was true ; for that was the only sense in which he was one of God's dear people. From my very soul, I detest everything that in the least savours of the Antinomianism which leads people to prate about being secure in Christ while they are living in sin. We cannot be saved *by* or *for* our good works, neither can we be saved *without* good works. Christ never will save any of His people *in* their sins ; He saves His people *from* their sins. If a man is not desiring to live a holy life in the sight of God, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he is still "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." I used to know a man of this class, who talked a great deal about "*saving faith*." He was notorious for his evil life, so I could not make out what he meant by saving faith, until the collection was taken, and I noticed how carefully he put his fingernail round a threepenny piece for fear lest it should be a fourpenny ; then I understood his meaning. But the idea of "saving faith" apart from good works, is ridiculous. The saved man is not a perfect man ; but his heart's desire is to become perfect, he is always panting after perfection, and the day will come when he will be perfected, after the image of his once crucified and now glorified Saviour, in knowledge and true holiness.

While I was minister at Waterbeach, I used to have a man sitting in front of the gallery, who would always nod his head when I was preaching what he considered sound doctrine, although he was about as bad an old hypocrite as ever lived. When I talked about justification, down went his head ; when I preached about imputed righteousness, down it went again. I was a dear good man in his estimation, without doubt. So I thought I would cure him of nodding, or at least make his

head keep still for once ; so I remarked, "There is a great deal of difference between God electing you, and your electing yourself ; a vast deal of difference between God justifying you by His Spirit, and your justifying yourself by a false belief, or presumption ; this is the difference," said I,—and the old man at once put me down as a rank Arminian,—“you who have elected yourselves, and justified yourselves, have no marks of the Spirit of God ; you have no evidence of genuine piety, you are not holy men and women, you can live in sin, you can walk as sinners walk, you have the image of the devil upon you, and yet you call yourselves the children of God. One of the first evidences that anyone is a child of God is that he hates sin with a perfect hatred, and seeks to live a holy, Christlike life.” The old Antinomian did not approve of that doctrine ; but I knew that I was preaching what was revealed in the Word of God.

There was another man, of that sort, who at one time frequently walked out with me into the villages where I was going to preach. I was glad of his company till I found out certain facts as to his manner of life, and then I shook him off, and I believe he hooked himself on to somebody else, for he must needs be gadding abroad every evening of the week. He had many children, and they grew up to be wicked men and women ; and the reason was, that the father, while he was constantly busy at this meeting and that, never tried to bring his own boys and girls to the Saviour. He said to me, one day, “I never laid my hand upon my children ;” so I answered, “Then I think it is very likely that God will lay His hand upon you.” “Oh !” he said, “I have not even spoken sharply to them.” “Then,” I replied, “it is highly probable that God will speak very sharply to you ; for it is not His will that parents should leave their children unrestrained in their sin.”

I knew another man, in those early days, who used to travel a long distance every Sabbath to hear what he called “the truth.” Neither his wife nor any of his children went to any place of worship, and when I talked to him very seriously about them, he told me that “the Lord would save His own ;” to which I could not help replying that the Lord would not “own” him. He demanded my authority for that statement, so I gave him this proof-text, “If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” One of his companions said to me, one day, that he knew how many children of God there were in the parish where he lived ; there were exactly *five*. I was curious to learn their names, so I asked him who the five were, and much to my amusement he began by saying, “There is *myself*.” I stopped him at this point, with the query whether he was quite sure about the *first* one. Since then, his character has gone I know not where, but certainly he will get on better without it than with it ; yet he was the first on his own list, and a few others of the same black sort made up the five. There were, in the other places of worship to which he did not go,

men, whose characters for integrity and uprightness, ay, and for spirituality and prayerfulness, would have been degraded by being put into comparison with his; yet *he* set himself up as judge in Israel, and pretended to know exactly how many people of God were in the village. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." I bless God that I have learned to have very little respect for the vision of *the man* with the measuring line. When I see an angel with it, I am glad enough; but when I see *a man* with it, I tell him that he must give me a warrant from God, and show me how he is to know the elect by any other method than that laid down by our Lord Jesus Christ: "By their fruits shall ye know them."

I have sometimes been greatly obliged to a wicked world for what it has done to inconsistent professors of religion. While I was Pastor at Waterbeach, a certain young man joined the church. We thought he was a changed character, but there used to be in the village, once a year, a great temptation in the form of a feast; and when the feast came round, this foolish fellow was there in very evil company. He was in the long room of a public-house, in the evening, and when I heard what happened, I really felt intense gratitude to the landlady of that place. When she came in, and saw him there, she said, "Halloa, Jack So-and-so, are *you* here? Why, you are one of Spurgeon's lot, yet you are here; you ought to be ashamed of yourself. This is not fit company for you. Put him out of the window, boys." And they did put him out of the window on the Friday night, and we put him out of the door on the Sunday, for we removed his name from our church-book. Where was he to go to? The world would not have him, and the church would not have him; if he had been all for the world, the world would have made something of him; and if he had been all for Christ, Christ would have made something of him. But as he tried to be a little for each, and so nothing to either, his life became a wretched one; as he walked the streets, people pointed at him with scorn. The Christians turned away, thinking him a hypocrite, as I fear he was; and the worldlings called him one, and made his name a by-word and a proverb.

In those early days, I had sometimes to contend with the Antinomian preachers as well as with their people. I once found myself in the midst of a company of ministers and friends, who were disputing whether it was a sin in men that they did not believe the gospel. Whilst they were discussing, I said, "Gentlemen, am I in the presence of Christians? Are you believers in the Bible, or are you not?" They said, "We are Christians, of course." "Then," said I, "does not the Scripture say, 'of sin, because they believe not on Me'? And is it not the damning sin of men, that they do not believe on Christ?" I should not have imagined, if I had not myself heard them, that any persons would be so wicked as to venture to assert that "it is no sin for a sinner not to believe on Christ." I

should have thought that, however far they might wish to push their sentiments, they would not tell a lie to uphold the truth ; and, in my opinion, this is what such men really do. Truth is a strong tower, and never requires to be buttressed with error. God's Word will stand against all man's devices. I would never invent a sophism to prove that it is no sin on the part of the ungodly not to believe, for I am sure it is. When I am taught in the Scriptures that "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light," and when I read, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God," I affirm, and the Word declares it, *unbelief is a sin*. Surely, with rational and unprejudiced persons, it cannot require any reasoning to prove it. Is it not a sin for a creature to doubt the Word of its Maker? Is it not a crime and an insult to the Deity, for me, an atom, a particle of dust, to dare to deny His Words? Is it not the very summit of arrogance and the height of pride for a son of Adam to say, even in his heart, "God, I doubt Thy grace ; God, I doubt Thy love ; God, I doubt Thy power" ? I feel that, could we roll all sins into one mass,—could we take murder, blasphemy, lust, adultery, fornication, and everything that is vile, and unite them all into one vast globe of black corruption,—they would not even then equal the sin of unbelief. This is the monarch sin, the quintessence of guilt, the mixture of the venom of all crimes, the dregs of the wine of Gomorrah ; it is the A1 sin, the masterpiece of Satan, the chief work of the devil. Unbelief hardened the heart of Pharaoh,—it gave license to the tongue of blaspheming Rabshakeh,—yea, it became a deicide, and murdered the Lord Jesus Christ. Unbelief ! it has mixed many a cup of poison ; it has brought thousands to the gallows, and many to a shameful grave, who have murdered themselves, and rushed with bloody hands before their Creator's tribunal, because of unbelief. Give me an unbeliever,—let me know that he doubts God's Word,—let me know that he distrusts His promise and His threatening ; and with that for a premise, I will conclude that the man shall, by-and-by, unless there is amazing restraining power exerted upon him, be guilty of the foulest and blackest crimes. Unbelief is a Beelzebub sin ; like Beelzebub, it is the leader of all evil spirits. It is said of Jeroboam that he sinned, and made Israel to sin ; and it may be said of unbelief that it not only itself sins, but it makes others sin ; it is the egg of all crime, the seed of every offence ; in fact, everything that is evil and vile lies couched in that one word—unbelief.

In striking contrast to those apologists for sin, I met in my first pastorate, as I have often done since, a number of persons who professed to be perfect, and who said that they had lived so many months or years without sinning against God. One man, who told me that he was perfect, was hump-backed ; and when I remarked

that I thought, if he were a perfect man, he ought to have a perfect body, he became so angry that I said to him, "Well, my friend, if *you* are perfect, there are a great many more as near perfection as you are." "Oh!" he exclaimed, "I shall feel it for having been betrayed into anger." He said that he had not been angry for many years; I had brought him back to his old state of infirmity, and painful as it might be for him, I have no doubt that it did him good to see himself as he really was. When a man thinks that he is a full-grown Christian, he reminds me of a poor boy whom I used to see. He had such a splendid head for his body that he had often to lay it on a pillow, for it was too weighty for his shoulders to carry, and his mother told me that, when he tried to stand up, he often tumbled down, overbalanced by his heavy head. There are some people who appear to grow very fast, but they have water on the brain, and are out of due proportion; but he who truly grows in grace does not say, "Dear me! I can feel that I am growing; bless the Lord! Let's sing a hymn, 'I'm a growing! I'm a growing!'" I have often felt that I was growing smaller; I think that is very probable, and a good thing, too. If we are very great in our own estimation, it is because we have a number of cancers, or foul gatherings, that need to be lanced, so as to let out the bad matter that causes us to boast of our bigness.

Our Wesleyan brethren have a notion that they are going to be perfect here on earth. I should be very glad to see them when they are perfect; and if any of them happen to be in the position of servants, wanting situations, I would be happy to give them any amount of wages I could spare, for I should feel myself highly honoured and greatly blessed in having perfect servants; and what is more, if any of them are masters, and need servants, I would undertake to come and serve them without any wages at all if I could but find a perfect master. I have had one perfect Master ever since I first knew the Lord, and if I could be sure that there is another perfect master, I should be greatly pleased to have him as an under-master, while the great Supreme must ever be chief of all. One man, who said he was perfect, called upon me once, and asked me to go and see him, for I should receive valuable instruction from him if I did. I said, "I have no doubt it would be so; but I should not like to go to your house, I think I should hardly be able to get into one of your rooms." "How is that?" he enquired. "Well," I replied, "I suppose that your house would be so full of angels that there would be no room for me." He did not like that remark; and when I made one or two other playful observations, he went into a towering rage. "Well, friend," I said to him, "I think, after all, I am as perfect as you are; but do *perfect men* ever get angry?" He denied that he was angry, although there was a peculiar redness about his cheeks, and a fiery flash in his eyes, that is very common to persons when they are in a passion. At any rate, I think I rather spoiled his perfection, for he evidently went home much less satisfied with himself than when he came out. I met another man who considered himself

perfect, but he was thoroughly mad ; and I do not believe that any of the pretenders to perfection are better than good maniacs, a superior kind of Bedlamites ; for, while a man has got a spark of reason left in him, he cannot, unless he is the most impudent of impostors, talk about being perfect. He who imagines such a thing must be insane ; for any man who examines himself for five minutes, in the light of God's Word, will find enough in his own heart to drive from him any shadow of a thought about being perfect in this world. I have little patience with such wilfully blind people, and when I hear of some who are said to be perfectly holy, and of others who are utterly foolish, I think the two classes are wonderfully alike. I have met with a few people who seemed to me almost perfect, but they have been the very ones who have groaned most over their own imperfections ; while those with whom I have come into contact, who have professed to be holy and without blemish, have been the most imperfect individuals I have ever known.

My own experience is a daily struggle with the evil within. I wish I could find in myself something friendly to grace ; but, hitherto, I have searched my nature through, and have found everything in rebellion against God. At one time, there comes the torpor of sloth, when one ought to be active every moment, having so much to do for God, and for the souls of men, and so little time in which to do it. At another time, there comes the quickness of passion ; when one should be calm and cool, and play the Christian, bearing with patience whatever has to be endured, there come the unadvised word and the rash expression. Anon, I am troubled with conceit, the devilish whisper,—I can call it no less,—“How well thou hast done ! How nobly thou hast played thy part !” Then crawls out distrust,—foul and faithless,—suggesting that God does not regard the affairs of men, and will not interpose on my behalf. Yet, what would I not give if I might but be perfect ! Sometimes, I think that, if God's people mentioned in the Old and New Testaments had all been perfect, I should have despaired ; but, because they seem to have had just the kind of faults I grieve over in myself, I do not feel any more lenient toward my faults, but I do rejoice that I also may say with each of them, “The Lord will *perfect* that which concerneth me.” He will most assuredly, beyond a doubt, bring to perfection my faith, my love, my hope, and every grace. He will perfect His own purposes ; He will perfect His promises, He will perfect my body, and perfect my soul. While I am fully persuaded that perfection is absolutely impossible to any man beneath the sky, I feel equally sure that, to every believer, future perfection is certain beyond a doubt. The day shall come when the Lord shall not only make us better, but shall make us perfectly pure and holy ; when He shall not merely subdue our lusts, but when He shall cast the demons out altogether ; when He shall make us holy, and unblameable, and unreprouable in His sight. That day, however, I believe, shall not come until we enter into the joy of our Lord, and are glorified

together with Christ in Heaven. Then, but not till then, shall He present us "*faultless* before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

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While I was going about the Cambridgeshire villages, preaching and visiting, it often saddened me to see, especially in the houses of the poor, Roman Catholic pictures hanging on the walls,—I suppose, because they happened to be rather pretty, and very cheap. Popish publishers have very cleverly managed to get up pictures of the Virgin Mary, and the lying fable of her assumption to Heaven, and all sorts of legends of saints and saintesses; and being brightly coloured, and sold at a low price, these vile productions have been introduced into thousands of houses. I have seen, to my horror, a picture of God the Father represented as an old man,—a conception almost too hideous to mention,—yet the picture is hung up in the cottages of England; whereas the Lord has expressly commanded us not to make any likeness or image of Him, or to try to represent His appearance in any way, and any attempt to do so is disobedient and even blasphemous.

It was grievous also to find what gross ignorance prevailed among many of the villagers concerning the way of salvation. They seemed, somehow, to have got into their heads the notion that they could not be saved because they could not read, and did not know much. Frequently, when I asked anything about personal salvation, I received the answer, "Oh, sir, I never had any learning!" and that was supposed to be a sufficient excuse for not having repented of sin, and trusted in the Saviour. Yet the unlearned need not stay away from Christ. It was said of an old Greek philosopher, that he wrote over his door, "None but the learned may enter here;" but Christ, on the contrary, writes over His door, "He that is simple, let him turn in hither." I can testify that great numbers of those humble country folk accepted the Saviour's invitation, and it was delightful to see what a firm grip they afterwards had of the verities of the faith; many of them became perfect masters in divinity. I used to think, sometimes, that if they had degrees who deserved them, diplomas would often be transferred, and given to those who hold the plough-handle or work at the carpenter's bench; for there is often more divinity in the little finger of a ploughman than there is in the whole body of some of our modern divines. "Don't they understand divinity?" someone asks. Yes, in the letter of it; but as to the spirit and life of it, D.D. often means DOUBLY DESTITUTE.

An incident that I once witnessed at Waterbeach furnished me with an illustration concerning death. A company of villagers, the younger branches of a family, were about to emigrate to another land. The aged mother, who had not for some years left her cottage fireside, came to the railway-station from which they must start. I stood among the sorrowful group as their friend and minister. I think I see the many embraces which the fond mother gave to her son and daughter, and

her little grandchildren ; I can picture them folding their arms about her aged neck, and then saying farewell to all the friends in the village who had come to bid them adieu. A shrill sound is heard ; it sends a pang through all hearts, as if it were the messenger of death to her who is about to lose the props of her household. In great haste, at the small village station, the passengers are hurried to their seats ; they thrust their heads out of the carriage window ; the aged parent stands on the very edge of the platform that she may take her last look at them. There is a whistle from the engine, and away goes the train. In an instant, the poor woman, jumping from the platform, rushes along the railway, with all her might crying, " My children ! My children ! My children ! They are gone, and I shall never see them again." The illustration may not be classical ; but, nevertheless, I have been reminded of it by many a death, when I have seen the godly suddenly snatched away. They have gone from us, swiftly as the wind itself could bear them, or as the hasty waves of the sea could bury them out of our sight. It is our affliction and trouble that we must remain behind and weep, for they are gone beyond recall ; yet there is something pleasant in the picture. It is but a departure ;—they are not destroyed ; they are not blown to atoms ; they are not taken away to prison ;—'tis but a departure from one place to another. They still live ; they still are blessed. While we weep, they are rejoicing ; while we mourn, they are singing psalms of praise ; and, by-and-by, in God's good time, we shall meet them again, to be parted no more for ever.

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There was an amusing incident in my early Waterbeach ministry which I have never forgotten. One day, a gentleman, who was then mayor of Cambridge, and who had more than once tried to correct my youthful mistakes, asked me if I really had told my congregation that, if a thief got into Heaven, he would begin picking the angels' pockets. " Yes, sir," I replied, " I told them that, if it were possible for an ungodly man to go to Heaven without having his nature changed, he would be none the better for being there ; and then, by way of illustration, I said that, were a thief to get in among the glorified, he would remain a thief still, and he would go round the place picking the angels' pockets !" " But, my dear young friend," asked Mr. Brimley, very seriously, " don't you know that the angels haven't any pockets ?" " No, sir," I replied, with equal gravity, " I did not know that ; but I am glad to be assured of the fact from a gentleman who does know. I will take care to put it all right the first opportunity I get." The following Monday morning, I walked into Mr. Brimley's shop, and said to him, " I set that matter right yesterday, sir," " What matter ?" he enquired. " Why, about the angels' pockets !" " What *did* you say ?" he asked, in a tone almost of despair at what he might hear next. " Oh, sir, I just told the people I was sorry to say that I had made a mistake

the last time I preached to them ; but that I had met a gentleman—the mayor of Cambridge,—who had assured me that the angels had no pockets, so I must correct what I had said, as I did not want anybody to go away with a false notion about Heaven. I would therefore say that, if a thief got among the angels without having his nature changed, he would try to steal the feathers out of their wings !” “ Surely, you did not say that ?” said Mr. Brimley. “ I did, though,” I replied. “ Then,” he exclaimed, “ I’ll never try to set you right again,” which was just exactly what I wanted him to say.

Once, while I was at Waterbeach, I had a sleepy congregation. It was on a Sabbath afternoon ;—those afternoon services in our English villages are usually a doleful waste of effort. Roast beef and pudding lie heavy on the hearers’ souls, and the preacher himself is deadened in his mental processes while digestion claims the mastery of the hour. The people had been eating too much dinner, so they came to chapel heavy and dull, and before long many of them were nodding. So I tried an old expedient to rouse them. I shouted with all my might, “ Fire ! Fire ! Fire !” When, starting from their seats, some of my hearers asked where it was, I answered, as other preachers had done in similar circumstances, “ In hell, for sinners who will not accept the Saviour.”

On another occasion, I had a trouble of quite a different character. I had preached on the Sunday morning, and gone home to dinner, as was my wont, with one of the congregation. The afternoon sermon came so close behind the morning one, that it was difficult to prepare the soul, especially as the dinner was a necessary but serious inconvenience where a clear brain was required. By a careful measuring of diet, I remained in an earnest, lively condition ; but, to my dismay, I found that the pre-arranged line of thought was gone from me. I could not find the trail of my prepared sermon ; and press my forehead as I might, the missing topic would not come. Time was brief, the hour was striking, and in some alarm I told the honest farmer that I could not for the life of me recollect what I had intended to preach about. “ Oh !” he said, “ never mind ; you will be sure to have a good word for us.” Just at that moment, a blazing block of wood fell out of the fire upon the hearth at my feet, smoking into my eyes and nose at a great rate. “ There,” said the farmer, “ there’s a text for you, sir,—‘ Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire ?’” “ No,” I thought, “ it was not plucked out, for it fell out of itself.” Here, however, was a text, an illustration, and a leading thought as a nest-egg for more. Further light came, and the discourse was certainly not worse than my more prepared effusions ; it was better in the best sense, for one or two came forward declaring themselves to have been aroused and converted through that afternoon’s sermon. I have always considered that it was a happy circumstance that I had forgotten the text from which I had intended to preach.

(The following is a *facsimile* of Mr. Spurgeon's Outline of the discourse that came to him in this singular manner. In this instance, the notes must have been written out afterwards. The numbers at the foot of the Outline mean that the service at Waterbeach, that Sabbath afternoon, was the 412th time that Mr. Spurgeon had preached,—although he was then only eighteen years of age,—and that he took the same subject again at six other places.)

- Lech III 2 Brand plucked from the fire
Suggested by a firebrand falling on the hearth —
- I Remarks on the wording of the text.
- "Brand" — Saints by nature like others "brands"
"out of the fire" — not away from it — to show the great danger
"plucked" — by mighty grace & omnipotence
- II Instances of plucking from the burning — ^{before conversion}
1. The narrow escapes saints have had from death
 2. The old age of some
 3. The natural depravity of the heart
 4. Evil habits into which they had fallen
 5. Temptations & trials after conversion
 6. The spirituality of the law
 7. The immense price of our ransom
- III How can I tell if I am one
1. Can you remember the plucking.
 2. Do you hate the fire —
 3. Do you love other plucked brands —
 4. Do you love to adore divine free grace
412. 415. 416. 418. 438. 560. 566.