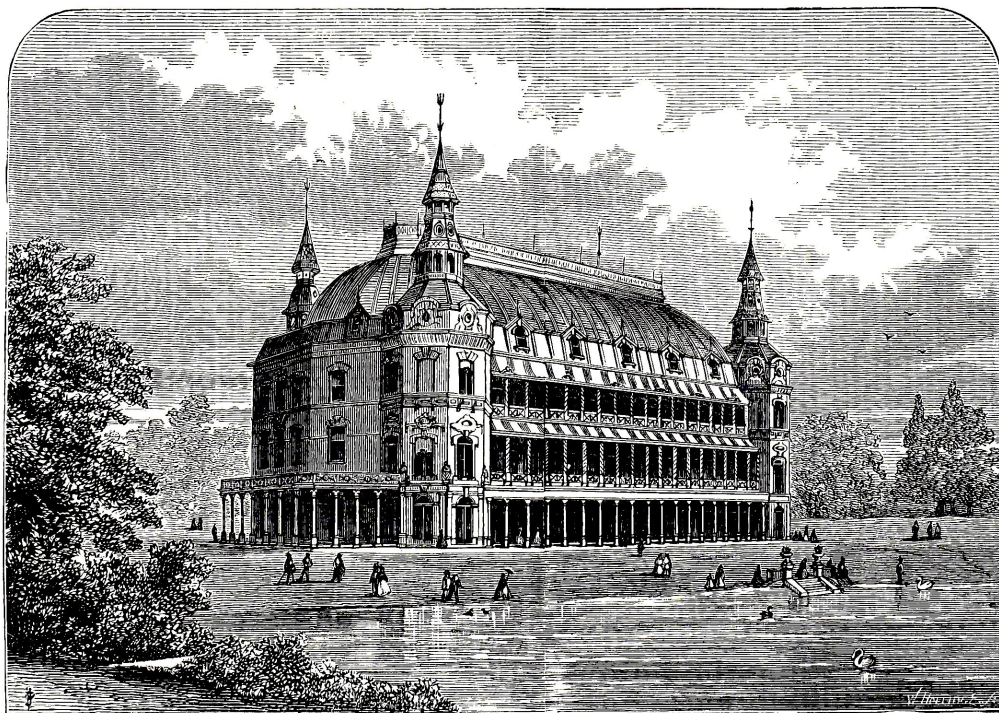


CHAPTER I

The Great Catastrophe at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall.



SURREY GARDENS MUSIC HALL,—EXTERIOR.

Here the reader must pardon the writer if he introduces a personal narrative, which is to him a most memorable proof of the lovingkindness of the Lord. Such an opportunity of recording my Lord's goodness may never again occur to me; and therefore now, while my soul is warm with gratitude for so recent a deliverance, let me lay aside the language of an author, and speak for myself, as I should tell the story to my friends in conversation. It may be egotism to weave one's own sorrows into the warp and woof of this meditation; but if the heart prompts the act, and the motions of the Holy Spirit are not contrary thereto, I think I may venture for this once to raise an Ebenezer in public, and rehearse the praise of Jesus at the setting up thereof. Egotism is not such an evil thing as ungrateful silence; certainly, it is not more contemptible than mock humility. Right or wrong, here followeth my story.

On a night which time will never erase from my memory, large numbers of my congregation were scattered, many of them wounded and some killed, by the malicious act of wicked men. Strong amid danger, I battled against the storm; nor did my spirit yield to the overwhelming pressure while my courage could reassure the wavering, or confirm the bold; but when, like a whirlwind, the destruction was overpast, when the whole of its devastation was visible to my eye, who can conceive the anguish of my sad spirit? I refused to be comforted; tears were my meat by day, and dreams my terror by night.

I felt as I had never felt before. "My thoughts were all a case of knives," cutting my heart in pieces, until a kind of stupor of grief ministered a mournful medicine to me. I could have truly said, "I am not mad, but surely I have had enough to madden me, if I should indulge in meditation on it." I sought and found a solitude which seemed congenial to me. I could tell my griefs to the flowers, and the dews could weep with me. Here my mind lay, like a wreck upon the sand, incapable of its usual motion. I was in a strange land, and a stranger in it. My Bible, once my daily food, was but a hand to lift the sluices of my woe. Prayer yielded no balm to me; in fact, my soul was like an infant's soul, and I could not rise to the dignity of supplication. "Broken in pieces all asunder," my thoughts, which had been to me a cup of delights, were like pieces of broken glass, the piercing and cutting miseries of my pilgrimage. I could adopt the words of Dr. Watts, and say,—

"The tumult of my thoughts
Doth but enlarge my woe;
My spirit languishes, my heart
Is desolate and low.

"With every morning-light
My sorrow new begins:
Look on my anguish and my pain,
And pardon all my sins."

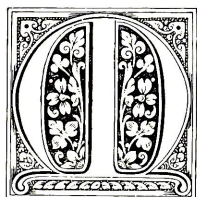
Then came "the slander of many,"—barefaced fabrications, libellous insinuations, and barbarous accusations. These alone might have scooped out the last drop of consolation from my cup of happiness; but the worst had come to the worst, and the utmost malice of the enemy could do no more. Lower they cannot sink who are already in the nethermost depths. Misery itself is the guardian of the miserable. All things combined to keep me, for a season, in the darkness where neither sun nor moon appeared. I had hoped for a gradual return to peaceful consciousness, and patiently did I wait for the dawning light. But it came not as I had desired; for He who doeth for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, sent me a happier answer to my requests. I had striven to think of the unmeasurable love of Jehovah, as displayed in the sacrifice of Calvary; I had endeavoured to muse upon the glorious character of the exalted Jesus; but I found it impossible to collect my thoughts in the quiver of meditation, or, indeed, to place them anywhere but with their points in my wounded spirit, or else at my feet, trodden down in an almost childish thoughtlessness.

On a sudden, like a flash of lightning from the sky, my soul returned unto me. The burning lava of my brain cooled in an instant. The throbbings of my brow were still; the cool wind of comfort fanned my cheek, which had been scorched in the furnace. I was free, the iron fetter was broken in pieces, my prison door was open, and I leaped for joy of heart. On wings of a dove, my spirit mounted to the stars,—yea, beyond them. Whither did it wing its flight, and where did it sing its song of gratitude? It was at the feet of Jesus, whose Name had charmed its fears, and placed an end to its mourning. The Name—the precious Name of Jesus, was like Ithuriel's spear, bringing back my soul to its own right and happy state. I was a man again, and what is more, a believer. The garden in which I stood became an Eden to me, and the spot was then most solemnly consecrated in my restored consciousness. Happy hour! Thrice-blessed Lord, who thus in an instant delivered me from the rock of my despair, and slew the vulture of my grief! Before I told to others the glad news of my recovery, my heart was melodious with song, and my tongue endeavoured tardily to express the music. Then did I give to my Well-beloved a song touching my Well-beloved; and, oh! with what rapture did my soul flash forth its praises! But all—all were to the honour of Him, the First and the Last, the Brother born for adversity, the Deliverer of the captive, the Breaker of my fetters, the Restorer of my soul. Then did I cast my burden upon the Lord; I left my ashes, and arrayed myself in the garments of praise, while He anointed me with fresh oil. I could have riven the very firmament to get at Him, to cast myself at His feet, and lie there bathed in the tears of joy and love. Never since the day of my conversion had I known so much of His infinite excellence, never had my spirit leaped with such unutterable delight. Scorn, tumult, and woe seemed less than nothing for His sake. I girded up my loins to run before His chariot, I began to shout forth His glory, for my soul was absorbed in the one idea of His glorious exaltation and Divine compassion.

After a declaration of the exceeding grace of God towards me, made to my dearest kindred and friends, I essayed again to preach. The task which I had dreaded to perform was another means of comfort, and I can truly declare that the words of that morning were as much the utterance of my inner man as if I had been standing before the bar of God. The text selected was in *Philippians* ii. 9—11. (See *The New Park Street Pulpit*, No. 101, "The Exaltation of Christ.") May I trouble the reader with some of the utterances of the morning, for they were the unveilings of my own experience?

"When the mind is intensely set upon one object, however much it may, by divers calamities, be tossed to and fro, it invariably returns to the place which it had chosen to be its dwellingplace. You have noticed this in the case of David. When the battle had been won by his warriors, they returned flushed with victory. David's mind had doubtless suffered much perturbation in the meantime; he had dreaded alike the effects of victory and of defeat; but have you not noticed how his thoughts, in one moment, returned to the darling object of his affections? 'Is the young man Absalom safe?' said he, as if it mattered not what else had occurred if his favourite son were but secure. So, beloved, is it with the Christian. In the midst of calamities, whether they be the wreck of nations, the crash of empires, the heaving of revolutions, or the scourge of war, the great question which he asks himself, and asks of others, too, is this,—'Is Christ's Kingdom safe?' In his own personal afflictions, his chief anxiety is,—'Will God be glorified, and will His honour be increased by them?' 'If it be so,' says he, 'although I be but as smoking flax, yet if the sun is not dimmed, I will rejoice; and though I be a bruised reed, if the pillars of the temple are unbroken, what matters it if I am bruised?' He finds it to be sufficient consolation, in the midst of all the breaking in pieces which he endures, to think that Christ's throne stands fast and firm, and that, though the earth hath reeled beneath *his* feet, yet Christ standeth on a rock which never can be moved. Some of these feelings, I think, have crossed our minds. Amidst much tumult, and divers rushings to and fro of troublous thoughts, our souls have returned to the dearest object of our desires, and we have found it no small consolation, after all, to say, 'It matters not what shall become of us; God hath highly exalted *Him*, and given *Him* a Name which is above every name; that at the Name of *Jesus* every knee should bow.'

Thus is the thought of the love of Jesus, in His delivering grace, most indelibly impressed upon my memory; and the fact that this experience is to me the most memorable crisis of my life, must be my apology for narrating it.—C. H. S., in "*The Saint and his Saviour*," published in 1857.



ANY of my friends are unacquainted with the transactions of the early years of my ministry in London, for a whole generation has passed away since then, and the mass of those who are with me now know little of "the brave days of old." Hence the necessity of telling the story, that later sympathizers and fellow-labourers may learn by what a wonderful way the Lord has led us. To return to New Park Street Chapel, greatly enlarged as it was during the time of our first sojourn at Exeter Hall, resembled the attempt to put the sea into a tea-pot. We were more inconvenienced than ever. To turn many hundreds away from the doors, was the general if not the universal necessity; and those who gained admission were but little better off, for the packing was dense in the extreme, and the heat something terrible even to remember. My enemies continued to make my name more and more widely known, by means of pamphlets, caricatures,* and letters in the papers, which all tended to swell the crowd. Matters reached a crisis in the Spring of 1856, and at a church-meeting, held on May 26 in that year, two resolutions were passed, the first intended to meet the immediately pressing need of a larger meeting-place for our great congregation, and the second looking further ahead, and providing for the requirements of the future. The official record is as follows:—

"Resolved,—That arrangements be made, as early as possible, for this church to worship at Exeter Hall on the Sabbath evenings during the Summer months.

* The two caricatures—"Brimstone and Treacle" and "Catch-'em-alive-O!"—have been so often reproduced that they are not included in this volume; but others that are less known are given,—"The Slow Coach and the Fast Train" (pages 48 and 49), "The Old Conductor and the New Conductor" (pages 208 and 209), and "The Young Lion of the Day and the Funny Old Woman of the Day" (Chapter LII).

“Resolved,—That the male members of this church be called together, as speedily as possible, to consult as to the best means of providing better accommodation for the vast crowds who are anxious to hear the gospel in connection with the ministry of our Pastor.”

Accordingly, services were held at New Park Street Chapel on the Sabbath mornings from June 8 to August 24, and in the evenings at Exeter Hall, but this plan was very inconvenient; and, therefore, in August, a fund was commenced to provide for the erection of a larger house of prayer, the first meeting in aid of that object being held at the house of “Father Olney.” Meanwhile, the proprietors of Exeter Hall intimated that they were unable to let that building continuously to one congregation. Although we paid for the use of it, it was but natural that others should think that the Baptists were monopolizing a hall which pertained to all denominations. I felt this to be just, and began to look about for another shelter. It was an anxious time, for friends feared that it would be long before we could build a house of our own; but the Lord had prepared for us a place where we sojourned for three years,—the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens.

Very curious is the story of the Surrey Gardens. Everybody has heard of the elephant and other animals which were to be seen at Exeter Change, near Waterloo Bridge. Mr. Cross, the proprietor of that exhibition, removed his menagerie, in 1831, to the Surrey Gardens. There were fountains, and caves, and summer-houses, a lake of three and a half acres, pleasant walks and lawns, and all the usual paraphernalia of public gardens. In Dr. Montgomery's *History of Kennington*, we read:—“Perhaps the most remarkable fact, for temperance folk, is that the proprietors of the Gardens never made application for a license to sell drink. It was started and made a success without the sale of intoxicants. This is a noteworthy fact. I do not know what happened in later years; but during the time of Mr. Cross, up to 1844, no license was ever applied for. The hours kept were early. At the latest, in the middle of Summer, the Gardens closed at 10 p.m., and in the Autumn at 7 p.m. Our Queen, when she was quite a little girl, came here with the Duchess of Kent, and was shown over the Gardens by Mr. Warwick.”

When I first came to London, the Zoological Gardens were a very respectable and quiet resort; but few persons availed themselves of them. The age which could be content with quiet amusements, free from loose associations, was passing away, and giving place to a generation which looked for more flavour in its recreation. The Gardens were kept up in part by subscription from families in the neighbourhood, and partly by displays of fireworks. The affair did not pay in that form, so a company was formed to continue the zoological collection, and add thereto the far greater attraction of the popular concerts of M. Jullien. A very fine hall was erected, which had three galleries, and would accommodate from six to

ten thousand people. I cannot speak exactly as to numbers, nor correct my estimate by personal inspection, for no vestige of the hall is now remaining. I recollect going with Mr. William Olney to see the place; and though we felt it to be a venturesome experiment to attempt to preach in so large a building, we had faith in God, and dared to hope that He would bless an earnest attempt to proclaim the gospel to the multitude. One or two of our good members thought it wrong to go to what they persisted in calling "the devil's house." I did not agree with their hard names, but encouraged them to stop away, and not to violate their consciences. At the same time, I bade them not to discourage either their brethren or me, for we were willing to go even into "the devil's house" to win souls for Christ. We did not go to the Music Hall because we thought that it was a good thing to worship in a building usually devoted to amusement, but because we had no other place to go to.

On October 6, a special church-meeting was held, for the purpose which is thus recorded in our Minutes:—"This meeting was convened to consider the propriety of engaging the use of the large hall in the Royal Surrey Gardens for our Sabbath evening worship, the directors of Exeter Hall having refused the church the further use of that place. After several of the brethren had expressed their concurrence, it was resolved that the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens be engaged for one month, commencing the third Sabbath in October."

When the appointed day arrived, our anticipations ran high, but none of us dreamed of that which lay before us. Much prayer was offered, and I looked forward hopefully, but yet felt overweighted with a sense of responsibility, and filled with a mysterious premonition of some great trial shortly to befall me. In the Preface to Vol. II. of *The Pulpit Library*, I wrote:—"The first sermon in this volume—'Prove Me now,' Malachi iii. 10,—was preached at New Park Street Chapel in the morning of that Lord's-day on which the fatal accident occurred at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall. By many readers it will now be perused with curiosity, but the preacher himself reviews each sentence with thrilling emotion. Its subject was entirely suggested by the enlarged sphere of labour he was about to occupy, and the *then* unprecedented number of souls he was expecting ere nightfall to address. If any passage seems to forestall the calamity, he can only say it is genuine,—a transcript from the reporter's notes. The Christian reader can understand many sore conflicts between the heart's feelings and its faith; yet no one *can* know, as the author's own soul, how, amidst fightings without and fears within, he was enabled to proclaim the strongest confidence in God. He has made that proof, which he counselled others to make, of the Divine faithfulness; and as to the result (notwithstanding a parenthesis of grievous tribulation), he dares to speak with abundant gratitude."

The sermon itself contained the following almost prophetic passage :—“ Perhaps I may be called to stand where the thunder-clouds 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. . . . This old Bible speaks to me to-day. This sword of the Spirit hath been thrust into many of your hearts ; and though they were hard as adamant, it has split them in sunder. I have wielded it in your midst as God's soldier ; and some of you have had sturdy spirits broken in pieces by this good old Jerusalem blade. But we shall be gathered together, to-night, where an unprecedented mass of people will assemble, perhaps from idle curiosity, to hear the Word of God ; and His voice cries in my ears, ‘ Prove Me now.’ Many a man has come, during my ministrations, armed to his very teeth, and having on a coat of mail, yet hath this tried weapon cleft him in twain, and pierced to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. ‘ Prove Me now,’ says God, ‘ go and prove Me before blasphemers ; go and prove Me before reprobates, before the vilest of the vile, and the filthiest of the filthy ; go and “ prove Me now.” Lift up that life-giving cross, and let it again be exhibited ; into the regions of *death*, go and proclaim the Word of *life* ; into the most plague-smitten parts of the city, go and carry the waving censer of the incense of a Saviour's merits, and prove now whether He is not able to stay the plague, and remove the disease.’

“ But what does God say to the church ? ‘ You have proved Me aforetime, you have attempted great things ; though some of you were faint-hearted, and said, “ We should not have ventured,” others of you had faith, and proved Me. I say again, “ 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*, go and prove Him now ; and see if He will not pour you out such a blessing as ye had not even dreamed of, see if He will not give you a Pentecostal blessing. ‘ Prove Me now.’ Why should we be unbelieving ? Have we one thing to make us so ? We are weak ; what of that ? Are we not strongest in our God when we are weakest in ourselves ? We are fools, it is said, and so we are, we know it ; but He maketh fools to confound the wise. We are base, but God hath chosen the base things of the world. We are unlearned,—

“ ‘ We know no schoolman's subtle arts,’

yet we glory in infirmity when Christ's power doth rest upon us. *Let them represent us as worse than we are* ; let them give us the most odious character that hath ever been given to man, we will bless them, and wish them well. What though the weapon be a stone, or even the jawbone of an ass, if the Lord direct it ? ‘ Do you not know,’ say some, ‘ what wise men say ?’ Yes, we do ; but we can read their oracles backwards. Their words are the offspring of their wishes. We know *who*

has instructed them, and we know he was a liar from the beginning. O fools, and slow of heart! do ye shrink from the truth, or do ye shrink from obloquy and disgrace? In either case, ye have not the love to your Master that ye should have. If ye be brave men and true, go on and conquer. *Fear not, ye shall yet win the day*; God's holy gospel shall yet shake the earth once more. The banner is lifted up, and multitudes are flocking to it; the Pharisees have taken counsel together,—the learned stand confounded,—the sages are baffled, they know not what to do. The little one, God has made great; and He that was despised, is exalted. Let us trust Him, then. He will be with us even to the end, for He has said, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'

I can never forget that terrible night. Having preserved all the pamphlets and papers connected with "the great catastrophe," I have just now perused them in order to write this memorial. I have thereby revived within myself much that is painful; but much more that causes me to praise the name of the Lord. When I was nearing the house in Manor Street, which was the office of the company, and was to serve me as a private entrance, I was exceedingly surprised to find the streets thronged for a long distance. With difficulty I reached the door. There was a long private road from the entrance of the Gardens to the Music Hall itself, and this appeared to be filled up with a solid block of people, who were unable to get into the building. I felt overawed, and was taken with that faintness which was, in my youth, the usual forerunner of every sermon. Still, I rallied, and was duly escorted to my pulpit in the midst of a dense throng. Here I was to pass through the greatest ordeal of my life.

But I will now give way to Dr. Campbell, then the Editor of *The British Banner*; for his is the description of an eye-witness, and of an impartial, self-possessed critic. He wrote:—"Ecclesiastically viewed, Sunday last (October 19th) was one of the most eventful nights that have descended upon our metropolis for generations. On that occasion, the largest, most commodious, and most beautiful building erected for public amusement in this mighty city was taken possession of for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel of salvation. There, where, for a long period, wild beasts had been exhibited, and wilder men had been accustomed to congregate, in countless multitudes, for idle pastime, was gathered together the largest audience that ever met in any edifice in these isles, to listen to the voice of a Nonconformist minister. The spectacle, of its kind, was one of the most imposing, magnificent, and awful ever presented to the human eye. No adequate idea of it can be conveyed by description; to be understood, it must have been seen; and they who beheld it received an impression which no time will ever obliterate. The sight of 10,000 or 12,000 people, more or fewer, assembled to listen to the Word of the living God, in

such a place, at such a time, and addressed by a man with a voice of such power and compass that the remotest might hear with ease and pleasure, was sufficient to excite intense joy in the hearts of all good men who witnessed it; nor is it extravagant to say, that it was enough to wake the attention of the angelic world!

“But, in proportion to the joy and the hope thus inspired, were the sorrow and disappointment arising from the terrible catastrophe by which the very first service was attended and cut short! At the most solemn moment of the occasion, the wicked rose in their strength, like a whirlwind, sin entered, followed by terror, flight, disorder, and death! The entire city has been filled with astonishment! From the cellar to the palace, the events of that dreadful night have been the theme of eager discourse. In the squares, the streets, the lanes, and alleys, as well as in the workshops and counting-houses, and all the chief places of concourse, it has been, through each successive day, the one great object of thought and converse.

“Imagination, as usual, has been active in the work of exaggeration, and malice in that of mendacity. At one time, the beautiful building has been wrapped in flames, and reduced to ashes! At another, the roof has fallen in, and entombed 10,000 people! The human mind, voracious of the tragical and the marvellous, has greedily devoured even the most preposterous accounts. The more horrible, the more credible and the more welcome; and the public press, as is its wont, has not been backward to pander to the morbid appetite of the excited millions. It has lied as well as exaggerated, most fearfully! Fancy pictures have been drawn, suited to ‘the chamber of horrors.’ Having ourselves not only witnessed the spectacle, but been in the very vortex, we are able to speak from observation touching the various points which the public are mainly concerned to know, and every way able to distinguish between truth and error. We, therefore, feel in duty bound to clear away the bewildering mist and darkness which have gathered around the character and conduct of honourable men. We were among the very first to enter the building, where we took up a position before the pulpit, which had been erected in front of the orchestra, so that we had a perfect command of the entire house, hearing and seeing everything of importance to be either heard or seen. The simple statement of facts as they occurred will form the best antidote to the flood of misrepresentation and falsehood which has welled forth from a portion of the metropolitan press.

“The house, considering its magnitude, might be said to be very speedily filled, leaving, it is supposed, an equal number outside unable to gain admission. The process of packing the hall, as may be presumed, was gone about in a somewhat tumultuous manner. The people were deeply excited by the violent struggle which had to be encountered and overcome at the doors to obtain an entrance, which naturally led, after admission, to rapid movements in every direction where there seemed a probability of gaining a seat, or, at least, standing-room. The aspect of

the hall during this period was, of course, anything but like that which obtains in places of regular worship, and somewhat fitted to do violence to the sober spirit of orderly people ; but, certainly, it would have borne a very favourable comparison with the gatherings of the huge religious anniversary meetings at Exeter Hall, or any other vast place of general concourse. It was, 'Every man for himself ;' and, as compared with the monster meetings of Whitefield on Kennington Common or Moorfields, in the High Churchyard, Glasgow, and the Orphan House Park, Edinburgh, so far as history has testified, there was nothing to complain of on the score of tumultuous levity.

"The hall having been filled in every part, things began to assume a perfectly settled aspect. The commotion ceased, and the air of the assembly was every whit as tranquil as that of our great philanthropic or even worshipping assemblies. The hall being thus gorged, Mr. Spurgeon considerably and wisely commenced the service about ten minutes before the appointed time, surrounded by a large number of most respectable people, composed of his officers and flock, who led the psalmody. After a few words of a highly pertinent character, he briefly offered prayer, and then gave out a thoroughly Evangelical hymn, with a force, a feeling, and an unction seldom witnessed in a worshipping assembly, and which threw an air of deep solemnity over the immense multitude by whom it was sung as with the voice of many waters. That hymn itself was an important proclamation of the gospel. The reading of the Sacred Scriptures immediately followed, with a running comment, as is the preacher's custom. The Scripture was well chosen, and the exposition admirably appropriate, and such as was well fitted to impress even the most frivolous. There was no dry disquisition, no curious criticism ; but an address directed to the hearts of the hearers, showing, from the first, that the speaker came strongly intent upon most important business, and that nothing was to be regarded short of its accomplishment.

"The general prayer next followed ; and here, too, the same pertinent and peculiar air was manifested. The one great motive which animated the preacher was, most obviously, the salvation of men. . . . This was the moment chosen by the emissaries of darkness to spring the mine of mischief, which, in effect, resulted in manifold murder ! To have made the attempt while the high praises of God were being sung, would have been certain failure. To have done so while a stream of eloquence was rolling on in the sermon, and all eyes open, would have been attended with no better success. Yes ; and the inhuman miscreants—cunning as they were impious and cruel,—knew it. They were obviously adepts in iniquity. They understood their business thoroughly. Their plans were skilfully formed, and executed with the precision of military science opening a masked battery. Just as the minds of the devout portion of the assembly were collected around the throne of the Great

Eternal, far away from earth and its grovellings, abstracted, absorbed, prostrate, suppliant, and adoring, the fiendish conspiracy broke forth with the rapidity of lightning and the fury of a tempest! The effect was such as was anticipated and desired. To say it began with one or two cries of 'Fire!' as we view the matter, is wholly to misrepresent it. For our own part, we heard no such cries. Such, however, there doubtless were; but they were only signals. The thing bore the impress of a plan to which some hundreds of persons at least appeared to be parties. The mere cry of 'Fire!' would have produced more or less of a general commotion extending to all parts of the house, which was but slightly moved; whereas, the indescribable and terrible outbreak was limited to a large portion of people in a given locality surrounding the great entrance. The outbreak could be likened to nothing but the sudden bursting forth of an immense body of trained singers, or a vast reservoir of water, whose sluices were opened, or whose banks had given way. It is impossible that any cries of two or three individuals could ever have produced so sudden, so simultaneous, and so sustained a display of fear, horror, and consternation. We are strongly impressed with the conviction that the thing, from the adroitness of the performance, must have been well practised beforehand. So far as we could judge from appearances, the parties, or a portion of them, who led in the terrific uproar, also led in the rush, which appeared as an especial part of their infernal arrangement. Mr. Spurgeon, who instantly recovered from the horrible surprise with which he was overwhelmed, in the very act of prayer, of course saw in a moment that the alarm was false. There was no appearance whatever of fire; and the noble structure in no place gave any symptoms of fracture or rupture. His quick eye perceived in an instant the true origin of the movement, and he acted accordingly, adopting every method that seemed calculated to calm the tumult, and to reassure the assembly."

It may put the matter still more vividly before the reader, if I quote from a statement appended to a sermon, preached soon after the catastrophe, by the venerable Dr. Alexander Fletcher:—"As early as five o'clock, thousands of persons were filling up the approaches to the Surrey Gardens. By five minutes after six, the hall was filled to overflow; it is supposed that not fewer than 12,000 persons were present, and many thousands were on the outside, and still as many more were unable to gain admittance even to the Gardens. While the service was being conducted in Mr. Spurgeon's usual way, during the second prayer, all of a sudden there were cries simultaneously, doubtless preconcerted, from all parts of the building, of 'Fire!' 'The galleries are giving way!' 'The place is falling!' the effect of which on the audience it is impossible to describe. Many hundreds of persons rushed towards the place of exit, at the risk of their own lives, and sacrificing those of their

fellow-creatures. In vain did Mr. Spurgeon, with his stentorian voice and self-possession, assure the alarmed multitude that it was a *ruse* on the part of thieves and pickpockets; the people in the galleries rushed down, precipitating themselves almost headlong over, or breaking down the balustrade of the stairs, killing some and fearfully wounding others. Those who fell through force, or fainting, were trampled under foot, and several lives were lost in the *mêlée*. To make 'confusion worse confounded,' it is also said that, as fast as one portion of the multitude made their exit, others from without entered. Mr. Spurgeon, who was ignorant of any of these fatal consequences, after a temporary lull, was persuaded to make an effort to preach; but, after one or two attempts, he found it impossible to proceed, owing to the noises which the swell-mobsmen continued to make. Wishing to get the people gradually out of the hall, he gave out a hymn, requesting the congregation to withdraw while it was being sung. He then pronounced the Benediction, and, at length, overcome by emotion, which he had long striven to repress, he was led from the platform in a state of apparent insensibility. The results of this dreadful panic are most calamitous and distressing. Seven lives have been sacrificed, and serious bodily injury inflicted upon a great number of persons."

(Mr. Spurgeon felt that it was impossible, under the circumstances, to say what he had prepared, but, notwithstanding the tumult, the people clamoured for him to go on preaching, so he spoke as follows:—

"My friends, you bid me preach, but what shall I preach about? I am ready to do all I can; but, in the midst of all this confusion, what shall be my subject? May God's Holy Spirit give me a theme suited to this solemn occasion! My friends, there is a terrible day coming, when the terror and alarm of this evening shall be as nothing. That will be a time when the thunder and lightning and blackest darkness shall have their fullest power, when the earth shall reel to and fro beneath us, and when the arches of the solid heavens shall totter to their centre. The day is coming when the clouds shall reveal their wonders and portents, and Christ shall sit upon those clouds in glory, and shall call you to judgment. Many have gone away to-night, in the midst of this terrible confusion, and so shall it be on that great day. I can, however, believe that the results of that time of testing will show that there will be many—not a less proportion than those who now remain to those who have left—who will stand the ordeal even of that day. The alarm which has just arisen has been produced, in some measure, by that instinct which teaches us to seek self-preservation; but in the more numerous of the cases, it is not so much the dread of death which has influenced them, as 'the dread of something after death,—the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveller returns.' 'Tis conscience that has made cowards of them. Many were afraid to stop here,

because they thought, if they stayed, they might die, and then they would be damned. They were aware—and many of you are aware—that, if you were hurried before your Maker to-night, you would be brought there unshriven, unpardoned, and condemned. But what are your fears now to what they will be on that terrible day of reckoning of the Almighty, when the heavens shall shrink above you, and hell shall open her mouth beneath you? But know you not, my friends, that grace, sovereign grace, can yet save you? Have you never heard the welcome news that Jesus came into the world to save sinners? Even if you are the chief of sinners, believe that Christ died for you, and you shall be saved. Do you not know that you are lost and ruined, and that none but Jesus can do helpless sinners good? You are sick and diseased, but Jesus can heal you; and He will if you only trust Him. I thought of preaching to-night from the third chapter of Proverbs, at the 33rd verse: ‘The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but He blesseth the habitation of the just.’ I feel that, after what has happened, I cannot preach as I could have wished to do; I fear that you will have another alarm, and I would rather that some of you would seek to retire gradually, in order that no harm may be done to anyone.”

Here there was a fresh disturbance; but after singing part of a hymn, comparative silence was obtained, and the preacher again attempted to begin his discourse:—“Although, my hearers, you may suppose that there are fifty different classes of persons in the world, there are, in the eyes of God, but two. God knows nothing of any save the righteous and the unrighteous, the wicked and the just.”

In the confusion that again ensued it was useless to try to preach, so Mr. Spurgeon said:—“My brain is in a whirl, and I scarcely know where I am, so great are my apprehensions that many persons must have been injured by rushing out. I would rather that you retired gradually, and may God Almighty dismiss you with His blessing, and carry you in safety to your homes! If our friends will go out by the central doors, we will sing while they go, and pray that some good may, after all, come out of this great evil. Do not, however, be in a hurry. Let those nearest the door go first.”)

All that I can remember of that awful night is the sight of a tumult, which I was then quite unable to understand. Even now it remains a mystery to me. I hope there was no concerted wickedness at the bottom of the sad event; though there may have been a love of mischief aiding at the first. We were all fresh to the place, and all more or less excited. I did my utmost to be calm, and to quiet the people, and I succeeded with the great mass of them; but away at the end of the building there was a something going on which I did not understand, while around the seated part of the hall there were rushes made by excited people again and

again, for reasons quite incomprehensible to me. One can understand, now, that those who had seen the accident on the staircase may have been trying to call attention to it, thinking it a strange thing that the service should have been continued after persons had been killed. Of this dread calamity I was unaware till, as I was led down faint from the pulpit, I heard a whisper of it. I know no more, for I lost almost all consciousness, and, amid the weeping and cries of many, I was carried by a private garden into the street, and taken home more dead than alive. There were seven corpses lying on the grass, and many have since told me how grievous was the sight. This I never saw; but what I had seen might have been sufficient to shatter my reason. It might well seem that the ministry which promised to be so largely influential was silenced for ever. There were persons who said so exultingly; but they knew not what they said. I was taken away to the house of a friend, early the following morning, and as I was assisted out of the carriage at Croydon, a working-man caught sight of me, and, in a frightened fashion, stammered out, "Why, sir!—it's Mr. Spurgeon, isn't it?" I answered, "Yes." "Then," he rejoined, "it must be his ghost; for, last night, I saw him carried out dead from the Surrey Gardens Music Hall!" I was not dead, thank God; but the bystanders might well have imagined that the terrible shock had killed me.

Of course there was an inquest;—verdict, accidental death;—on the whole, the only safe conclusion to arrive at. A fund was raised for the sufferers, and all was done that lay in the power of our people to help the injured. Our friends were crushed in spirit, but not driven from their faith or love, nor divided from their youthful minister. I was, for a short time, incapable of any mental effort. Who would not be? How great a trial to have a number of one's hearers killed or maimed! A word about the calamity, and even the sight of the Bible, brought from me a flood of tears, and utter distraction of mind.

During that time, I was not aware of the ferocious assaults which were made upon me by the public press; indeed, I heard no word of them until I was sufficiently recovered to bear them without injury. As we read of David, that they spake of stoning him, so was it with me. Here is a specimen of what was said by a popular daily paper, which I will not name, for it has long been of quite another mind, and most friendly to me:—

"Mr. Spurgeon is a preacher who hurls damnation at the heads of his sinful hearers. Some men there are who, taking their precepts from Holy Writ, would beckon erring souls to a rightful path with fair words and gentle admonition; Mr. Spurgeon would take them by the nose, and bully them into religion. Let us set up a barrier to the encroachments and blasphemies of men like Spurgeon, saying to them, 'Thus far shalt thou come, but no further;' let us devise some powerful means which shall tell to the thousands who now stand in need of enlightenment,—This

man, in his own opinion, is a righteous Christian ; but in ours, nothing more than a ranting charlatan. We are neither strait-laced nor Sabbatarian in our sentiments ; but we would keep apart, widely apart, the theatre and the church ;—above all, would we place in the hand of every right-thinking man, a whip to scourge from society the authors of such vile blasphemies as, on Sunday night, above the cries of

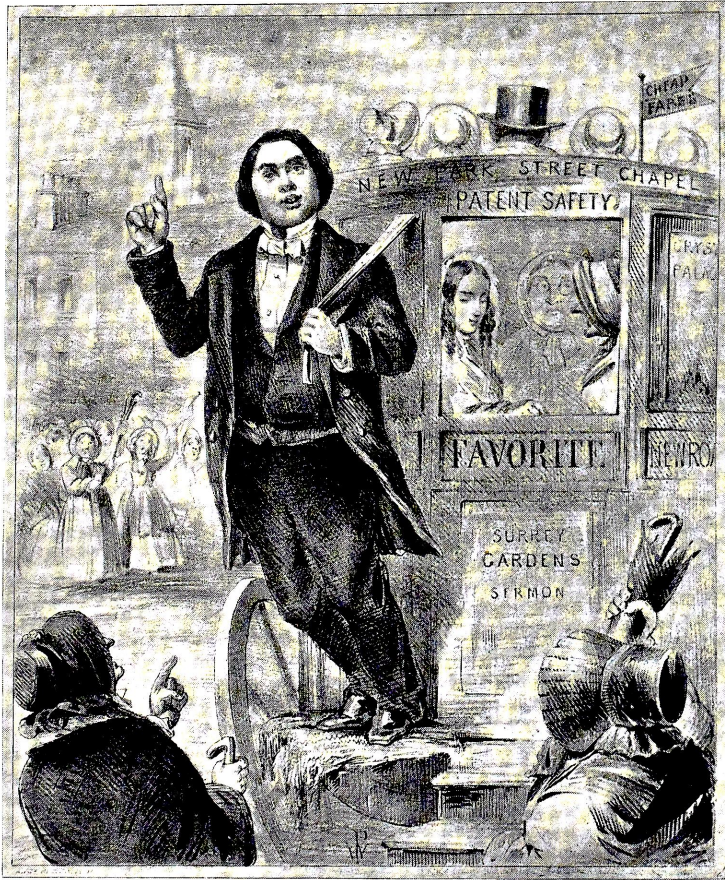


THE OLD CONDUCTOR.

the dead and the dying, and louder than the wails of misery from the maimed and suffering, resounded from the mouth of Spurgeon in the Music Hall of the Surrey Gardens."

Many other utterances were equally cruel and libellous. A gentleman applied to the magistrate at Lambeth, seeking an investigation by his worship into the circumstances connected with the catastrophe, and into the necessity for a license to use the Music Hall as a place of worship. He was not aware that, on the previous Saturday, the building had been licensed as a place for Dissenting worship. He

stated that persons collecting money in an unlicensed place were liable to be treated as rogues and vagabonds; and went on to add that a further question might arise, as to whether the parties causing large congregations to assemble were not liable to a still graver charge. This liberal-minded person represented the mind of a considerable section whose thoughts of the preacher were bitterness itself. The



THE NEW CONDUCTOR.

magistrate, however, assured the applicant that the law permitted public buildings to be used as places of worship for temporary purposes.

The following article appeared in *The Saturday Review*, October 25, 1856:—

“MR. SPURGEON AT THE SURREY GARDENS.

“If it be true, as has been said, that notables represent, rather than create, public opinion, Mr. Spurgeon and his doings are worth a more serious consideration than their intrinsic value would justify. The manners of an age or people do not

follow its literature,—they produce it. Crebillon or Shaftesbury did not form the taste or principles of their contemporaries ;—Voltaire did not so much educate as embody his times ;—and, in like manner, Mr. Spurgeon does not create the state of feeling to which he owes his popularity. It is a melancholy reflection that such a personage is a notable at all. It is no new thing that there should be popular delusions ; but we had flattered ourselves that we had outlived the days of religious, or so-called religious, epidemics. Yet the age of spirit-rapping and of Mr. Spurgeon,—the times in which Dr. Cumming is an authority, and Joe Smith and Mr. Prince are prophets,—cannot cast stones at any ‘dark ages.’ Whatever legitimate weapons, be they of argument or ridicule, can be employed to arrest the progress of mere imposture, we hold to be justifiable. We should not deem Mr. Spurgeon entitled to the place which he at this moment occupies in public attention,—and certainly we should not trouble ourselves with any reference to his proceedings,—did we not consider him rather as a sign and a result than an original. His success is simply of the vulgarest and most commonplace type. Given a person of some natural talents, with matchless powers of acquired impudence, and a daring defiance of good taste, and often of common decency,—and he will always produce an effect. Anybody who will give himself out as some great one, will find followers enough to accept his leadership. A charlatan will never be without dupes. The crowds who flock to the various Spurgeon conventicles are only of the class who would follow the bottle conjuror, or anyone who chose to advertise that he would fly from the Monument to the dome of St. Paul’s. Mr. Spurgeon is perfectly aware that human nature is much the same now as it was five hundred years ago, and it is with humiliation that we concur in his estimate. His crowded congregations are part of his stock-in-trade. He hires Exeter Hall or the Surrey Gardens merely in the way of an advertisement. If he could have the Coliseum at Rome, it would be a safe investment. His scheme for building a conventicle to hold fifteen thousand persons is all in the way of business, just like the big shop, *toute la Rue du Coq*, in Paris.

“All we can do is to warn the public ; but we are afraid it will be to little purpose. *Populus vult decipi*. It is, we fear, scarcely more useless to caution people against joint-stock banks and public companies when there is a plethora of money, than seriously to hold up Mr. Spurgeon to the world as a very ordinary impostor. The only effectual remedy is, in the one case, to provide safe and honest investments for capital ;—in the other, to offer more healthful and rational counter-attractions. We have been accused, in some quarters, of recommending Sunday amusements in the place of religion. As a fact, we have done no such thing, for our arguments were all based on the compatibility of religious exercises with healthful and innocent recreation, and the policy of combining them. But if the question is between Sunday bands and Sunday doings of the Spurgeon character at the Surrey

Gardens, by all means, we say, let the bands at least be admitted to unrestricted competition. We do not wish to silence Mr. Spurgeon; but, for the sake of the public safety, let there be a chance of thinning the crowds. Very judiciously, on a late occasion, we had fireworks simultaneously in the West End Parks, on Primrose Hill, and in the East of London; and we do not see why Mr. Spurgeon should have a monopoly of brazen instruments South of the Thames. Whitefield used to preach at fairs. In these days of open competition, we perceive no reason why this practice should not be inverted. The innovation would only be the substitution of one set of amusements for another;—or, rather, an addition to our list of Sunday sports. Let religious people ask themselves whether this is not in fact the true way of putting the case. It is a profanation to religion to imagine that, as regards the crowds who flock to the Spurgeon show, there is any higher influence at work than the common love of excitement. Mr. Spurgeon's doings are, we believe, entirely discountenanced by his co-religionists. There is scarcely a Dissenting minister of any note who associates with him. We do not observe, in any of his schemes or building operations, the names, as trustees or the like, of any leaders in what is called the religious world. Nor can we attribute to mere envy the feelings with which Mr. Spurgeon is apparently regarded by those respectable persons who are his brethren in the Dissenting ministry. Somehow, it is generally felt that religion is not benefited by his abnormal proceedings. There is, at any rate, this most remarkable *differentia* between him and other revivalists,—that he stands alone, or nearly so. The fact is an antecedent ground for grave suspicion and natural distrust.

“This hiring of places of public amusement for Sunday preaching is a novelty, and a painful one. It looks as if religion were at its last shift. It is a confession of weakness rather than a sign of strength. It is not wrestling with Satan in his strongholds,—to use the old earnest Puritan language;—but entering into a very cowardly truce and alliance with the world. After all, Mr. Spurgeon only affects to be the Sunday Jullien. We are told of the profanity which must have been at the bottom of the clerical mind when the Church acted miracle-plays, and tolerated the Feast of the Ass; but the old thing reappears when popular preachers hire concert-rooms, and preach Particular Redemption in saloons reeking with the pertume of tobacco, and yet echoing with the chaste melodies of *Bobbing Around* and the valse from the *Traviata*. And where is this to end? If, as Mr. Spurgeon doubtless argued, Exeter Hall can be hired by a clergyman of the Establishment to read Mr. Caird's sermon, and if the enterprising divine who performed this notable feat was rewarded for it by the judicious Archbishop of Canterbury with a living of £500 per annum, why should not he hire the Surrey Gardens? Mr. Spurgeon has outbid Mr. Mansfield; but why should not somebody outbid Mr. Spurgeon? Or why should he be content with his present achievements? The Surrey Gardens affair was a

great *coup*. The deplorable accident, in which seven people lost their lives, and scores were maimed, mutilated, or otherwise cruelly injured, Mr. Spurgeon only considers as an additional intervention of Providence in his favour. 'This event will, I trust, teach us the necessity of'—being sober, rational, and decent?—No;—'having a building of our own.' Preach another crowd into a frenzy of terror,—kill and smash a dozen or two more,—and then the speculation will have succeeded.

"Mr. Spurgeon, improving the occasion, is said to have remarked that 'this gathering had aroused Satan, and he would not allow the service to go on without endeavouring to interrupt it.' We do not profess that familiarity with Satan and his doings which is enjoyed by Mr. Spurgeon. Doubtless, he possesses more of Satan's confidence, and more knowledge of his character, than ordinary men; at least, with our estimate of the power of evil, we should judge so from this mode of dealing with the deplorable result of his vanity and cupidity. We certainly believe that Satan was busy enough on Sunday evening last. The reporters tell us that the publicans and pickpockets 'reaped a rich harvest' from the occasion. These are, at any rate, new fruits of a gospel ministry, and strange triumphs of the cross. Expostulation and advice are thrown away upon one who can act as Mr. Spurgeon is reported to have acted in the very presence of these unusual seals to his ministry. Yet it is always a public duty to show up selfishness and vanity; and we can only hope that it will prove in this instance to be a public benefit also."

Our church-book contains the following entry concerning the catastrophe; it shows the way in which this great affliction was viewed by our own friends:—
 "Lord's-day, October 19, 1856. On the evening of this day, in accordance with the resolution passed at the church-meeting, October 6, the church and congregation assembled to hear our Pastor in the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens. A very large number of persons (about 7,000) were assembled on that occasion, and the service was commenced in the usual way, by singing, reading the Scriptures, and prayer. Just, however, after our Pastor had commenced his prayer, a disturbance was caused (as it is supposed, by some evil-disposed persons acting in concert), and the whole congregation was seized with a sudden panic. This caused a fearful rush to the doors, particularly from the galleries. Several persons, either in consequence of their heedless haste, or from the extreme pressure of the crowd behind, were thrown down on the stone steps of the north-west staircase, and were trampled on by the crowd pressing upon them. The lamentable result was that seven persons lost their lives, and twenty-eight were removed to the hospitals seriously bruised and injured. Our Pastor, not being aware that any loss of life had occurred, continued in the pulpit, endeavouring by every means in his power to alleviate the fear of the people, and was successful to a very considerable extent. In attempting to renew the

service, it was found that the people were too excited to listen to him, so the service was closed, and those who had remained dispersed quietly. This lamentable circumstance produced very serious effects on the nervous system of our Pastor. He was entirely prostrated for some days, and compelled to relinquish his preaching engagements. Through the great mercy of our Heavenly Father, he was, however, restored so as to be able to occupy the pulpit in our own chapel on Sunday, November 2nd, and gradually recovered his wonted health and vigour. 'The Lord's name be praised!'

"The church desires to note this event in their Minutes, and to record their devout thankfulness to God that, in this sad calamity, the lives of their beloved Pastor, and deacons, and members were all preserved; and also with the hope that our Heavenly Father may, from this seeming evil, produce the greatest amount of real lasting good."

(Mr. Spurgeon did not approve of the printing of his prayers, as a rule; but the circumstances under which the church and congregation met on that Lord's-day morning,—November 2, 1856,—were so unusual, that an exception may be made in order to insert the record of the Pastor's first public utterance after the accident:—

"We are assembled here, O Lord, this day, with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow,—joy that we meet each other again, and sorrow for those who have suffered bereavements. Thanks to Thy Name! Thanks to Thy Name! Thy servant feared that he should never be able to meet this congregation again; but Thou hast brought him up out of the burning fiery furnace, and not even the smell of fire has passed upon him. Thou hast, moreover, given Thy servant special renewal of strength, and he desires now to confirm those great promises of free grace which the gospel affords. Thou knowest, O Lord, our feelings of sorrow! We must not open the sluices of our woe; but, O God, comfort those who are lingering in pain and suffering, and cheer those who have been bereaved! Let great blessings rest upon them,—the blessings of the covenant of grace, and of this world, too. And now, O Lord, bless Thy people! We have loved one another with a pure heart fervently;—we have rejoiced in each other's joy,—we have wept together in our sorrow. Thou hast welded us together, and made us one in doctrine, one in practice, and one in holy love. Oh, that it may be said of each individual now present with us that he is bound up in the bundle of life! O Lord, we thank Thee even for all the slander, and calumny, and malice, with which Thou hast allowed the enemy to honour us; and we pray Thee to grant that we may never give them any real cause to blaspheme Thy holy Name! We ask this for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

The opening sentences of the discourse delivered on that occasion have a special

and permanent interest from the fact that the Lord so abundantly fulfilled Mr. Spurgeon's prophecy concerning future services and blessing in the Music Hall :—

“I almost regret, this morning, that I have ventured to occupy this pulpit, because I feel utterly unable to preach to you for your profit. I had thought that the quiet and repose of the last fortnight had removed the effects of that terrible catastrophe ; but on coming back to this chapel again, and more especially, standing here to address you, I feel somewhat of those same painful emotions which well-nigh prostrated me before. You will therefore excuse me, this morning, if I make no allusion to that solemn event, or scarcely any. I could not preach to you upon a subject that should be in the least allied to it ; I should be obliged to be silent if I should bring to my remembrance that terrific scene in the midst of which it was my solemn lot to stand. God will overrule it, doubtless. It may not have been so much by *the malice* of men, as some have asserted ; it was perhaps simple wickedness,—an intention to disturb a congregation ; but certainly with no thought of committing so terrible a crime as that of the murder of those unhappy creatures. God forgive those who were the instigators of that horrid act ! They have my forgiveness from the depths of my soul. *It shall not stop us, however* ; we are not in the least degree daunted by it. I shall preach there again yet ; aye, and God will give us souls there, and Satan's empire shall tremble more than ever. God is with us ; who is he that shall be against us ? The text I have selected is one that has comforted me, and, in a great measure, enabled me to come here to-day,—the reflection upon it had such a power of comfort on my depressed spirit. It is this :—‘Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name : that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’ I shall not attempt to preach upon this text ; I shall only make a few remarks that have occurred to my own mind ; for I could not preach to-day. I have been utterly unable to study, but I thought that even a few words might be acceptable to you this morning, and I trust to your loving hearts to excuse them. O Spirit of God, magnify Thy strength in Thy servant's weakness, and enable him to honour his Lord, even when his soul is cast down within him !”)

I have many times used the great calamity as an illustration of the truth that accidents are not to be regarded as Divine judgments ; perhaps the most notable instance is the sermon I preached soon after the collision in the Clayton tunnel on the Brighton railway. (See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 408, “Accidents, not Punishments.”) That discourse is to me the more memorable as I possess a copy of it which Dr. Livingstone had carried with him in his African journeys,

and on the top of which he had written, "*Very good.*—D. L." It was found, after his death, in the volume of his Diary from November, 1861, to July, 1863, and was sent to me by his daughter, Mrs. Livingstone-Bruce. In the course of the sermon I said:—"It has been most absurdly stated that those who travel on the first day of the week, and meet with an accident, ought to regard that accident as being a judgment from God upon them on account of their violating the Christian's day of worship. It has been stated, even by godly ministers, that the late deplorable collision should be looked upon as an exceedingly wonderful and remarkable visitation of the wrath of God against those unhappy persons who happened to be in the Clayton tunnel. Now I enter my solemn protest against such an inference as that, not in my own name, but in the Name of Him who is the Christian's Master and the Christian's Teacher. I say of those who were crushed in that tunnel, Suppose ye that they were sinners above all the other sinners? 'I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.' Or those who were killed last Monday, think ye that they were sinners above all the sinners that were in London? 'I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.' Now, mark, I would not deny that there have been judgments of God upon particular persons for sin; sometimes, and I think but exceedingly rarely, such things have occurred. Some of us have heard, in our experience, instances of men who have blasphemed God, and defied Him to destroy them, who have suddenly fallen dead; and in such cases, the punishment has so quickly followed the blasphemy that one could not help perceiving the hand of God in it. The man had wantonly asked for the judgment of God, his prayer was heard, and the judgment came. . . . But in cases of accident, such as that to which I refer, and in cases of sudden and instant death, again I say, I enter my earnest protest against the foolish and ridiculous idea that those who thus perish are sinners above all the sinners who survive unharmed. Let me just try to reason this matter out with Christian people; for there are some unenlightened Christians who will feel horrified by what I have said. Those who are ready at perversions may even dream that I would apologize for the desecration of the day of worship. Now, I do no such thing. I do not extenuate the sin, I only testify and declare that accidents are not to be viewed as punishments for sin, for punishment belongs not to this world, but the world to come. To all those who hastily look on every calamity as a judgment, I would speak in the earnest hope of setting them right.

"Let me begin, then, by saying, my dear brethren, do you not see that *what you say is not true*, and that is the best of reasons why you should not say it? Do not your own experience and observation teach you that one event happeneth both to the righteous and to the wicked? It is true, the wicked man sometimes falls dead in the street; but has not the minister fallen dead in the

pulpit? It is true that a boat, in which men were seeking their own pleasure on the Sunday, has suddenly gone down; but is it not equally true that a ship, which contained none but godly men, who were bound upon an excursion to preach the gospel, has gone down, too? The visible providence of God has no respect of persons; and a storm may gather around the *John Williams* missionary ship, quite as well as around a vessel filled with riotous sinners. Why, do you not perceive that the providence of God has been, in fact, in its outward dealings, rather harder upon the good than upon the bad? For, did not Paul say, as he looked upon the miseries of the righteous in his day, 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable?' The path of righteousness has often conducted men to the rack, to the prison, to the gibbet, to the stake; while the road of sin has often led a man to empire, to dominion, and to high esteem among his fellows. It is not true that, in this world, God does, as a rule, and of necessity, punish men for sin, and reward them for their good deeds; for, did not David say, 'I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree;' and did not this perplex the psalmist for a little season, until he went into the sanctuary of God, and then he understood their end?

"Will you allow me also to remark that the supposition, against which I am earnestly contending, is *a very cruel and unkind one*? For, if it were the case, that all persons who thus meet with their death in an extraordinary and terrible manner were greater sinners than the rest, would it not be a crushing blow to bereaved survivors, and is it not ungenerous on our part to indulge the idea unless we are compelled by unanswerable reasons to accept it as an awful truth? Now, I defy you to whisper it in the widow's ear. Go home to her, and say, 'Your husband was a worse sinner than the rest of men, therefore he died.' You have not brutality enough for that. A little unconscious infant, which had never sinned, though, doubtless, an inheritor of Adam's fall, is found crushed amidst the *débris* of the accident. Now, think for a moment, what would be the infamous consequence of the supposition that those who perished were worse than others; you would have to make it out that this unconscious infant was a worse sinner than many in the dens of infamy whose lives are yet spared. Do you not perceive that the thing is radically false? And I might perhaps show you the injustice of it best by reminding you that it may, one day, turn upon your own head. Let it be your own case that you should meet with sudden death in such a way, are you willing to be adjudged to damnation on that account? Such an event may happen in the house of God. Let me recall to my own, and to your sorrowful recollection, what occurred when once we met together. I can say, with a pure heart, we met for no object but to serve our God, and the minister had no aim in going to that place but that of gathering many to hear who otherwise would not have listened to his voice; and yet there were

funerals as a result of that holy effort (for holy effort still we avow it to have been, and the aftersmile of God hath proved it so). There were deaths, and deaths among God's people ;—I was about to say, I am glad it was with God's people rather than with others. A fearful fright took hold upon the congregation, and they fled ; and do you not see that, if accidents are to be viewed as judgments, then it is a fair inference that we were sinning in being there,—an insinuation which our consciences repudiate with scorn ? However, if that logic were true, it is as true against us as it is against others ; and inasmuch as you would repel with indignation the accusation that any were wounded or hurt on account of sin in being there to worship God, what you repel for yourself repel for others, and be no party to the accusation which is brought against those who have been destroyed, during the last fortnight, that they perished on account of any great sin.

“ Here I anticipate the outcries of prudent and zealous persons who tremble for the ark of God, and would touch it with Uzzah's hand. ‘ Well,’ says one, ‘ but we ought not to talk like this, for it is a very serviceable superstition, because there are many people who will be kept from travelling on the Sunday by the accident, and we ought to tell them, therefore, that those who perished, perished because they travelled on Sunday.’ Brethren, I would not tell a lie to save a soul ; and this would be telling lies, for it is not the fact. I would do anything that is right to stop Sunday labour and sin, but I would not forge a falsehood even to do that. They might have perished on a Monday as well as on a Sunday. God gives no special immunity any day of the week, and accidents may occur as well at one time as at another ; and it is only a pious fraud when we seek thus to play upon the superstition of men to make capital for Christ. The Roman Catholic priest might consistently use such an argument ; but an honest Christian man, who believes that the religion of Christ can take care of itself without his telling falsehoods, scorns to do it. These men did not perish because they travelled on a Sunday. Witness the fact that others perished on the Monday when they were on an errand of mercy. I know not why or wherefore God sent the accident. God forbid that we should offer our own reason when God has not given us His reason ; but we are not allowed to make the superstition of men an instrument for advancing the glory of God. You know, among Protestants, there is a great deal of Popery. I meet with people who uphold infant baptism on the plea, ‘ Well, it is not doing any hurt, and there is a great deal of good meaning in it, and it may do good ; and even confirmation may be blessed to some people, therefore do not let us speak against it.’ I have nothing to do with whether the thing does hurt or not ; all I have to do with is whether it is right, whether it is Scriptural, whether it is true ; and if the truth does mischief,—which is a supposition we can by no means allow,—that mischief will not lie at our door. We have nothing to do but to speak the truth, even though the heavens should fall.”

I thank God that, terrible as the great catastrophe was, there was never in my experience another like it, for I do not think I could have survived a second one. I have, on several occasions, seen some cause for alarm when I have been conducting services in places that have not seemed to me to be able to stand the strain of the multitudes gathered to hear the Word; and the sensation I felt at the Surrey Gardens has, in a moment, come over me again. Many years ago, I was preaching in a building which was exceedingly crowded; and, to my apprehension, there was a continuous tremor. I grew so anxious that I said to a friend, who understood such matters, "Go downstairs, and see whether this structure is really safe; for it seems hardly able to bear the weight of this crowd." When he returned, he looked anxious, but gave me no answer. The service ended quietly, and then he said, "I am so glad that everything has gone off safely. I do not think you should ever preach here again, for it is a very frail affair; but I thought that, if I frightened you, there would be more risk of a panic than there was in letting the service go on." The narrowest escape I ever had of a repetition of the Music Hall fatality was about eighteen months after the accident there; on the following Lord's-day morning,—April 11, 1858,—I thus described to my congregation the Lord's merciful interposition:—

"During this week, my mind has been much directed to the subject of providence, and you will not wonder when I relate a portion of one day's story. I was engaged to preach, last Wednesday, at Halifax, where there was a heavy snow-storm. Preparations had been made for a congregation of 8,000 persons, and a huge wooden structure had been erected. I considered that, owing to the severe weather, few persons could possibly assemble, and I looked forward to the dreary task of addressing an insignificant handful of people in a vast place. However, when I arrived, I found from 5,000 to 6,000 people gathered together to hear the Word; and a more substantial-looking place it has not been my lot to see. It certainly was a great uncomely building; but, nevertheless, it seemed well adapted to answer the purpose. We met together in the afternoon, and again in the evening, and worshipped God; and we separated to our homes, or rather, we were about to separate, and all this while the kind providence of God was watching over us. Immediately in front of me there was a huge gallery, which looked an exceedingly massive structure, capable of holding 2,000 persons. This, in the afternoon, was crowded, and it seemed to stand as firm as a rock. Again, in the evening, there it stood, and neither moved nor shook. But mark the provident hand of God; in the evening, when the people were retiring, and when there were scarcely more than a hundred persons there, a great beam gave way, and down came a portion of the flooring of the gallery with a fearful crash. Several people were precipitated with the planks, but still the good hand of God watched over us, and only two persons were

severely injured with broken legs, which it is trusted will be set so as to avoid the necessity of amputation. Now, had this happened any earlier, not only must many more have been injured, but there are a thousand chances to one, as we say, that a panic must necessarily have ensued similar to that which we still remember, and deplore as having occurred in this place. Had such a thing happened, and had I been the unhappy preacher on the occasion, I feel certain that I should never have been able to occupy the pulpit again. Such was the effect of the first calamity, that I marvel that I ever survived. No human tongue can possibly tell what I experienced. The Lord, however, graciously preserved us; the fewness of the people in the gallery prevented any such catastrophe, and thus a most fearful accident was averted. But there is a more marvellous providence still to record. Overloaded by the immense weight of snow which fell upon it, and beaten by a heavy wind, the entire structure fell with an enormous crash three hours after we had left it, splitting the huge timbers into shivers, and rendering very much of the material utterly useless for any future building. Now mark this,—had the snow begun three hours earlier, the hall must have fallen upon us, and how few of us would have escaped, we cannot guess. But mark another thing. All day long it thawed so fast, that the snow as it fell seemed to leave a mass, not of white snow, but of snow and water together. This ran through the roof upon us, to our considerable annoyance, and I was almost ready to complain that we had hard dealings from God's providence. But if it had been a frost, instead of a thaw, you can easily perceive that the place must have fallen several hours before it did; and then your minister, and the greater part of his congregation, would probably have been in the other world. Some there may be who deny providence altogether. I cannot conceive that there were any witnesses of that scene who could have done so. This I know, if I had been an unbeliever to this day in the doctrine of the supervision and wise care of God, I must have been a believer in it at this hour. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His Name together! He hath been very gracious unto us, and remembered us for good."

(In his record of "The Life and Labours of Pastor C. H. Spurgeon," published by Messrs. Passmore & Alabaster under the title, *From the Usher's Desk to the Tabernacle Pulpit*, Mr. Shindler says, concerning the catastrophe at the Surrey Gardens:—"Twenty-five years afterwards, the writer witnessed the terribly depressing effect the memory of this sad event had on Mr. Spurgeon. During the session of the Baptist Union at Portsmouth and Southampton, in 1881, Mr. Spurgeon was announced to preach in the largest available room in the former town. Long before the service began, every available seat and all standing-room were occupied, and still there were hundreds pressing forward, and endeavouring to crowd

in. There was some confusion just as the preacher was passing on to the platform to take his seat. He seemed entirely unmanned, and stood in the passage leaning his head on his hand. He told the writer that the circumstance so vividly recalled the terrible scene at the Surrey Music Hall, that he felt quite unable to preach. But he did preach, and preach well, though he could not entirely recover from the agitation of his nervous system. Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar, a cousin of Queen Victoria, who was then the military commander of the district, was present with his suite, and cordially greeted 'the prince of preachers' after his sermon."

Pastor W. Williams, in his *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, writes:—" 'What are you going to preach from to-morrow?' he once asked me. " 'The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked : but He blesseth the habitation of the just ;'" I answered. He gave a deep sigh ; his countenance changed even before I had finished the verse, brief as it was ; and he said, in tones of deep solemnity, ' Ah, me !' ' What is the matter, sir ?' I asked. ' Don't you know,' he replied, ' that is the text I had on that terrible night of the accident at the Surrey Music Hall ?' I did not know it, but I learned, from the mere mention of it, how permanent was the effect upon his mind of that awful night's disaster. I never alluded either to this text or to the Surrey Gardens calamity after that. I cannot but think, from what I then 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.")