



## THE LATE MR. SPURGEON.

BY THE REV. H. R. HAWEIS, M.A.

SPURGEON was the prophet of middle-class religion in England for nearly half a century. Barring his sectarian theology he was common sense raised to its highest power. That was his secret. His narrow dogmatism was his defect. The times were indeed growing out of joint before he passed away. The new views sorely perplexed him. He beheld with terror brood after brood of the strange chickens he had hatched taking to the water. He stood on the bank shouting in bewilderment "Down grade! down grade!" but they swam away safely enough into the Broad Waters and he saw them no more. At last it needed all the intense fervour of his personal ascendancy to keep up the Sunday collections at the Metropolitan Tabernacle—letters and persuasions of various kinds had to be resorted to—and funds still drooped, and doctrines still swerved if for a moment the master's strong hand was off the helm.

But take him all in all there is no figure since old Simeon's comparable to Spurgeon as a great middle-class orator, and even Rowland Hill's and Simeon's piety and pulpit power rolled together would hardly amount to one Spurgeon! Indeed no one since the world began has ever accomplished the feat habitually performed by Spurgeon without apparent effort—I mean the feat of attracting and retaining a congregation of 6,000 persons twice every Sunday for over thirty years. His simple and unaffected egotism—like that of Oliver Wendell Holmes—had something very frank and winning about it. The head was perhaps deficient in a sense of proportion, but then the heart was so good. He was perfectly unconscious of any inconsistency. No one disliked the Pope's arrogant assumptions more than Spurgeon, but as a dogmatic teacher the Pope would have to climb down before the great Baptist—and certainly no Pope ever had a more perfect belief in his own infallibility. Was, then, Mr. Spurgeon puffed up? Not at all. A friend of mine was calling on him some time ago and happened to say:

"Do you know, Mr. Spurgeon, some people think you conceited."

The great preacher smiled indulgently, and after a pause said:

"Do you see those bookshelves? They contain hundreds, nay, thousands, of my sermons translated into every language under heaven. Well, now add to this, that ever since I was twelve years old there never has been discovered or built a place large



RUSSELL & SONS, 17 BAKER ST., PHOTO.  
CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON, BORN JUNE 19, 1834,  
AT KELVEDON, ESSEX. DIED JANUARY 31, 1892, AT  
MENTONE.



enough to hold the numbers of people who wished to hear me preach, and upon my honour when I think of it, I wonder I'm not more conceited than I am."

That is a kind of *bonhomie* which fairly disarms criticism.

I remember once going to hear Spurgeon, and having sent in my card, was graciously provided with a seat on the platform amongst the elders. After a most touching and eloquent sermon, Mr. Spurgeon invited me into his vestry, a large hall with doors leading into antechambers, and thus discoursed :

"This is not my usual congregation to-night, the wet has kept probably hundreds away."

"But, Mr. Spurgeon, the Tabernacle was packed. There were people standing in all the aisles?"

"That's nothing; that would be so in any case," he replied, loftily. "This is my vestry. In yonder room are people waiting to see me, and in yonder other room are the deacons and elders; no one intrudes upon me here until I call them."

He was then good enough to explain his system.

"Everything is purely voluntary. We have no power but moral power—but we watch for the souls of our people as those who must give an account. If we know that any one has done wrong—lying, fraud, or immorality—we send an elder, and he has to confess his fault and promise amendment. If he does, we take him back, if not we cut him off, that is all; he is simply cast off from membership. If the elders cannot manage a case they refer it to me, and I decide. And," said the great Baptist Pope, "in the space of forty years' ministry I have never known any appeal from my decision—that is final; we have no other way of ruling, but it works."

I then asked him about his charities and agencies. He replied :

"Well, I am responsible for about £300 a-week for the various agencies floated and sustained by my people, and under my control."

This is not the place to dwell at length upon Spurgeon's preaching. He has the credit not only of reviving the art of great preaching amongst Nonconformists, but of immensely quickening pulpit oratory within the establishment. People are no longer afraid—at least those who have any nature in them—to be natural in the pulpit, which is, after all, the great secret of winning and keeping attention. The questionable jokes and stories attributed not always without truth to Spurgeon, have been much misrepresented and often exaggerated. It is true that he would resort to any device rather than fail to keep the attention of his audience, but I doubt whether he ever risked a witticism or an anecdote, the immediate effect of which for good did not far outweigh the evil of supposed irreverence or vulgarity. Half Spurgeon's best things won't bear repeating; they were born of circumstances and glowed in an atmosphere which cannot be revived. Forcible we all know he was, but in a certain vein of delicate and almost sentimental piety he was unrivalled. It came out more often in his wonderful running expositions than even in his sermons. The tender and meditative handling of that episode of the women who came to the sepulchre and found a great stone there, I shall never forget. Spurgeon seemed to be with them, and yet all the time conscious of the risen Lord, whom they believed to be dead, and as he showed how we all might have the great stones of our trouble rolled away by the Angels, deep groans as of blessed emancipation broke from the vast audience that seemed literally to hang upon his lips, and all the time his mellow, gentle, searching voice was hardly raised above its usual talking pitch; but it travelled and subdued the great space, and found out every ear and comforted every heart. No! we shall not look upon his like again. Spurgeon was the greatest natural pulpit orator we have had in England for fifty years at least. In America, Ward Beecher alone was his equal in eloquence, his inferior in tenderness, but his superior in intellect and general culture. He died prematurely worn out by the herculean labours which he had advisedly and systematically undertaken. He died—not, indeed, too soon for his reputation—but, as all will agree who heard him even at the last, not too late.

He belongs to that small and elect circle of men who stand out each one separate and alone. He had no rivals—he will have no successor. There can be but one Spurgeon.