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LIFE AND WORKS
OF REV. CHARLES H. SPURGEON

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Rev. C. H. Spurgeon: The Story of His Life and Labors.

CHAPTER II.
Mr. Spurgeon's Account of his Conversion and Early Preaching.

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"I WILL tell you how I myself was brought to the knowledge of the truth. It may happen the telling of that will bring some one else to Christ. It pleased God in my childhood to convince me of sin. I lived a miserable creature, finding no hope, no comfort, thinking that surely God would never save me. At last the worst came to the worst-- I was miserable; I could do scarcely anything. My heart was broken in pieces. Six months did I pray-- prayed agonizingly with all my heart, and never had an answer. I resolved that, in the town where I lived, I would visit every place of worship in order to find out the way of salvation. I felt I was willing to do anything and be anything if God would only forgive me.

I set off, determined to go round to all the chapels, and I went to all the places of worship; and though I dearly venerate the men that occupy those pulpits now, and did so then, I am bound to say that I never heard them once fully preach the gospel. I mean by that, they preached truth, great truths, many good truths that were fitting to many of their congregation-- spiritually-minded people; but what I wanted to know was, How can I get my sins forgiven? And they never once told me that. I wanted to hear how a poor sinner, under a sense of sin, might find peace with God; and when I went I heard a sermon on 'Be not deceived: God is not mocked,' which cut me up worse, but did not say how I might escape.

Earnestly Seeking.

I went again another day, and the text was something about the glories of the righteous: nothing for poor me. I was something like a dog under the table, not allowed to eat of the children's food. I went time after time, and I can honestly say, I don't know that I ever went without prayer to God, and I am sure there was not a more attentive hearer in all the place than myself, for I panted and longed to understand how I might be saved.

At last, one snowy day-- it snowed so much, I could not go to the place I had determined to go to, and I was obliged to stop on the road, and it was a blessed stop to me-- I found rather an obscure street, and turned down a court, and there was a little chapel. I wanted to go someplace. It was the Primitive Methodists' chapel. I had heard of these people from many, and how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache; but that did not matter. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they made my head ache ever so much I did not care. So, sitting down, the service went on, but no minister came. At last a very thin-looking man came into the pulpit and opened his Bible and read these words: 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' Just setting his eyes upon me, as if he knew me all by heart, he said: 'Young man, you are in trouble.' Well, I was, sure enough. Says he, 'You will never get out of it unless you look to Christ.'

"It is Only Look."

And then, lifting up his hands, he cried out, as only, I think, a Primitive Methodist could do, 'Look, look, look! It is only look!' said he. I saw at once the way of salvation. Oh, how I did leap for joy at that moment! I know not what else he said: I did not take much notice of it-- I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, they only looked and were healed. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard this word 'Look!' what a charming word it seemed to me. Oh, I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away! and in heaven I will look on still in my joy unutterable.

I now think I am bound never to preach a sermon without preaching to sinners. I do think that a minister who can preach a sermon without addressing sinners does not know how to preach."

Preaching in the Old Place.

On Oct. 11, 1864, the pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle preached a sermon to five hundred hearers in the chapel at Colchester (in which he was converted), on the occasion of the anniversary in that place of worship. He took for his text the memorable words, Isaiah xlv. 22, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved," etc., and the preacher said, "That I heard preached from in this chapel when the Lord converted me." And pointing to a seat on the left hand, under the gallery, he said: "I was sitting in that pew when I was converted." This honest confession produced a thrilling effect upon the congregation, and very much endeared the successful pastor to many hearts.

Best of All Days.

Of his conversion Mr. Spurgeon spoke on every fitting opportunity, hoping thereby to benefit others. As an example of the advantage which he takes, under the title of "A Bit for Boys," he says, in "The Sword and the Trowel:" "When I was just fifteen, I believed in the Lord Jesus, was baptized, and joined the church of Christ. This is twenty-five years ago now, and I have never been sorry for what I then did; no, not even once. I have had plenty of time to think it over, and many temptations to try some other course, and if I had found out that I had been deceived or had made a gross blunder, I would have made a change before now, and would do my best to prevent others from falling into the same delusion.

"I tell you, boys, the day I gave myself up to the Lord Jesus, to be His servant, was the very best day of my life. Then I began to be safe and happy; then I found out the secret of living; and had a worthy object for my life's exertions and an unfailing comfort for life's troubles. Because I would wish every boy to have a bright eye, a light tread, a joyful heart, and overflowing spirits, I plead with him to consider whether he will not follow my example, for I speak from experience."

Dawn of a New Life.

Early in the month of January, 1856, Mr. Spurgeon preached a sermon to his own congregation on Sunday morning, which is entitled "Sovereignty and Salvation." In that sermon he says:

"Six years ago to-day, as near as possible at this very hour of the day, I was 'in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity,' but had yet, by divine grace, been led to feel the bitterness of that bondage, and to cry out by reason of the soreness of its slavery. Seeking rest and finding none, I stepped within the house of God, and sat there, afraid to look upward, lest I should be utterly cut off, and lest his fierce wrath should consume me. The minister rose in his pulpit, and, as I have done this morning, read this text: 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else.'

"I looked that moment; the grace of faith was vouchsafed to me in that instant; and

"Ere since by faith I saw the stream
His flowing wounds supply
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.'

I shall never forget that day while memory holds its place; nor can I help repeating this text whenever I remember that hour when first I knew the Lord. How strangely gracious! How wonderfully and marvellously kind, that he who heard these words so little time ago, for his own soul's profit, should now address you this morning as his hearers from the same text, in the full and confident hope that some poor sinner within these walls may hear the glad tidings of salvation for himself also, and may to-day be 'turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God!'"

A Public Profession.

All the letters he sent home at that period were full of the overflowings of a grateful heart; and, although so young in years, he describes the operations of divine grace on the heart and life, and the differences between the doctrines of the gospel and the forms of the church, in terms so precise and clear, that no merely human teaching could have enabled him so to do.

Brought up, as he had been, among the Independents, his own views on one point of church ordinances now assumed a form differing materially from what his parents had adopted. Having experienced a change of heart, he felt it to be laid upon him as an imperative duty to make a full and public confession of the change by public baptism.

He had united himself formally with the Baptist people the year before; now he felt constrained to fully cast in his lot and become one of them entirely. He wrote many letters home to his father, asking for advice and information, but striving to enforce his own conviction for making a public profession of his faith in Christ. At length the father was satisfied that his son had no faith in the dogma of baptismal regeneration; that his motives for seeking to be publicly recognized as a follower of the Lord Jesus were higher than those he had feared; therefore no further opposition was made, and the necessary steps were taken for his immersion.

All the arrangements having been made, the young convert walked from Newmarket to Isleham, seven miles, on May 2d, and staying with the family of Mr. Cantlow, the Baptist minister there, he was by that gentleman publicly baptized in that village on Friday, May 3, 1851, being in his sixteenth year. He thus proceeds in his letter to his father: "It is very pleasing to me that the day on which I shall openly profess the name of Jesus is my mother's birthday. May it be to both of us a foretaste of many glorious and happy days yet to come."

School Duties and Mission Work.

Having thus publicly devoted himself to the service of God, he has more earnest than ever in his efforts to do good. Besides having himself revived an old society for distributing tracts, he undertook to carry out this good work in Newmarket thoroughly. Whenever he walked out he carried these messengers of mercy with him, he was instant in season, and, indeed, was seldom out of season, in his efforts to do good. His duties in school occupied him three hours daily, the remainder of his time being spent in his closet or in some work of mercy. The Sunday-school very soon gained his attention, and his addresses to the children were so full of love and instruction that the children carried the good tidings home to their parents; and soon they came to hear the addresses in the vestry of the Independent chapel in that town. The place was soon filled.

The Boy Preacher.

At one of the examinations of the school he had consented to deliver an oration on missions. It was a public occasion, and in the company was a clergyman. During the examination the clergyman heard of the death of his gardener, and suddenly left for home. But on his way he thus reasoned with himself: The gardener is dead; I cannot restore his life ; I will return and hear what the young usher has to say on missions. He returned, heard the oration, and was pleased to show his approval by presenting Mr. Spurgeon with a sovereign.

Having at once identified himself as a member of the Baptist church in Cambridge he soon found occupation suitable to his mind. His addresses to children, and afterwards to parents and children, had produced a love of the work, and he soon was called to exhort a village congregation. He was then sixteen years old. Connected with the Baptist church meeting in St. Andrew's street, Cambridge, formerly under the pastoral care of the late learned Robert Hall, there existed a society entitled "The Lay Preachers' Association." Although so young in years, Mr. Spurgeon was accepted as a member of this association. Here he at once found the occupation which his mind most desired; and he was soon appointed to address a congregation.

As this was one of the most important steps in Mr. Spurgeon's life, the reader will be glad to learn from his own pen the circumstances which led to his first attempted sermon. In introducing the text, "Unto you therefore which believe, He is precious," I Peter ii. 7, Mr. Spurgeon remarks, in 1873: "I remember well that, more than twenty-two years ago, the first attempted sermon that I ever made was from this text.

First Sermon.

"I had been asked to walk out to the village of Taversham, about four miles from Cambridge, where I then lived, to accompany a young man whom I supposed to be the preacher for the evening, and on the way I said to him that I trusted God would bless Him in his labors. 'Oh, dear,' said he, 'I never preached in my life; I never thought of doing such a thing. I was asked to walk with you, and I sincerely hope God will bless you in your preaching.' 'Nay,' said I, 'but I never preached, and I don't know that I could do anything of the sort.' We walked together till we came to the place, my inmost soul being all in a trouble as to what would happen. When we found the congregation assembled, and no one else there to speak of Jesus, though I was only sixteen years of age, as I found that I was expected to preach, I did preach, and the text was that just given."

Considering the results which have followed that sermon, it will be interesting to glance at some of the incidents belonging to that early period of his ministry.

Early Promise.

In the summer of 1875, from inquiries made in the locality, a correspondent of the "Baptist" newspaper reports as follows:

"A gentleman informed me that he heard Mr. Spurgeon preach his first sermon when about sixteen

years of age: and he then read, prayed, and expounded the Word, being attired in a round jacket and broad turn-down collar, such as I remember to have been in fashion at that period.

"Mr. Spurgeon was then living near Cambridge, and his mode of preaching afforded promise that he would become a powerful and popular preacher.

"Mr. C., the schoolmaster of the village in 1850, was impressed with the precocious talent of the young preacher, and his style of preaching."

Having once entered on this most solemn duty, and finding acceptance with the people, he laid himself out for one service every evening, after attending to his duties in school during the day.

From an aged and experienced Christian, who heard Mr. Spurgeon preach before his call to London, we learn that his addresses were very instructive, and often included illustrations derived from history, geography, astronomy, and from other branches of school occupation, evidently adapted from his daily duties, and thus made to serve as instruments in religion, as well as in training and informing the mind.

His early ministry was not only gratuitous, but often attended with demands on his small salary, which he willingly gave to God-- not to be seen of men, did he help the needy.

In Cottages and the Open Air.

In some of the thirteen village stations around Cambridge and Waterbeach, to which Mr. Spurgeon devoted all his evenings, the preaching was held in a cottage, in others a chapel, and occasionally the open common could furnish the accommodation required. At the village of Waterbeach, Mr. Spurgeon was received in a marked manner of approval. In most of the places in which he had preached the effect was very much alike, in the large numbers attracted to hear the Word of God, and in the success which God was pleased to bestow on his labors.

Even at that early period of his ministerial career, invitations to preach special sermons in towns and villages at a distance soon rapidly increased. At Waterbeach, however, the little church saw in the young man a suitability to their wants, and they gave him an invitation to become their pastor. He was well received by the people, and soon became quite popular. During the few months of his pastorate there, the church members were increased from forty to nearly one hundred.

Pastorate at Waterbeach.

Mr. Spurgeon has himself supplied an interesting reminiscence of his ministry at that village, which is worth preserving:

"When we had just commenced our youthful pastorate at Waterbeach, in 1852, Cornelius Elven, as a man of mark in that region, was requested to preach the anniversary sermons in our little thatched

meeting-house, and right well we remember his hearty compliance with our desire. We met at the station as he alighted from a third-class carriage which he had chosen in order to put the friends to the least possible expense for his travelling. His bulk was stupendous, and one soon saw that his heart was as large in proportion as his body.

"He gave us much sage and holy advice during the visit, which came to us with much the same weight as Paul's words came to Timothy. He bade us study hard, and keep abreast of the foremost Christians in our little church, adding as a reason, that if these men, either in their knowledge of Scripture or their power to edify the people, once outstrip you, the temptation will arise among them to be dissatisfied with your ministry; and, however good they are, they will feel their superiority, and others will perceive it too, and then your place in the church will become very difficult to hold. His sermons were very homely, and preeminently practical. He told anecdotes of the usefulness of addressing individuals one by one about their souls."

Not Spoiled by Colleges.

It has been remarked a hundred times, by those not well informed on the matter, that Mr. Spurgeon was an uneducated man, and had no college instruction. The experience of a quarter of a century was demonstrated how erroneous were these remarks. Is there in England a man of education who has done more for the extension of the kingdom of Christ by the publication of numerous valuable theological and instructive books than Mr. Spurgeon? Let the list of his works determine.

On the question of not going to college there is also some misconception. The exact facts are worthy of being placed on record. Mr. Spurgeon has himself so clearly stated the case in an article he wrote some time ago in his own magazine, that the reader will be glad to see it here; it is curious and interesting:

"Soon after I had begun, in 1852, to preach the Word in Waterbeach, I was strongly advised by my father and others to enter Stepney, now Regent's Park College, to prepare more firmly for the ministry. Knowing that learning is never an incumbrance and is often a great means of usefulness, I felt inclined to avail myself of the opportunity of attaining it; although I believed I might be useful without a college training, I consented to the opinion of friends, that I should be more useful with it.

An Appointment not Kept.

"Dr. Angus, the tutor of the college, visited Cambridge, where I then resided, and it was arranged that we should meet at the house of Mr. Macmillan, the publisher. Thinking and praying over the matter, I entered the house at exactly the time appointed, and was shown into a room, where I waited patiently for a couple of hours, feeling too much impressed with my own insignificance and the greatness of the tutor from London to venture to ring the bell and inquire the cause of the unreasonably long delay.

At last, patience having had her perfect work, the bell was set in motion, and on the arrival of the servant, the waiting young man of eighteen was informed that the doctor had tarried in another room,

and could stay no longer, so had gone off by train to London. The stupid girl had given no information to the family that any one called and had been shown into the drawing-room, consequently the meeting never came about, although desired by both parties. I was not a little disappointed at the moment; but have a thousand times since then thanked the Lord very heartily for the strange providence which forced my steps into another and far better path.

Strange Impressions.

"Still holding to the idea of entering the Collegiate Institution, he thought of writing and making an immediate application; but this was not to be. That afternoon, having to preach at walked slowly in a meditating frame of mind over Midsummer Common to the little wooden bridge which leads to Chesterton, and in the midst of the common I was startled by what seemed to me to be a loud voice, but which may have been a singular illusion: whichever it was, the impression it made on my mind was most vivid; I seemed very distinctly to hear the words, "Seekest thou great things for thyself, seek them not."

"This led me to look at my position from a different point of view, and to challenge my motives and intentions. I remembered my poor but loving people to whom I ministered, and the souls which had been committed to my humble charge; and although at that time I anticipated obscurity and poverty as the result of the resolve, yet I did there and then renounce the offer of collegiate instruction, determining to abide for a season, at least, with my people, and to remain preaching the Word so long as I had strength to do it. Had it not been for those words, I had not been where I am now. Although the ephod is no longer worn by a ministering priest, the Lord guides His people by His wisdom, and orders all their paths in love; and in times of perplexity, by ways mysterious and remarkable, He says to them: "This is the way; walk ye in it."

The Turning Point.

One or two extracts from his letters, written at the same time, it is desirable to have to show how anxiously the matter was considered. In his reply to his father, dated March 9, 1852, Mr. Spurgeon writes: "I have all along had an aversion to college, and nothing but a feeling that I must not consult myself, but Jesus, could have made me think of it. It appears to my friends at Cambridge, that it is my duty to remain with my dear people at Waterbeach; so say the church there unanimously, and so say three of our deacons at Cambridge."

During the summer his decision was taken, in the Way previously related; and in a letter he sent to his mother in November following, he says: "I am more and more glad that I never went to college. God sends such sunshine on my path, such smiles of grace, that I cannot regret if I have forfeited all my prospects for it. I am conscious I held back from love to God and His cause; and I had rather be poor in His service than rich in my own. I have all that heart can wish for; yea, God giveth more than my desire. My congregation is as great and loving as ever. During all the time I have been at Waterbeach, I have had a different house for my home every day. Fifty-two families have thus taken me in; and I have still six other invitations not yet accepted. Talk about the people not caring for me because they

me so little! I dare tell anybody under heaven is false! They do all they can. Our anniversary passed off grandly; six were baptized; crowds on crowds stood by the river; the chapel afterwards was crammed both to the tea and the sermon."

By these and other exercises of mind, God was preparing his young servant for greater plans of usefulness and a wider sphere of action.

The following stanzas were written by Mr. Spurgeon, at the age of eighteen:

Immanuel

When once I mourned a load of sin;
When conscience felt a wound within;
When all my works were thrown away;
When on my knees I knelt to pray,
Then, blissful hour, remembered well,
I learned Thy love, Immanuel.

When storms of sorrow toss my soul;
When waves of care around me roll;
When comforts sink, when joys shall flee;
When hopeless griefs shall gape for me,
One word the tempest's rage shall quell--
That word, Thy name, Immanuel.

When for the truth I suffer shame;
When foes pour scandal on my name;
When cruel taunts and jeers abound;
When "Bulls of Bashan" gird me round,
Secure within Thy tower I'll dwell--
That tower, Thy grace, Immanuel.

When hell enraged lifts up her roar;
When Satan stops my path before;
When fiends rejoice and wait my end;
When legioned hosts their arrows send,
Fear not, my soul, but hurl at hell
Thy battle-cry, Immanuel.

When down the hill of life I go;
When o'er my feet death's waters flow;
When in the deep'ning flood I sink;
When friends stand weeping on the brink,
I'll mingle with my last farewell
Thy lovely name, Immanuel.

When tears are banished from mine eye;
When fairer worlds than these are nigh;
When heaven shall fill my ravished sight;
When I shall bathe in sweet delight,
One joy all joys shall far excel,
To see Thy face, Immanuel.

["LIFE AND WORKS" CHAPTER 3](#)