

# SPURGEON

## *Heir of the Puritans*



Ernest W. Bacon

Christian Liberty Press

Arlington Heights, Illinois

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Langford, Bristol-Avon  
England

Ernest W. Bacon went home to be with the Lord on January 8, 1992.

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**Christian Liberty Press**

502 West Euclid Avenue  
Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004

*2001 Printing*

Book designed by Eric D. Bristley  
Set in Minion  
Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 1-930367-54-6

We would like to thank Dr. Robert Rodgers for the use of his original manuscripts of Spurgeon's sermons.

# Preface

Spurgeon was steeped in and fashioned by the writings and principles of the Puritans and can only be understood in their light. This book, therefore, makes no apology for presenting him as “heir of the Puritans.” In his preaching of Christ, in his controversies, and in his personal life, he would not have been what he was without them.

In the Sermons there are embedded many autobiographical glimpses of the Prince of Preachers, and I have garnered not a few for this book. I was brought up in the Spurgeon tradition. My parents knew Spurgeon well and were often at his house in their younger days. Many were the stories about him told in our family. One of the earliest things I remember is the great preacher’s picture hanging on the wall, with many small portraits surrounding it within the same frame—the Metropolitan Tabernacle, the Stockwell Orphanage, the pulpit of New Park Street strangely placed in a tree, probably in his garden, etc. Another of my early memories is of a phrase used concerning the great man—“An ugly man made beautiful by the grace of God.” I wondered in my childish way what this thing called “grace” could be which could make such a transformation. Years later, I am thankful to say, I knew.

Wherever possible I have tried to let Spurgeon himself speak, in the events of his life and in his theological beliefs. Indented quotations are mostly taken from his *Autobiography* or the Sermons.

For nearly forty years I have read the works of the Puritans—if not as deeply as Spurgeon did, at least with as great a love. Like him, also, I have an especial love for Thomas Brooks. I would here like to acknowledge my deep debt to Dr. Alexander Whyte, himself a great lover of Spurgeon, who first inspired me to seek out and read the Puritans for myself. The quotations from the Puritan writers which head each chapter have been chosen with great care, and the reader is urged to read these great men of God for himself.

Some paragraphs from chapter 10 have been taken from an article on “The Puritans and their Preaching” contributed to *The Gospel Magazine*.

I have to thank the following for helpful suggestions and the loan of books: Dr. L. G. Champion, Principal of Bristol Baptist College, my friend and fellow student; Mr. Cecil Grubb; Mr. Percy H. R. Hide, Secretary of Spurgeon’s Homes; Dr. E. K. H. Jordan; the Rev. Malcolm Pollock MA; and the Rev. L. P. Willmer, a good friend who many years ago gave me a number of complete sets of the Puritan writers, thereby greatly enriching my spiritual understanding. To all these friends I extend my sincere gratitude.

I must also express my very great gratitude to Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, an authority on the Puritan era and a great lover of Spurgeon, for so kindly reading this book. My own debt to him for his clear and vital teaching is tremendous, and I am greatly honored that, as Chairman of the “Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference,” he should so willingly and warmly commend this new study of a great man of God and the source from which he drew his strength.

May the blessing of God rest upon this book.

—ERNEST W. BACON

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## CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF CHARLES SPURGEON

1834	Born at Kelvedon, Essex, June 19.
1835	With grandparents at Stambourne, Essex, August.
1841	Returns to parental home at Colchester, August.
1849	School at Newmarket, August.
1850	Conversion at Colchester, January 6. Baptized at Isleham Ferry, May 3. Usher at Leeding's School, Cambridge, June 20. Joins St. Andrew's Street Baptist Church, Cambridge, October 2.
1851	First sermon at Teversham, Cambs, Spring.
1852	Student-Pastor of Waterbeach Baptist Chapel, January 1852 to February 1854.
1853	First sermon at New Park Street Baptist Chapel, London, December 18.
1854	Commences ministry at New Park Street, March.
1855	Preaches in Exeter Hall, February–May.
1856	Married to Susannah Thompson, January 8. Twin sons born, September 20. Surrey Music Hall tragedy, October 19. Morning services, Surrey Music Hall, November 1856 to December 1859. The Pastors' College commenced.
1857	Preaches to over 20,000 at Crystal Palace, October 7.
1859	Foundation stone of the Metropolitan Tabernacle laid on August 16.
1861	The Metropolitan Tabernacle opened, March 25.
1864	The "Baptismal Regeneration" Controversy.
1865	<i>The Sword and the Trowel</i> was first published.
1867	Foundation stone of Stockwell Orphanage laid, August 9.
1869	"Helensburgh," Clapham, built, Summer.
1874	Twin sons baptized, September 21.
1880	Moves to "Westwood," Upper Norwood, Summer.
1887	The "Down Grade" Controversy, 1887–1889.
1891	Last sermon in the Tabernacle, June 7.
1892	Died at Menton, France, January 31. Buried at West Norwood, February 11.

# Chapter 1

## Early Years

*Children are their parents' heirs; the mercies of God are not the least part of the parents' treasure, nor the least of the children's inheritance, being helps for their faith, matter for their praise, and spurs to their obedience.*

—WILLIAM GURNALL, *THE CHRISTIAN IN COMPLETE ARMOUR*

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born on June 19, 1834, in a picturesque little cottage at Kelvedon, Essex, still a pleasant rural country town. He belonged to a sturdy lower middle class family which had been strongly Nonconformist<sup>1</sup> for generations. It is on record that one of his ancestors, Job Spurgeon, in the seventeenth century, was imprisoned for attending a Nonconformist meeting. Some of Spurgeon's biographers have urged that his ancestors were probably Dutch refugees who fled to England in 1568 from the persecution of Protestants under the Duke of Alva. It may have been so, for the great preacher was of conventional Dutch build, and through the passing centuries the family could have had an admixture of Dutch blood. On the other hand, some of his biographers urge that his ancestors were Norsemen, and that the name Spurgeon was derived from the Norse word *sporr*, a sparrow. Still others suggest that the Spurgeon family is of French Huguenot<sup>2</sup> origin.

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1. Protestants in England who refused to become members of the Anglican Church. Also known as *Dissenters*—those who refused to accept the doctrines and forms of the Established Church in England and Scotland.
  2. French Reformed Protestants of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

His father, John Spurgeon, then aged twenty-four, was a clerk in a coal yard, and also the honorary pastor of the Independent (or Congregational) Church at Tollesbury. Here for sixteen years he preached the evangelical Calvinist doctrines to a warm-hearted and loyal congregation. Later he was pastor of the church at Cranbrook, and later still he ministered at Fetter Lane, London, and Upper Street, Islington. He died in 1902, having lived to see his son become the most famous preacher of his day.

His mother, Eliza Jarvis, was barely nineteen when Charles, her eldest child, was born. According to James A. Spurgeon, her second son, she was “the starting point of all greatness and goodness that any of us, by the grace of God, have enjoyed.” Altogether seventeen children were born to her, nine of whom died in infancy (as was too often the sad experience of those days), two boys and six girls surviving. Charles always held her in special reverence, and many were the tender and spiritual letters she received from him.

Ten months after his birth, his parents moved to Colchester, and within eighteen months—“on account of unfavorable circumstances”—the baby was sent to live with his grandparents, the Rev. and Mrs. James Spurgeon, in the large manse of the Independent Chapel at Stambourne. Probably the unfavorable circumstances had to do with bad housing, but for whatever reason the next six years of his life, impressionable, formative years for all at that age, were spent under the care of his grandparents and his maiden aunt, Ann Spurgeon. Splendidly did they fulfill their loving responsibility, and Charles always retained a warm affection for them.

We do well to take notice of this family of three into whose care Charles came. The Rev. James Spurgeon, born in 1776, became Pastor at Stambourne in 1810, and ministered at the Meeting-House there for no less a period than fifty-four years, until his death in 1864. Although a man of the old, thorough going Calvinist school, he was a man of wide sympathies and



*Rev. James Spurgeon*



a notable preacher of the Gospel. He wore the knee-breeches, buckled shoes and silk stockings of the reign of George the Third, a picture of neatness and a lover of young people. In the years to come he was to delight in Charles's success as a warrior of the Lord.



*The Old Manse and Meeting-House at Stambourne*

The grandmother was a sweet and loving soul. Her piety and useful labors, it is recorded, made her a valuable helpmeet to her husband in every good work. Charles long remembered her with her open Bible sitting by the great fireplace and speaking of the love of God. One Sunday morning in the eventide of this devoted couple, she remarked to her old husband that she did not feel well, and would stay at home and read her Bible and pray, while he preached. On his return he found her in the old armchair, her Bible spread out on her lap, her spectacles across it, her head bowed upon her breast, still in death. Her finger was resting upon Job 19:21—"The hand of God hath touched me!"

Ann Spurgeon, the unmarried daughter of the household, was seventeen when Charles came to them. She was, by all accounts, a radiant young girl of a lovely spirit, and she came to have chief charge of the

newcomer. She taught him his letters (she was proud of this later on!), and she encouraged in him that irresistible gift of fun that was so marked in his character in later years.

The little village of Stambourne nestled near the source of the Colne River, a pleasant, peaceful place with its farms, cottages and blacksmith's shop. The Manse at Stambourne was an old, roomy two-storied house. It had a brick hall floor, sprinkled with sand which was kept in a cupboard under the stairs. Its windows were in part plastered, in order to escape the window tax of those days. In one of its attics Charles discovered a large number of books, amongst which was an old copy of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, illustrated with amazing woodcuts. He promptly carried it downstairs and began to read. It was as the opening of a new world to him. Bunyan's masterpiece became one of his favorite books, which he claimed to have read over one hundred times. Thus it will be seen that his introduction to Puritan writers, to whom he owed such a deep debt, began before he was six years old!



*John Bunyan, the Puritan*

Sunday by Sunday the little lad watched his grandfather ascend the steep stairs of the Independent Chapel pulpit, and listened as he poured out a flood of eloquence concerning Christ and His grace freely given to sinners. He probably understood but little, and yet all unconsciously he was being impressed by the fact that a pulpit was a throne, and a Gospel preacher was one of the most important men in the world.

In August 1841 Charles, aged seven, returned to his parents' home at Colchester. It was a deep sorrow for him to leave his grandfather and grandmother and Aunt Ann. But the minister comforted his grandson by telling him that when he looked up at the shining moon at Colchester he must remember that it was the same moon his grandfather would see at Stambourne. For years the boy never saw the moon without thinking of his grandfather. He was not to be cut off from his beloved friends at Stambourne. Year by year he would visit them for holidays, and he kept in touch with them all their days.

At Colchester, Charles found two sisters and a brother, and quickly became their leader. In his *Autobiography* he speaks lovingly of his mother's influence upon them.

I have not the powers of speech to set forth my valuation of the choice blessing which the Lord bestowed on me in making me the son of one who prayed for me and prayed with me. How can I ever forget when she bowed her knee, and with her arms about my neck, prayed: "O that my son might live before Thee!"

He goes on to record that on Sunday evenings, instead of going to service, mother and children sat round the table, and as they each read the Bible in turn, she would explain the passage, verse by verse, and then pray for them. Afterwards she would read a passage or two from Richard Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted*, or Richard Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, and press the points home to her children.

A recent writer has spoken of the "years of mental and spiritual torture" in Spurgeon's youth, and adds: "One cannot help feeling that his godly parents contributed to this in no small measure, as they held before his childish mind the terrors of the damned, and earnestly besought him to flee from the wrath to come." There is, of course, absolutely no evidence that Spurgeon as a child was subjected to anything of the kind. On the contrary, the atmosphere of his early home was good, kind and loving, not at all severe, and his parents wisely and

gently sought to form his mind and character on the Gospel of the love of Christ.

Spurgeon attended, first of all, a dame school kept by a Mrs. Cook, and later on a school presided over by Mr. Henry Lewis. Here, at the age of ten, he gained the first class English prize, a copy of White's *Natural History of Selborne*, a book he much treasured. At fourteen, Charles and his brother James were sent to Maidstone as pupils at All Saints' Agricultural College, not with the idea of training them to be farmers, but because an uncle was one of the tutors there. Here Charles made steady progress in all subjects, especially in arithmetic, pointing out a mathematical mistake of his uncle's with great glee.

During these early days his passion for reading continued unabated. His father's collection of books included many volumes of the works of the Puritans, and young Spurgeon delved into them eagerly. He read among others Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, James's *Anxious Enquirer*, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, and Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. For lighter reading there was Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Shakespeare's plays, and the poems of John Milton and William Cowper (He delighted in *The Task* and also the moral satires of Cowper.) Heavy fare, some will think, for a boy of his age. Many men of mature intellect find such books heavy going. But Charles was a bright lad, and was nourished both mentally and spiritually by them.

We may conclude this part of our narrative by looking at the world of 1834 into which Spurgeon was born. William the Fourth, "the sailor king," was on the throne. Lord Grey, Lord Melbourne, and the great Duke of Wellington were successively prime ministers. Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837. The first Reform Bill had been passed by a Whig Government in 1832. Trade unions were beginning to be organized, but the poverty of the lower wage earners was great and distressing. In the cotton factories of Lancashire the average weekly wage was nine shillings and ninepence; Yorkshire woolen weavers earned twenty shillings; a builder's laborer in London might earn eighteen shillings; agricultural wages varied in different parts of the country, from seven shillings per week in Wiltshire and Suffolk, to twelve shillings per week in Yorkshire. Unemployment was rife, and in 1842 paupers numbered no less than 1,427,187.

In religion the Church of England was dominant and largely under the influence of a latitudinarian<sup>3</sup> liberalism with no message of salvation or hope for the people. According to Mr. Dean Church, the country parson was “a country gentleman in orders, who rode to hounds and shot and danced and farmed, and often did worse things.” He was also very often a pluralist,<sup>4</sup> and generally unpopular. At the same time, Evangelicals<sup>5</sup> in the Established Church [of England and Scotland], like Charles Simeon of Cambridge, were making their influence felt, and seeking to secure the appointment of those who preached the Gospel to parish congregants. 1833 saw the rise of the Tractarians,<sup>6</sup> and the increasing spread and dominance of the High Church<sup>7</sup> and Sacerdotal party,<sup>8</sup> some of whom were to follow Newman to Rome.

The Nonconformists were a formidable religious force in the life of the nation, although by this time the impulse of the Evangelical Revival had slackened amongst them. Their strength was in the middle and working classes, and in the large towns. Robert Hall, the famous preacher, had died in 1831, but there were other giants left like Thomas Binney, Dr. Rippon, Dr. Baldwin Brown, John Angell James, Josiah Conder, J. H. Hinton, Dr. James Bennett, Dr. F. A. Fox and Dr. Thomas Price. The Nonconformists, however, still suffered from various civil disabilities, and were not admitted to the universities until 1870.

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3. A kind of religious liberalism that cares little about particular creeds and forms.
  4. A person who believes that ultimate reality has more than one true explanation. The country parson often did not hold to the Reformation doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), which states that the Bible is the only source of knowledge regarding God and man and, therefore, the sole means by which ultimate reality can be explained.
  5. Those Protestants which emphasize salvation by faith alone (*Sola Fide*) in the atonement of Jesus Christ, and reject the Roman Catholic doctrine that the power of the sacraments and good works are effective in securing one's salvation. Also the Low Church party within the Church of England; this party is strongly evangelical.
  6. Also known as the Oxford Movement, which placed the authority of the church over the Bible. Many of this sect later were welcomed into the Roman Catholic Church.
  7. A party within the Church of England which emphasizes the importance of the priesthood and the traditional rituals and doctrines.
  8. A party within the Church of England which believes in the divine authority of the priesthood.

In spite of the deadness amongst many of the churches, there were days in which God was believed in, Sunday strictly kept, and the Scriptures honored and read.

Charles Lamb died in 1834, the year of Spurgeon's birth, and so did Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Wordsworth was still alive but not writing very much now. On the other hand, young Alfred Tennyson was busy polishing his verses, sure that one day he would astonish the world. A young man named Charles Dickens was a hard worked Parliamentary shorthand writer, his fame before him. Down at Plymouth, J. N. Darby was beginning his labors among "The Brethren." Thomas Arnold was the vigorous headmaster of Rugby, bent on revolutionizing the public school system. And far from our shores, Charles Darwin, naturalist of the survey ship *Beagle*, was laying the foundation of his scientific knowledge and pondering his subsequently formulated theory of evolution, or natural selection, which was to shake the scientific and theological worlds to their foundations.

Slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1834, the slave-owners being compensated to the extent of twenty million pounds, which many public spirited and humanitarian citizens thought altogether wrong. In Spain the Carlist civil war was in full swing, and in France Republican insurrections were already breaking out. South Australia was colonized in that year, and Thomas, son of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, was to preach the Gospel there in years to come. There was feverish building of railways throughout the country, and even more feverish financial speculation in railway shares, in which fortunes were made and lost almost overnight. On the other hand, no public libraries existed before 1845, and the percentage of illiterates in 1839 was 41.6 percent. Sadly, few churchmen at this time saw the need to establish Christian schools to help deal with the illiteracy problem.

Such was the world into which Spurgeon was born, a world vastly different from our own. Yet man's basic needs, material, moral, and spiritual in essence, were the same as ours today. And in the fullness of the time, and in the purpose of God, He sent Charles Haddon Spurgeon to preach the Everlasting Gospel, and to prepare men for Himself.

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9. This political conflict was instigated by Don Carlos (1788-1855), who claimed to be the rightful successor to the Spanish throne.

# Chapter 2

## *Into the Light*

*It is profitable for Christians to be often calling to mind the Beginnings of Grace within their Souls.*

—JOHN BUNYAN, *GRACE ABOUNDING*

*Regeneration is a universal change of the whole man. It is a new creature, not only a new power or new faculty. It extends to every part; understanding, will, conscience, affections, all were corrupted by sin, all are renewed by grace. Grace sets up its ensigns in all parts of the soul, surveys every corner, and triumphs over every lurking enemy; it is as large in renewing as sin was in defacing. The whole soul shall be glorified in heaven; therefore the whole soul shall be beautified by grace.*

—STEPHEN CHARNOCK, *THE NATURE OF REGENERATION*

Many and varied are the God-blessed influences that lead to the conversion of a soul. In Spurgeon's case a deep impression was made on him when, a lad of ten, he was on holiday at his grandfather's parsonage at Stambourne. In the summer of 1844 the Rev. Richard Knill came to stay at this house on missionary deputation for the London Missionary Society. He was minister of Queen Street Congregational Church, Chester, where his portrait still hangs, with these words under it: "Brethren, the heathen are perishing. Shall we let them perish? God forbid!" He had spent some years in India in the service of the Gospel, but had been sent back home due to illness. He was also a prolific tract writer; some fourteen million of his tracts having been circulated.

Mr. Knill was greatly drawn to Charles, and during his three days' stay at Stambourne attached himself to the boy as often as possible. In the early mornings he took him into the garden, and there in a yew tree arbor spoke to him of the love of Christ, and prayed with him. On his last morning, in the presence of the family, he took Charles on his knee and uttered a remarkable prophecy: "This child will one day preach the Gospel, and he will preach it to great multitudes. I am persuaded that he will preach in the chapel of Rowland Hill." He also made the boy promise to learn Cowper's hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform," and to see that it was sung when he preached in Rowland Hill's chapel. Charles solemnly promised. Rowland Hill, a stalwart of Nonconformity, exercised a powerful ministry at Surrey Chapel in London, where great crowds gathered to hear him. Years later, when a famous preacher himself, Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached in Rowland Hill's pulpit and, filled with emotion, told the story of his boyhood and Mr. Knill's prophecy. "To me," he declared, "it was a very wonderful thing, and I no more understood at that time how it could come to pass than I understand today why the Lord should be so gracious to me." Cowper's hymn was sung.

In the autumn of 1849 Charles, aged fifteen, went to Newmarket, Cambridgeshire, to the school of Mr. John Swindell. Here he was an *usher*, the old phrase for an assistant teacher, and made good progress in his studies of Greek, Latin, and philosophy, as well as helping in the teaching of the younger children. In the school debates he astonished his hearers by the agility of his mind and his grasp of the essential points of any argument.

But what of his religious life? For some considerable time, it would seem, he was under strong spiritual stress. The Spirit was stirring him in his quest for a real knowledge of God and salvation. The sermons he heard, the Puritan authors he was reading—like Goodwin's *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*—made a deep impression on him, and planted in him the deep desire for a first-hand knowledge of the truth of the Gospel in personal experience. Sin was a reality; he longed for Christ and His grace to be a reality also. Long afterwards he wrote:

Let none despise the stirrings of the Spirit in the hearts of the young, let not boyish anxieties and juvenile repentances be lightly regarded. I, at least, can bear my personal testimony to the fact that grace operates on some minds at a period almost too early for recollection. When but





*Thomas Goodwin*

young in years I felt much sorrow for sin. Day and night God's hand was heavy on me. If I slept at night I dreamed of the bottomless pit, and when I awoke I seemed to feel the misery I had dreamed. Up to God's house I went; my song was but a sigh. To my chamber I retired, and there, with tears and groans, I offered up my prayer without a hope and without a refuge, for God's law was flogging me with its two-tongued whip, and then rubbing me with brine afterwards, so that I did shake and quiver with pain and anguish.

It was my sad lot to feel the greatness of my sin without a discovery of the greatness of God's mercy. I had to walk through this world with more than a world upon my shoulders, and I wonder to this day how it was that my hand was kept from rending my own body in pieces through the awful agony which I felt when I discovered the greatness of my transgression. I used to say, "If God does not send me to hell, He

ought to do it." I sat in judgment upon myself and pronounced the sentence that I felt would be just. I could not have gone to heaven with my sin unpardoned, even if I had the offer to do it, for I justified God in my own conscience, while I condemned myself.

The Law had truly entered into his conscience with convicting power, that it might act as "a schoolmaster to lead him to Christ." Yet he seemed no nearer an experience of saving grace. "Yet the simplest of all matters—believing in Christ crucified, accepting His finished salvation, being nothing and letting Him be everything, doing nothing but trusting to what He has done—I could not get hold of it."

When I was in the hands of the Holy Spirit under conviction of sin, I had a clear and sharp sense of the justice of God. Sin, whatever it might be to other people, became to me an intolerable burden. It was not so much that I feared hell as that I feared sin; and all the while I had upon my mind a deep concern for the honor of God's name, and the integrity of His moral government. I felt that it would not satisfy my conscience if I could be forgiven unjustly.

Pondering this, we may well consider whether in our modern age, and with our modern evangelism, that we have not stressed enough the fact of sin, the transgression of God's Law, and the necessity for repentance as well as faith. A cheap and superficial solution to the moral ills of man will produce shallow and unstable believers. We are in danger of trying to heal the moral and spiritual hurt of man slightly. Appeals to people to "decide for Christ," without making them thoroughly aware of their sins, and God's judgment on their sins, and without calling for real repentance, is not the Gospel preaching of the New Testament. The "law-work" in the soul, pressed home by the Puritans and by Whitefield and Edwards, produced deep and convinced believers.

Sometimes the young Spurgeon was under the grip of blasphemous thoughts straight from the devil; at another time he was pressed by lustful desires; at yet another time he even persuaded himself that he was an atheist. There is not a little of John Bunyan's tormenting experience as recorded in *Grace Abounding* in the early spiritual experiences of Charles Spurgeon. But Pilgrim was soon to lose his burden.

In the household of the Newmarket school was a cook, Mary King, a stout old Calvinist of deep religious feelings and strong grasp of the truth. When Spurgeon came under the agony of conviction he sought her counsel. Greatly did she help him—another influence pointing

him onward to the Light. “A cook taught me theology!” he used to say in later years. And massive theology too!

His spiritual crisis became intense.

I cried to God with groanings—I say it without exaggeration—groanings that cannot be uttered! and, oh, how I sought in my poor dark way, to overcome first one sin and then another, and so to do better, in God’s strength, against the enemies that assailed me, and not, thank God, without success, though still the battle had been lost unless He had come who is the Overcomer of Sin, and the Deliverer of His people, and had put the hosts to flight.

He had, he tells us, become faint, overcome with dread, full of penitence of heart, by reason of two related thoughts—“God’s majesty, and my sinfulness.” Back home at Colchester for the Christmas holidays, he went questing to various churches seeking Gospel light. He found none, and none of the preachers helped him. One reason for his failure, undoubtedly, was the fact that he held on to his own self-sufficiency, instead of resting entirely on Christ. Another reason was the character of the preaching that he heard. He said:

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 preach the Gospel. I mean by that they preached truths, great 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.*

No wonder, in years to come, he was to urge his students that in every sermon there should be something of the Gospel. Deliverance and salvation came to him at length, but only when “God gave me the effectual blow, and I was obliged to submit to that irresistible effort of His grace.” God took the initiative in his conversion, as He always does in every true conversion.

Spurgeon’s surrender to irresistible grace happened thus. On Sunday, January 6, 1850, a snowy day, he rose before sunrise to pray and read his Bible. But he found no rest for his soul. Later in the morning, with the snow coming down more heavily, he set out for a certain Colchester church recommended by his mother. The fury of the storm, however, compelled him to turn down a side street and, coming upon the Primitive Methodist<sup>10</sup> Church in Artillery Street, he decided to go no further, and turned into the little chapel. It was not the place of his choice, as Dr. W. Y. Fullerton remarks, but it was the place of God’s

choice. It was the day of deliverance after five weary years in the shadows. There were only fifteen people in the congregation who had braved the snowstorm. Even the appointed minister was snowed up, and the preacher, a thin man with no pretense to education, who could hardly read the Bible aright, entered the pulpit and spoke a few words on the text “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 45:22). As Spurgeon himself, who had a remarkable memory, recalled it in a sermon in March 1861 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle:

Blessed be God for that poor local preacher. He read his text. It was as much as he could do. The text was: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” He was an ignorant man, he could not say much; he was obliged to keep to his text. Thank God for that. He began: “Look, that is not hard work. You need not lift your hand, you do not want to lift your finger. *Look*, a fool can do it. It does not need a wise man to look. A child can do that. It don’t need to be full-grown to use your eyes. *Look*, a poor man may do that, no need of riches to look. *Look*, how simple.” Then he went on: “Look unto *Me*. Do not look to yourselves, but look to *Me*, that is Christ. Do not look to God the Father to know whether you are elected or not, you shall find that out afterwards; look to *Me*, look to Christ. Do not look to God the Holy Spirit to know whether He has called you or not; that you shall discover by and by. Look unto Jesus Christ.” And then he went on to put it in his simple way thus: Look unto *Me*; I am sweating great drops of blood for you; look unto *Me*, I am scourged and spit upon; I am nailed to the cross, I die, I am buried, I rise and ascend, I am pleading before the Father’s throne, and all this for you.

Now that simple way of putting the Gospel had enlisted my attention, and a ray of light had poured into my heart. Stooping down, he looked under the gallery and said: “Young man, you are very miserable.” So I was, but I had not been accustomed to be addressed in that way. “Ah,” said he, “and you will always be miserable if you don’t do as my text tells you; and that is, Look unto Christ.” And then he called out, with all his might, “Young man, look; in God’s name look, and look now. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live.” I did look, blessed be God! I know I looked then and there; and

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10. This denomination grew out of the “camp-meeting” movement which was introduced into England by the spectacular wilderness evangelist Lorenzo Dow from America. The Primitive Methodists claimed to return to the *perfectionism* and *evangelism* of John Wesley, both of which they have preserved in their creed but abandoned in practice.

he who but that minute ago had been near despair, had the fullness of joy and hope.

In a moment Charles saw the way of salvation and entered into eternal life. He believed, and was at once engraced into Christ.

The cloud was gone, the darkness rolled away, and in that moment I saw the sun. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard the word Look, I could almost have looked my eyes away. I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith that looks alone to Him.

I thought I could dance all the way home. I could understand what John Bunyan meant when he declared he wanted to tell all the crows on the plowed land about his conversion.... Between half past ten, when I entered that chapel and half-past twelve, when I returned home, what a change had taken place in me!

That same evening he went with his mother to the Baptist Chapel at Colchester, and heard a helpful, heartwarming sermon on the text, "Accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). It did much for his assurance of pardon and peace. That same night, when the younger children had gone to bed, Charles told his father of his conversion that morning, and late into the night father and son spoke together of the mighty work of grace on the soul, and of the all-sufficiency of Christ to save and keep and bless.

In the new fervor of his conversion, Charles began to read the Bible with redoubled eagerness. Before long he was convinced that believers were commanded to be baptized by immersion. Writing to his father on the subject after his return to Newmarket, and asking permission to be thus baptized, he said, "From the Scripture, is it not apparent that, immediately upon receiving the Lord Jesus, it is a part of duty to openly profess Him? I firmly believe and consider that baptism is the command of Christ, and shall not feel comfortable if I do not receive it." To his mother he wrote, "Conscience has convinced me that it is a duty to be buried with Christ in baptism, although I am sure that it constitutes no part of salvation." The Catechism of the Church of England also convinced him on this point. He had never even heard of Baptists until he was fourteen, and had heard no sermons on believers' baptism.

He now looked around for a Baptist minister to baptize him. The nearest one was the Rev. W. W. Cantlow of Isleham, a former missionary in Jamaica. On May 3, 1850, his mother's birthday, when he was almost sixteen, he rose early for prayer and walked the eight miles to

Isleham Ferry where the Baptismal Service had been arranged to take place. Here the beautiful River Lark flows on its way, dividing Suffolk from Cambridgeshire. It was a Friday, but a goodly number of believers and others had assembled to watch on either shore. Two women were also baptized with Spurgeon, Eunice Fuller and Diana Wilkinson, who ever after delighted in the honor of having been baptized with the Prince of Preachers. The wind was cold, and the river colder still, but Charles's joy in his Lord was at white heat as he was immersed by Mr. Cantlow in the Name of the Trinity, on profession of his faith. From that day Spurgeon ever held believers' baptism in high esteem, and constantly preached its meaning and validity.

That evening was spent at a prayer meeting in the Isleham vestry. The newly baptized boy prayed amongst the rest, and it is recorded that "people wondered and wept for joy as they listened." He returned to Newmarket, and on the following Sunday sat down at the Lord's Table. Before long he was a teacher in the Sunday School. He also found time to become an energetic distributor of tracts (no doubt some of Mr. Knill's fourteen million), calling usually at about seventy houses on a



*Isleham Ferry, Cambridgeshire, where Spurgeon was baptized*

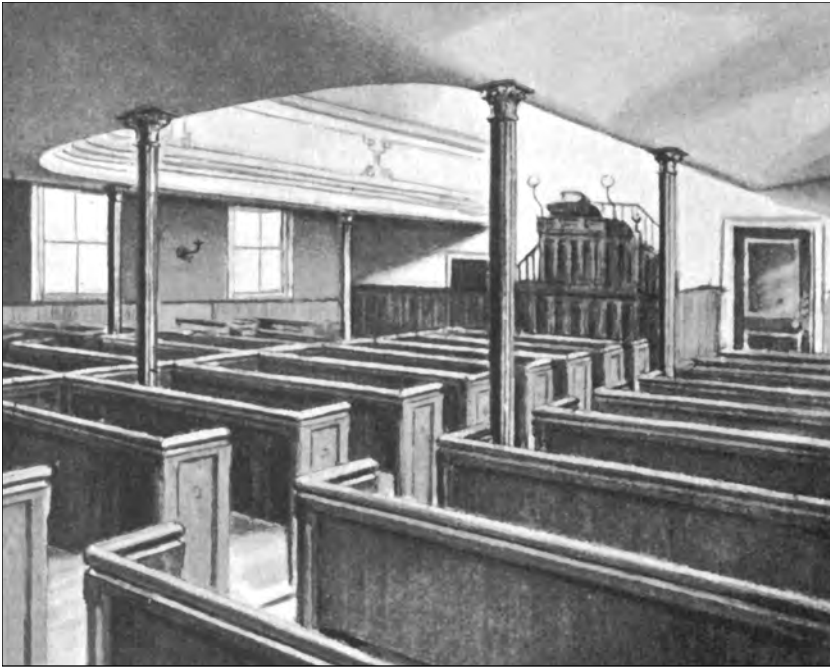
Saturday afternoon. He was ready to bear testimony by word of mouth also. Seeing a Christian whom he knew about to enter a dancing booth at a village fair, he went up to him and exclaimed, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" The appeal was fruitless, but thus early his Puritan emphasis was evident.

Paul was his hero. In his diary for May 9th he wrote, "Make me to be an eminent servant of Thine, and to be blessed with power to serve Thee like unto Thy great servant Paul." The prayer was abundantly answered. This diary was given to his wife soon after their marriage, with the request that it should not be opened until after his death. She did not open it until 1896, four years after his death. Where is it now? It would be worth a king's ransom! Other extracts may be given: on April 22nd, he wrote, "Went this evening to the prayer-meeting; engaged in prayer. Why should I fear to speak of my only Friend? I shall not be timid another time." At other times he wrote, "Life of my soul, forgive me when I am so blind as to look on an earthly object, and forget Thy divine beauties; Desire of my heart, keep me nearer Thy bosom; Pride is yet my darling sin; Lord, give me much of a Berean nobility."

One final extract from this diary sets the young convert before us as one fully yielded to his Savior: "I vow to glory alone in Jesus, and His cross, and to spend my life in the extension of His cause, in whatsoever way He pleases. I desire to be sincere in this solemn profession, having but one object in view, and that to glorify God. Help me to honor Thee, and live the life of Christ on earth!" How he fulfilled this desire his whole career gloriously shows.

His first public address, apart from Sunday School talks, was at a missionary meeting in September 1849 and was given at his school. It is recalled by one who heard him that "he spoke fluently." He had been accustomed to missionary activities and to hearing missionaries from his earliest days, and missionary work on sound Gospel lines ever gained his warm interest and support. Indeed, at one time in his early London ministry, he seriously considered whether he was not called to preach Christ in China.

Today, the visitor to the little Methodist Chapel in Artillery Street, Colchester, may read on a tablet these words: "Near this spot C. H. Spurgeon looked and lived." There was the beginning of the great Metropolitan Tabernacle ministry. There was the fountain-head of that



*The Interior of the Artillery Street Methodist Chapel*

mighty river of God of which multitudes in all parts of the world drank and were refreshed.

“Let preachers study this story,” recommends Sir William Robertson Nicoll, the great Free Church leader, and former Editor of the *British Weekly*; “Let them believe that under the most adverse circumstances, they may do a good work that will tell on the universe for ever. It was a great thing to have converted Charles Haddon Spurgeon; and who knows but he may have in the smallest and humblest congregation in the world some lad as well worth converting as was he?”