

C. H. Spurgeon.—An Analysis of the Great Preacher's Power.

BY H. F. ADAMS, TRURO, N. S.

If I do not succeed in unlocking all the secrets of the unparalleled success of the great man as a preacher, it will be because there is always an element in Christ-trained preachers, that defies interpretation.

I. THREE HUMAN ELEMENTS OF HIS POWER :

(1). His extraordinary voice. I mention this attribute of his power first, not because it is the most important factor in every speaker's success, but because it occupied such a prominent place in his more than royal sway over immense congregations for a period of 38 years. With all his brain powers, his executive ability, his magnetic personality, and his untiring industry, he never could have accomplished such gigantic tasks, and have attained such cosmopolitan fame, without the magnificent might of his rich, round, rolling voice. By it he could express tones of deepest tenderness, or the roar of tremendous indignation; but whichever office it performed, the hearer was completely bewitched by its wonderful charm. It could wind its way, like a silver rivulet, into a prejudiced mind, till false pre-judgments were almost unconsciously smoothed away; and it could dash and crash like the falls of Niagara, till opposition was borne down, like a straw before a mighty current.

I once heard him preach a sermon titled, "The unknown ways of love," and how that voice seemed to weep? How it transferred with striking accuracy the current of deep sympathy from the preacher's heart to the hearts of his hearers. How it travelled tremulously on its errand of love, till it entered all hearts, and broke up the fountain of everyone's emotions. I have heard him arraign injustice, denounce wrongs, and warn sinners of coming judgment, and oh! how that voice thundered; how its tones struck the sound waves, which rolling and swelling till the very pillars in the great Tabernacle seemed to tremble, and an awe indescribable filled every soul. During the delivery of sermons of this class it was no uncommon thing to see perspiration standing on people's foreheads, and expressions of fear marking everyone's countenance, as if some awful calamity were about to happen.

In his earlier days his voice had much greater volume than in later years. On October 7, 1857, (the day of National Humiliation for the Indian Mutiny), Mr. Spurgeon preached, by request, a commemorative sermon in the centre transept of the Crystal Palace to 23,000 people. In May 1867, (while the Tabernacle was being repaired) he preached for five Sabbath mornings in the Great Agricultural Hall, London, which was crowded each time with not less than 20,000 persons. And he has made 12,000 people hear him in the open air. During his last ten or fifteen years his physical weakness was such that he had to limit the tones of his voice. Instead of forked lightning, (which his voice resembled in former days), it might latterly be compared to bottled electricity, which with less display, yet with unerring accuracy, flowed forth in a perpetual current of power. Though sickness and experience mellowed both him and his voice, so that he was more a great teacher, than the great preacher of former days, yet it was a grand sight to see and hear the Tabernacle Lion roar. For at times the slumbering fires leapt forth, when righteous indignation needed to be voiced. Then the man of 55 recalled the days, when his voice rolled with earthquake power among his hearers.

I do not say he was the equal of John B. Gough in the flexibility and imitiveness of his vocal powers, but few people knew what a variety of tones Mr. Spurgeon could produce with his voice. In one of his college lectures titled "The Voice," I have heard him reproduce the defects of voices, he warned us not to cultivate or imitate; from the sonorous Johnstorian, to the squeaky and effeminate voice. Elocutionists in London taught their pupils all they knew of voice culture, then sent them to the Tabernacle to see and hear one of the greatest masters of voice-power of this century. Let it not be supposed that because nature endowed Mr. Spurgeon with the great volume of voice-power he possessed, that therefore he was the polished orator he was. But as he told us in his "college talks," he had to bestow much labor on the culture of the gift, in order to bring it under much perfect control, which like a well-trained horse, was obedient to the will of its owner.

Of movements in the pulpit, Mr. Spurgeon never had many. He never raved, or clapped his hands, nor pounded the Bible, but was the stillest orator of the highest order, I ever heard. All the silly stories about his gestures and jumpings; sliding down baluster rails, and climbing up pulpit stairs, were retailed in Rowland Hill's day before Mr. Spurgeon was born. When he was preaching one could think of nothing but the sermon, the man was wholly hidden behind his theme. I remember sitting behind a lady in the steep seats of the first gallery, when forgetful of everything but the discourse, my head gradually lowered till my chin touched the lady's bonnet. On recovering myself, of course I felt very silly, and apologized to the person, but I doubt not many a man has also transgressed in the

same direction, because of his forgetfulness of everything but the theme of the sermon, and the fascination of that extraordinary voice.

(2). I next place in order the manner of his preaching. From his youth up, this had been what is popularly called extemporaneous. That is, using a brief outline containing main and sub-divisions of the thought or thoughts evolved from the text or passage of Scripture under consideration; then filling it up verbally when in the pulpit. When our Lord ascended the mountain, and had sat down, "he opened his mouth," not a manuscript. And nearly all the greatest preachers have followed the Mountain Preacher's style of opening the mouth, and letting flow forth the ripened thought of the heart, clothed with language suggested at the moment. This was eminently the style of the greatest preacher of the 19th century, and is a source of power to which sermon readers must be strange. Mr. Spurgeon could not make 7000 people hear him read a sermon, even if they were before him. For the position of the head in reading, causes the voice to strike the sounds waves downward, which could not, therefore, travel onward and upward filling such a vast space as 7000 hearers would require. But supposing 7000 people could have heard him once, they would not have continued to attend his church, for there would have been lacking that personal magnetism that flashes forth from the human eye; and that tremulous power that accompanies the words of the earnest extemporaneous preacher. And these being wanting, the link between so vast an audience and the preacher would be gone. Of course a very effective sermon reader may hold a smaller audience together, of which Dr. Thomas Chalmers, and Jonathan Edwards are excellent samples.

It is interesting to see Dr. Dale, of England, fill a church of some 1500 every Sabbath for more than a score of years; and it was more interesting to see Canon Liddon draw 2000 people to hear him read in St. Paul's Cathedral. But it must be remembered that these famous sermon readers had other attractions in the churches of a musical, ritualistic, and architectural character, which greatly aided to draw hearers. Whereas Mr. Spurgeon stood alone in a great plain Tabernacle, with carpetless floor, and cushionless seats. No organ of any kind, and no choir of any size or sort were heard there, to attract and fascinate lovers of elaborate music. It was one of the greatest marvels of this age of change, that for 38 years this solitary man held together the largest audiences consecutively, in the world, by the simple might of extemporaneous gospel preaching.

(To be concluded in next issue.)

The Material to be Worked Upon by the Sabbath School Teacher.

BY REV. J. H. SAUNDERS.

As it is of the first importance that the artisan shall undertake his work with a full knowledge of the material on which he is to operate, as well as to be correct in his ideals of the end sought, so is it necessary for the Sabbath School teachers to have like qualification for the work they have in hand. It may be that much of the disappointment and failure in our Sabbath School effort has originated in a misconception of the child nature and the child life; even where the ideal Christian character sought for the pupil has been quite faultless. Nor should this—if it be true—be a matter of great surprise; for in all the realm of thought and research there is not found a more intricate subject than is human nature in its early days.

The reason of this is not far to seek.

a. Good and evil are together mysteriously ingrained in the child nature. In some cases the evil is so completely veiled that wise ones tell us that it is not there at all, and they quote the Christ in evidence of their assertion.

Then the most beautiful and the best of human character is seen in the child, and we love it, and sometimes we worship it. With consummate skill parental love cloaks, and it may be endeavors to choke the first dim dawning of natural and normal, moral defects. The most perfect little tots are sent to the Sabbath School. It must not be overlooked that good and evil are both in embryo in childhood. The good may dominate and the evil may elude the keenest search of the Sabbath School Teacher.

b. Then heredity and environment have to be reckoned with. Where these are most favorable the better principle may have the control in child life.

c. Nor is psychology or kindred sciences infallible guides to the Sabbath School teacher in this matter. These may afford valuable assistance such as no teacher ought to reject if it be within their reach; but it must be remembered that science is yet only on the threshold of facts, in the realm of the physical and mental characteristics of the child. Into the realm of the spiritual, into which the Sunday School teacher must enter and labor, science is not in authority. Here it can at its best only aspire to a servat's place.

The author of salvation must hold supreme dictation here.

Startling surprises await Sunday School teachers who enter upon their work, even with pious intent, if their equipment be human theories of child nature and child culture. Under these conditions the most hopeful little saint may at an advanced period, cruelly put at fault all prophesy of its future, and explain to poor advantage its Sabbath School training.

Emphasis must ever rest on the religiousness of all Sabbath School endeavor. The salvation of the scholar—the highest type of spiritual life is the true ideal here. This brings us face to face with the one great fact suggested by the word salvation.

THE CHILD IS A SINNER.

Of this fact the Sabbath School teacher must not be in ignorance. This is a fact that science—it may be wisely—makes no attempt to explain. Sometimes it very unwisely attempts to deny this sad fact.

It is also noticeable that in the normal training provided for our workers this fact of sin finds no great prominence. Some text books are quite colorless; and other methods of work are a denial of the fact in so far as they appear to succeed. It is only as they fail that testimony to this truth is given.

Sabbath School workers as

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cannot attain to a respectable efficiency if they stand in doubt on this doctrine. This fellowship of toil puts God in authority at the commencement of all proper Sabbath School effort. Whatever besides this the teacher may or may not know of the child, or of the lessons to be taught, he must know of the spiritual conditions of child life, and of the relation of this to Christian manhood and womanhood, as the author of life has revealed it, and our history testifies of it. In the Sabbath School the Bible—which is not only a revelation of the Divine nature, but of human nature as well, and so of child nature—must be in authority in all that is wrought or implied in child culture. What the child should be taught—how it should be taught and why it should be taught and trained for the future, must all be gathered from this one text-book.

Do I need an apology for placing great emphasis on the sinfulness of child life? If so I find it in the present trend of religious thought, which evidently overlooks this sad fact. And I may be allowed to add just here, that the very few saved sinners by the grace of God in our churches to-day, and the alarming absence of repentance among the most notorious backsliders, indicates that the doctrine of human depravity is not much in evidence with us. In fact the consciousness of sin, which the Holy Spirit begets in human hearts, is all but an unknown factor in the religious experience of these times. The absence of the conviction of sin has in all ages been an indication of the hellward trend. Why should it be otherwise in our day?

That we may not be in doubt on this subject, so far as our children are concerned, you will allow me now to put in evidence the testimony of three witnesses, "that in the mouth of two or three" this fact of sin in child life may be established.

1. The Testimony of Scripture.—A few passages must suffice.

Behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.

The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born speaking lies.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee ye must be born again.

"As in Adam all die, etc." By grace ye are saved—Salvation by grace cannot apply to the sinless.

2. The Testimony of the Creeds.—This fact of sin in the child is based on the dogma or doctrine of infant baptism. The church of Rome teaches baptismal regeneration, as the only hope of the salvation of the infant. The Church of England teaches, that the infant in baptism is regenerated, and exhorts its members to observe this ordinance to this end. The Presbyterian church declares the child in a state of sin. In the (Westminster) "Confession of Faith" (Cap. 10 Sec. 3.) it says, "elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth." In the Declaration of its Doctrines and Discipline the Methodist church says (Ar. vii) of original sin. "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam—but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil and that continually." Add to this the demand of the Baptist Faith for a regenerate church membership and the proper observance of ordinances, and we have quite a complete and harmonious testimony of the Christian church to the fact that the child is in need of salvation by the grace of God. This consensus of the creeds, and the plain teaching of the Word of God, should leave the Sabbath school worker in no uncertainty as to the character and needs of every scholar.

3. In the testimony of child life, as it advances, we have a proof of sin more convincing to some minds and appealing more directly to Sabbath school workers than those before mentioned.

While in the history of our Sabbath schools there is so much to encourage further effort—so much of real success to be thankful for—we must not be unmindful of some of the dark pages of human history for which we have furnished the material. We rejoice greatly that we have graduated from our schools into our churches many faithful laborers, and have largely increased the efficiency of its several ministries. But from our Sabbath schools there have gone up to our churches young men and young women who have been a burden and a disgrace, when they should have been an ornament and glory, and towers of strength in our Zions; and these not from the low slum classes only, but from the homes of our wealthiest and most respectable citizens.

When it is known that our Sabbath schools are represented in our criminal institutions, and even on the lists of those who have suffered capital punishment for the foulest crimes their names are found. In any of these sad instances have we failed because we did not properly

recognize the ing? Because suspect the a failed to work alarming fact these sad fact ers in our Sab duties with o ments can aff of a religious hope of succe curse of sin i ed; and this but by the t above, we will of our Sabba blessing of G

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