

## Spurgeon's Dilemma.

BY REV. FRANK B. STEEPER.

An exceedingly fascinating and remarkable event is narrated in the autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon. It was Saturday evening, the time for the preparation of his Sunday forenoon sermon. He had chosen his text. It was Psalm 110: 1. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power in the beauty of holiness from the womb of the morning; thou hast the dew of thy youth." But for once the great and gifted mind was balked. He could not get to the heart of his text and elaborate the plan for his discourse that should be satisfactory and forcible. He sat up late at his work, but accomplished nothing, and retired to bed very much despirited. During the night his wife heard him talking in his sleep. He was giving a clear and definite exposition of his text. Her ears and memory were keenly alert to receive and retain the plan of his sermon. She says, "Never preacher had a more eager and anxious hearer." In the morning she told him all that he had spoken in his sleep. He was utterly astonished and could hardly credit her words. He exclaimed, "Why, that is just what I have wanted! That is the true explanation of the whole verse." And that Sunday forenoon he preached one of his best sermons from the plan he had talked in his sleep.

Spurgeon's autobiography is marvelous in its fascinating power. It shows how God has ordained his specially gifted preachers. The divine revelations come to them by visions and dreams or by a lightning flash of the Holy Ghost. The eye sees instantly into the hidden meaning of a text and its application to the needs of the soul. How grand the inspiration, where a Spurgeon in each discourse has the power to wield all thoughts, all passions, all delights; and to hear his audience trembling and enraptured with him in his heavenly flight. Such a man is more than earthly king, and has higher honor. Preachers of supreme ability work with great rapidity. They often formulate a sermon in an hour. But it is not a careless production. The plan will be unique—the thought deep and rich; the sentences concise and often brilliant; the metaphors grand and fitting; and the discourse will have a marvelous moving power because of its pure wisdom and freshness.

It was said of Dr. John A. Broadus that he was "both the collocation and the despair of young ministers. His sermons, quickly prepared and delivered without any notes, were simple, profound, and wonderfully magnetic with their revelations of pure gospel truth. The audience hung spellbound on the gorgeous words from his lips." He was the orator, quiet, powerful, clear and abundant; his thought was level and his language flowing and elegant; never wearisome to his congregation. But are there not important suggestions to ordinary preachers from these men of divine eloquence? If God spoke to Spurgeon in his sleep may not we look for special revelations in some way? Will it be in vain that we have the holy fire burning in our hearts as he did in his?

There is a right and a wrong imitation of noted men. Study Spurgeon, preacher, Phillips Brooks and Joseph Parker. They were great because they were great workers. They did not expect the slightest benefit from laziness. Little do we understand the mighty intensity of their constant toil. The following concerning Spurgeon contains volumes of meaning: "All of his days were great days in hardest work. He despised the ministerial drone. He was constantly seeking for large and new thought for future use. His ambition from the first was to be a preacher of unbounded resources. Given the mighty fountain on a mountain top, and the stream comes with no effort whatever. Spurgeon was at one time asked the question, 'If you were appointed one year ahead to preach a special sermon how long would you take to prepare that discourse?' He answered: 'I would wait 364 days and twenty-three hours and then arrange my sermon.' An ordinary preacher undertaking this would make a fool of himself. But behind this one hour preparation of Spurgeon's discourse lay his matchless and boundless resources of carefully acquired thought. He dare not waste the slightest portion of his time. It was too precious in God's sight."

It is a grand gift to prepare a sermon quickly that shall be fresh, thorough, magnetic, and all on fire. But we must pay the price of this in the most careful and exhaustive study every day. Thoroughly to analyze deep and rich thought and to hold it in memory for future demand is the great work of the preacher. He must be a sermon builder of time. All of God and Bible and nature and human experience should be the vast tributaries from which he draws. Mrs. Spurgeon gives a forcible picture of her husband: A man of constant stimulus and quickening of the mind. Hour by hour he was seeking for original illustrations for sermons, for side lights on texts, for metaphors and parables whereby the hearts of his hearers might be impressed. The result of this careful painstaking was the ability to preach great spiritual discourses continually. His holy ambition was that his mind should be a treasure house of jewels for the sanctuary. His sermons were not roid or formal. They burned with fire from God's altar. A severe critic listening to Spurgeon for the first time said: "The discourse did not sound studied, but was full of the most inspiring oratory. I could not detect the least weakness or the slightest hesitation of his flowing and simple eloquence." What an

example to other preachers! The duty of never ceasing work in the study. It is unto such faithful ministers that God comes with visions and dreams and sudden illustrations.

Surely of all preachers Spurgeon was put to the most critical test, to have in his audience at times "the Prime Minister and statesmen and nobles and great divines." These were listening with a hypercritical spirit. Every mistake or weakness would be noted and bruited abroad. Then to have John Ruskin, the keenest of all critics, himself the master of a picturesque Saxon style, one of the glories of modern English literature, as a frequent attendant. Did Spurgeon quail before those searching eyes? To have such a mighty intellect as a hearer. To know that every faintest error or wrong shading of thought would be detected. Yet Spurgeon knew that he had been so sloven in his preparatory work. He had come with "well-beaten oil to the sanctuary." He was giving his best unto God and humanity. And he completely won the heart of sturdy old John Ruskin. The great man and great author loved Spurgeon with the deepest affection. He found in him a royal manhood, an indefatigable student, a fearless preacher and a prophet with giant powers of devotion and success. It is a tender picture that Mrs. Spurgeon gives when her husband was sick and Mr. Ruskin came to see him. Mr. Ruskin threw himself on his knees at Spurgeon's side and said, "My brother, my dear brother, how grieved I am to see you thus." It was the tribute of a large soul unto one of God's noblemen.

Spurgeon prized what we should all prize, the watchful, critical eye in his congregation. It was because of this that he bound Ruskin to his heart. It was not the honeyed words of praise that the great preacher valued the highest. He knew that the pulpit demanded the very best that mind or soul could give. To have a man of great intellect watching him in all the progress of his prayers and sermons; to know that every slightest fault of thought or language would be exposed to such keen critical judgment—this might prove the crucible of intense suffering unto others. Perhaps it was to Spurgeon. But it was also the glorious assurance of a higher and finer style of pulpit work. If possible he would have attained heaven's oratory that he might win souls to Christ.

Why should the preacher be sensitive to honest criticism? He is only human and fallible. And a virtue is a greater virtue to us if we have to suffer and fight for it. To have a person of large intellect in the audience capable, kind, honest and thorough, and then to hold full communion with such a soul is the greatest possible blessing. If we do not see our own faults and overcome them they will be marshaled against us. The public is both kind and severe. There is no man put to the test as the preacher. Spurgeon was continually a growing man. This was noted and spoken of. If he became conscious of a fault in speaking he never committed that fault again. He aimed at perfection. An educated Englishman said to me, "Spurgeon was by far the finest speaker in England." I referred to Gladstone. He answered, "Yes, I have heard Gladstone over and over again. I greatly admired him. But for genuine spontaneous eloquence with every thought and word in just the right place Spurgeon was the superior. His progress was phenomenal in pure, deep wisdom and beauty of diction."

Thank God for such a life, unattainable as it is by the ordinary preacher. How it thrills and enlarges the soul with a view of an ideal ministry. To look on a human star of the first magnitude reveals what the Lord may accomplish among the sons of men. It arouses a larger ambition. It stimulates to intenser work. It gives a grander conception of our high and holy calling. The motto of Spurgeon's college with the picture of the cross was "Et teneo et teneor, I hold and am held." We follow after according to the same divine law and passion.—The Standard.

## Our Pulpit.

THE GIFT THAT BRINGS ALL GIFTS.

BY REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.

"He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall he not with Him also freely give us all things."—Rom. 8:32.

I begin my remarks by asking you to think of (1) That Mysterious Divine surrender which is here shadowed for us. There may, in some manner inconceivable to us, but which we are not warranted dogmatically to declare impossible, have flitted across the Divine mind some shadowy resemblance to what paternal love on earth would certainly involve, the sense of—may I use the word?—loss. Or even may we go further, and with all consciousness of the inapplicability of the terms, yet I say something that was almost like what we call pain, when the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. The stars cast tremulous, faint reflections on the sea, and there may be in Abraham's wrung heart some shadowy adumbration of the Father's when "He spared not His own Son." I say more than "may be," but even the possibility ought to make us feel how great, how heart-touching is the appeal that word makes to us, when so considered.

But I turn from that, which I dare say may appear fanciful to many of my hearers, even if not dogmatically incor-

rect, and come upon the surer ground of the other words here which describe the great surrender. Notice how it is enhanced by making very emphatic the relationship between the Father and the Son. "He that spared not His own Son." However people may be disposed—and a great many folks are very much disposed at present—to draw down, as far as possible, to a level of earth the significance of that name applied to Jesus Christ, and to empty it as far as possible of its loftiest contents, we cannot in view of the mighty words of my text, help giving the name as here used, its highest possible signification. It will not do to say that it means only "a Son of God," as all men are sons. It will not do to say that it is only a synonym for "the Jewish conception of the Messiah." No; it is a great deal more than either the one or the other, or there would be no power in the Apostle's great thought, "He that spared not His own Son." It flings us back to the historical incident—for I believe it to be historical—to which I have already said the allusion is made, when we read: "Thy Son; thine only Son." It points to community of nature, and it tells us that Jesus Christ stands to the Divine Paternity in a relation altogether solitary and high above the relation in which other men stand. He is the Son, and that in an altogether unique and special sense, else there would be no force in the words, the great words of my text.

Notice, again, how this Divine mysterious act of surrender is intensified by the combination, in the words of our text, of the negative and positive sides. "He that spared not," or did not "withhold." . . . But that is not all. . . . "delivered Him up for us all." "He gave His Son," is something more. The language of true devotion towards God is, "I will not offer unto the Lord that which costs me nothing." May we not say, the language of the Eternal Father to His wayward, sinful children is, "I will not give to you that which costs Me nothing." He "spared not," "gave up."

And then mark how, still further, the greatness, and how wonderfulness, and heart-touchingness of this Divine, mysterious surrender is deepened by the contemplation of the one motive for it—Delivered Him up for us all." Paul does not need for the purpose in hand, to define how that surrender benefitted humanity. His point is that, whatever of surrender it involved in the Divine heart, the one motive for it was the benefit of every soul of man. "For us all." God surrendered His Son; for no reason but for pure love to us, to you and to me.

So you will observe that we have here in this text a fresh beam of light on the Divine Love. The work of Jesus Christ is here contemplated from another point of view from that from which it is so often looked at in Scripture. We are accustomed to speak of the mission of Jesus Christ, his pure, sinless beneficent, self-forgetting life, and the miracle and mystery of His self-sacrificing death, as being the great outcome and manifestation of His own love to us, and we cannot too continuously look at it from that point of view. Then there is another point of view which, if we believe, and I hope you do—that "God was in Christ," and that "He that hath seen Jesus Christ, hath seen the Father," we can regard Christ's death as revealing God's love. "He comprehended His love towards us in that, whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," and we cannot think too much of it from that point of view. Christ's life, with all its gracious deeds, and that triumphant death which, in one aspect, is a revelation to us all of a love "greater than which"—or nearly as great as which—"no man hath," is also a revelation to us—because of the union between Christ and God—of the Father's heart of love. But here we have a third point of view, and we bow before the miracle of Divine love; not merely because Christ's mission reveals Christ's heart, not merely because in revealing Christ's heart it reveals God's heart, but because for a moment they are considered as separate; and that the wills of the Father and of the Son are considered as separate; and the Father gives, and gives up, the Son for the redemption of the world. Now, brethren, ere we can understand aright the unspeakable gift of God, or render to Him due thanks for it, we must unite all three aspects; the mission of Christ as the revelation of His love, the mission of Christ as the revelation of the love of the Father who dwelt in Him, the mission of Christ as the revelation of the love of the Father who gave Him up. And blending the three, we have the white beam of the perfect Son of Righteousness, and when we blend them we know how to say "thanks be to God for His 'unspeakable gift.'" But now turn, in the second place, to—II.—The triumphant question based upon this mysterious surrender. "How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" The answer to that question can only be a yet more triumphant "He will give us all things," and it requires only the belief in the unchangeableness of the Divine resources, the uniformity of the Divine purpose. If we admit these things, then clearly, and without possibility of evasion, the conclusion that the Apostle seeks to establish flows to us in all the fulness of its consolation and its power.

For it must be so, inasmuch as, for one thing, the greater gift implies the less. If we believe, as I say, in the unchangeableness of the Divine love, and the exhaustlessness of the Divine resources, then we do not need to fear that the failure which attends human gifts will ever apply to Him. We sometimes lavish so much that we have no more to give. We sometimes weary in sacrifices. But with Him