

Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon

by Jennie Chappell

Chapter 1.—'When Love Took Up the Harp of Life.'

For all the purposes of the biographer, Mrs. Charles Haddon Spurgeon seems to have begun to live only when her existence came first within the orbit of that wonderful personality by which it was destined thenceforward to be inspired and absorbed.

For twenty-one years Susannah Thompson led a life of such uneventful privacy that of her childhood and youth we have little to relate.

She was the daughter of Mr. Robert Thompson, of Falcon Square, E.C., and with her parents was accustomed to attend New Park Street Chapel, Southwark. Here the chief thing that seems to have impressed her childish mind was the cock-robin-like side-view of the senior deacon, as it was presented to her gaze Sunday after Sunday in the open desk immediately below the pulpit! This was owing to the fact that he was a "short, stout man," who still wore the silk stockings and knee-breeches of a previous generation. His "rotund body, perched on undraped legs, was, moreover, clothed in a long-tailed coat," and "when he chirped out the verses of the hymn in a piping, twittering voice," little Susie thought the likeness complete.

But another object in this memorable place of worship which in the interval between prayers and sermon continually excited the little girl's imagination was, strange to say, that pulpit where hereafter was to rise the sun and glory of her earthly existence.

Without staircase, or visible entrance, this rostrum hung upon the chapel wall like a swallow's nest. "One moment," Mrs. Spurgeon tells us, "the big box would be empty; the next—if I had but glanced down at Bible or hymn-book, and raised my eyes again—there was the preacher, comfortably seated, or standing ready to commence the service! I found it very interesting, and though I knew there was a matter-of-fact door ... this knowledge was not allowed to interfere with, or even explain, the fanciful notions I loved to indulge in concerning that mysterious entrance and exit."

Thus, unheralded and suddenly, on December 18, 1853, young Charles Haddon Spurgeon stepped into that pulpit, and into "little Susie's" life.

He was to preach both morning and evening, with a view to being chosen as permanent pastor of the then vacant church. But although the friends (Mr. and Mrs. Olney) with whom Miss Susie was just then staying went to the forenoon service, the young lady herself did not accompany them, having somewhat of a prejudice against the "boy preacher" on account of his extreme youth, for Charles Spurgeon was at that time not out of his teens.

The morning congregation, however, was so poor, that Mr. Olney, fearing the young stranger might feel discouraged, did all he could to collect a larger gathering for the later service. The Olney family, of course, went in full force, and their guest could not do otherwise than accompany them.

Once again, as so often before, Susie Thompson's expectant gaze was riveted upon the "swallow's nest" pulpit, and into her view there stepped a figure that at first sight gave her a disagreeable shock.

The lad's countrified manner and attire, his loose crop of somewhat unkempt dark hair, a physiognomy that inadequately suggested the mental and spiritual gifts which lay behind, his big, antiquated black satin "stock," and the appalling blue pocket-handkerchief with white spots that he grasped in his hand, all more or less offended the maiden's fastidious taste, and diverted her mind from the unmistakable power and earnestness of the address which he delivered.

Only one phrase of the whole sermon remained in her mind, and that because of its singularity; for he likened the body of Christians to "living stones in the Heavenly Temple perfectly joined together with the *vermilion cement of Christ's blood*"—scarcely an improvement, we venture to think, on the more chaste scriptural symbol which evidently suggested it.

However, Miss Thompson was not so unfavourably impressed by the "boy preacher from Waterbeach" but that she was willing to go and hear him again. Introduced by their mutual friends, the Olneys, she became personally acquainted with him. Gradually her prejudice wore away, and his earnestness began to make an impression on her. Indeed, before very long the pendulum of sentiment had swung so far in an opposite direction from the first aversion, that, Spurgeon being settled at New Park Street Chapel, we find our young lady exerting herself most strenuously to collect money for a proposed enlargement of the building. She got together for this purpose no less than one hundred pounds. This speaks volumes.

It was but four months from the date of Charles Spurgeon's first

appearance at New Park Street, when his acquaintance with Susannah had become sufficiently advanced to permit of his presenting her with a book—of course, to her great surprise.

This volume was an illustrated copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and contained the inscription, "Miss Thompson, with desires for her progress in the blessed pilgrimage, from C. H. Spurgeon, April 20, 1854."

Mrs. Spurgeon in after years declared her belief that the young pastor had at that time no other thought than to help a struggling soul heavenward. But we know how, in pure and ardent natures, the earthly and heavenly love become so readily intertwined and so mutually enkindling that it is oftentimes difficult to perceive the dividing line. We are not unprepared, therefore, to learn that Miss Thompson was "greatly impressed" by Mr. Spurgeon's concern for her, and that "the book became very precious as well as helpful to her soul."

A little later, she was drawn to consult him as to her state before God. Conversations upon her spiritual welfare ensued, and ultimately she is able to record that she was led "through the power of the Holy Spirit to the Cross of Christ for the peace and pardon my weary soul was longing for."

After that, she tells us, she was happier than she had been at any time since the days when, at the Poultry Chapel, her heart had experienced its first stirrings towards the Divine life, and although she little dreamed of the great joy that was speeding towards her, the steady development of a friendship between her and her pastor may have lent its quota to that blessedness of which she speaks.

The intimacy seems to have progressed with fair rapidity. Less than three months subsequent to the gift of *The Pilgrim's Progress* occurred the grand opening of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, when a party of New Park Street friends was made up to witness the ceremony, and included both the young people in whom we are interested.

They occupied some raised seats in a good position for viewing the spectacle, and while Miss Thompson and her companions beguiled the waiting time with talking and laughter, their pastor was seen to be improving his spare moments in dipping into a book. This proved to be a volume of Martin Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy*, then but recently published.

Suddenly, he turned to Miss Thompson, and handing her the book, with his finger marking a particular page, he asked, "What do you

think of the poet's suggestion in those verses?"

With a deepening flush upon her cheeks, the young girl noticed that the chapter was headed "On Marriage," and the lines especially pointed out to her were these—

"Seek a good wife of thy God, for she is the best gift of His Providence;
Yet ask not in bold confidence that which He hath not promised:
Thou knowest not His good will; be thy prayer then submissive thereupon;
And leave thy petition to His mercy, assured He will deal well with thee.
If thou art to have a wife of thy youth, she is now living on the earth;
Therefore think of her, and pray for her weal!"

As she reached this point, there came a soft, low whisper in her ear:—"Do you pray for him who is to be your husband?"

Thus delicately conveyed, the hidden meaning of this query was not misunderstood. Little of the brilliant procession did Susannah Thompson that day behold, few words of the speeches entered her ears. Her whole soul had been filled with a new and all-absorbing emotion.

"Will you come and walk round the Palace with me?" whispered some one, as the spectators began to leave their seats.

Miss Thompson consented; friends were obligingly oblivious of their disappearance, and the pair wandered long and blissfully through the Palace, round about the gardens, and as far as the lake, where antediluvian monsters placidly witnessed the newest and oldest thing on earth—the first entrancing ecstasies of "love's young dream."

"During that walk, I believe," wrote Mrs. Spurgeon nearly half-a-century afterwards, "God Himself united our hearts in indissoluble bonds of true affection, and, though we knew it not, gave us to each other for ever. From that time our friendship grew apace, and quickly ripened into deepest love—a love which lives in my heart to-day as truly, aye, and more solemnly and strongly than it did in those early days; for though God has seen fit to call my beloved up to higher service, He has left me the consolation of still loving him with all my heart, and believing our love shall be perfected when we meet in that blessed Land where Love reigns supreme and eternal."

Young men, however, were discreet and maidens demure in those old-fashioned days, and although a unanimous "understanding" was arrived at that memorable June day in the Crystal Palace, it was not until two months later that Charles Spurgeon formally "proposed" to the lady of his choice.

The spot which this incident glorified and endeared for ever to both their hearts was a prosaic little London back-garden, attached to the residence of Miss Thompson's grandfather.

"To this day," writes Mrs. Spurgeon, forty years later. "I think of that old garden as a sacred place, a paradise of happiness, since there my beloved sought me for his very own, and told me how much he loved me." This confession, she adds, was "wonderful," and asks, "Was there ever quite such bliss on earth before?"

Being a truly good, Christian girl, Susannah fully realized her happiness as a gift from God, and kneeling alone in her room, she praised and thanked Him, with happy tears, for His great mercy "in giving her the love of so good a man."

Soon after, Miss Thompson requested baptism at the hands of her pastor and *fiancé*. The confession of faith which she made as a preliminary to this ordinance touched him deeply for its true spirituality of tone. "I could weep with joy (as I certainly am doing now)," he wrote in his reply, "to think that my beloved can so well testify to a work of grace in her soul."

He went on to encourage her with his assurance that she must indeed be one of God's chosen—which at the outset of their acquaintance he had feared she might not be, for, said he, "If the Lord had intended your destruction, He would not have told you such things as these, nor would He enable you so unreservedly to cast yourself upon His faithful promise. ... Dear purchase of a Saviour's blood, you are to me a Saviour's gift, and my heart is full to overflowing with the thought of such continued goodness. ... Whatever befall us, trouble, adversity, sickness or death, we need not fear a final separation, either from each other or from our God."

The baptism of Miss Thompson was performed as quietly as circumstances would allow, but that the actual position of affairs was not absolutely unsuspected by others than immediate relatives was suggested by a rather amusing incident.

Preceding the young lady in the list of candidates for the examination "before the church," was an old man named Johnny Dear. When he

had been passed and was departed, an elderly dame at the back of the room was heard to whisper—"I suppose it will be 'sister dear' next!"

It may be a comfort to some young people who read these pages to learn that even such a love as that between Charles and Susannah, inspired and blessed by God as it undoubtedly was, did not run its course with perfectly unruffled smoothness. For both were human, and the thoughtlessness of the young preacher and the sensitive pride of the maiden on one occasion brought about what, with some natures, might have been a serious misunderstanding.

On this occasion, Mr. Spurgeon was to preach in a large hall at Kennington, and Miss Thompson went with him in a cab.

An immense crowd was thronging the entrance and the staircase, through which the preacher himself, in the absence of any private entrance, had to force his way. So great was the crush that his poor little *fiancé* was somehow separated from him, and, terrible to relate, *he never missed her!* Turning in at a side-door, which presumably led to the vestry, he passed from her sight without another word or look, and left her struggling helplessly among a mass of strangers.

Worse still, he was so occupied with the message he had to deliver, that he actually for the time forgot her existence. Hurt beyond expression, bewildered, then angry, the young girl straightway turned back without entering the building, and carried her wounded heart home to her mother.

The slight and only glimpse we at this point catch of Susannah Thompson's mother goes far to explain the sweetness of character possessed by Mr. Spurgeon's wife.

"She wisely reasoned," the latter relates, "that my chosen husband was no ordinary man, that his whole life was absolutely dedicated to God and His service, and that I must never, *never* hinder him by trying to put myself first in his heart."

Susannah, who had already much good sense, was gradually calmed and softened by her mother's soothing words, and by the time Charles returned, in a state of great anxiety about Susie, Susie was ready to forgive his negligence, not unashamed in her inmost heart of having so quickly doubted and taken offence at him, when not the least unkindness was intended. It was a hard lesson, as she owns, but it was learnt then *by heart*, and never again did she seek to assert any right to her lover's time and attention when they were claimed by his service to God.

"The end of this little 'rift in the lute,'" to use Mrs. Spurgeon's own beautiful similitude, "was ... an increase of that fervent love which can look a misunderstanding in the face till it melts away and vanishes, as a morning cloud before the ardent glances of the sun."

Miss Thompson's next experience was a visit to Colchester to make the acquaintance of her prospective father and mother-in-law, always something of an ordeal to a timid young girl. If, however, Charles Spurgeon's fiancée felt any nervousness, her fears were soon dispelled by the hearty and affectionate welcome which she then received. She was entertained, and petted, and taken to see every object and place of interest in all the neighbourhood, but owing to the superlative delight of her lover's society, no distinct remembrance of any incident of that halcyon time was carried away. "The joy of being all day long with my beloved, and this for three or four days together, was enough to fill my heart with gladness, and render me oblivious of any other pleasure."

It is good to see this girl and boy—for they were no more—so deeply and frankly in love with one another, but better still to know that though other earthly joys were obscured by this overmastering bliss, the young people never lost sight of its Source and Giver.

Shortly after Miss Thompson's return home, her betrothed wrote as follows:—

"My own doubly-dear Susie,

"How much we have enjoyed in each other's society! It seems almost impossible that I can either have conferred or received so much happiness. I feel now, like you, very low in spirits. ... Let us take heed of putting ourselves too prominently in our own hearts, but let us commit our way unto the Lord. 'What I have in my own hand, I usually lose,' said Luther, 'but what I put into God's Hand, is still, and ever will be, in my possession.'"

The first parting of any length between this devoted pair was when Mr. Spurgeon went on a preaching tour into Scotland—in those days farther off from London than it is now. While he was away he constantly wrote letters, in which, the happy recipient relates, "Little rills of tenderness run between the sentences, like the singing, dancing waters among the boulders of a brook. ... To the end of his beautiful life it was the same, his letters were always those of a devoted lover as well as of a tender husband! not only did the brook never dry up, but the stream grew deeper and broader, and the rhythm of its song waxed sweeter and stronger."

It was during these pre-nuptial days that Miss Thompson attempted, at

her lover's request, her first piece of literary work. This was to compile for him a selection of extracts from the writings of the Puritan Divine, Thomas Brooks. The young girl's critical taste was both tested and trained by the direction to mark every paragraph and sentence that struck her as "particularly sweet, or quaint, or instructive."

This seems simple enough, but so new was the task that to her it appeared most important and difficult. That it was performed with discrimination and to Mr. Spurgeon's satisfaction is proved by the fact that the little volume was ultimately published under the some-what playful title of "*Smooth Stones taken from Ancient Brooks.*"

Thus pleasantly sped the year 1855. Their favourite meeting-place was the Crystal Fountain in the newly-opened palace of glass on Sydenham Hill. With palpitating heart the young girl would wait for the whispered message in the chapel aisle at the close of the week-night service—"Three o'clock to-morrow!" and joyfully would she, when the longed-for hour arrived, set out on her walk from the Brixton Road to keep that happy tryst.

But another appointment was swiftly approaching. The young people's engagement, notwithstanding Mr. Spurgeon's youth, was not unduly prolonged. The wedding-day was fixed for the first week of the next new year.

Chapter 2.—An Ideal Pastor's Wife.

If there were any truth in the adage that "Happy is the bride that the sun shines on," the married life of Mrs. Charles Haddon Spurgeon would not have been among the most blessed, for her wedding-day, January 8, 1856, was, we are told, "dark, damp, and cold."

That was the outward weather. Inwardly "most of its hours were veiled in a golden mist," through which they afterwards looked to memory "luminous but indistinct." Susannah knelt by her bedside in the early morning, "awed and deeply moved by a sense of the responsibilities to be taken up that day, yet happy beyond expression that the Lord had so favoured her." And there, alone with God, she earnestly sought "strength and blessing and guidance for the new life opening before her."

Multitudes assembled at New Park Street Chapel to witness the interesting ceremony. The building was filled to overflowing, and those who were unable to gain admittance waited in the streets to catch a glimpse of the bride and bridegroom in such numbers that traffic in

the vicinity of the chapel was practically brought to a standstill, and the aid of a special body of police was required to prevent accidents.

The young bride, very simply attired, drove to New Park Street in a cab with her father, astonished to find herself gazed at almost as though she had been a royal princess, and wondering if the people all knew what a marvellous bridegroom she was going to meet.

The ceremony was performed by "dear old Dr. Alexander Fletcher," and then amid the enthusiastic cheering of crowds, Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon drove away to start on their brief honeymoon tour.

Some of the sights they gazed upon together during that blissful ten days in Paris are sketched for us by Mrs. Spurgeon's pen, with a grace and vividness which justifies her husband's discrimination in encouraging the development of her literary gift.

Of La Sainte Chapelle, which Mrs. Spurgeon described as "a little heaven of stained glass," she says: "Its loveliness looked almost celestial as we stood enwrapped in its radiance, the light of the sinking sun glorifying its matchless windows into a very dream of dazzling grace and harmony of colour."

In the crypt of the Panthéon, once a temple, now a church, they saw the tombs of Rousseau, Voltaire, and others, and heard, "with something like fear, the thunderous echo which lurks there. ... It is very loud and terrible, like a cannon fired off, and it gives one quite an uncanny feeling to hear such a deafening roar down in the bowels of the earth."

The view from St. Cloud she pronounces "glorious." "The Seine flowed far below, the suburbs of the city lay beyond; Mont Valérien on the right, Paris straight before one's eyes, with the gilded dome of the Invalides shining in the clear air; St. Sulpice, and the Panthéon, and countless towers and spires forming landmarks in the great sea of houses and streets, the twin heights of Montmartre and Père la Chaise in the background ; all these grouped together and viewed from the hill, formed an indescribably charming picture."

As Mrs. Spurgeon was familiar with Paris and spoke French fluently, the delight of both was mutually increased by her ability to act as guide to the various spots of interest, and years afterwards her husband wrote to her during one of his visits alone to the gay capital: "My heart flies to you, as I remember my first visit to this city under your dear guidance. I love you now as then, only multiplied many times."

On returning home the young couple commenced housekeeping in a small residence in the New Kent Road. As is always the case in hearts where God rules, their own happiness made them long to reach out in help and joy to others. From the outset they denied themselves in order to contribute to the support and education of one young man who was being prepared for the ministry. To provide such training for suitable and earnest young men was already a dear dream of Charles Spurgeon's heart, and this first student for whom they so gladly "planned and pinched " was the nucleus of the future Pastors' College.

So real was this self-sacrifice that at times during those early days the young preacher and his wife had a difficulty in making ends meet, and to "tie a bow " was an unimagined luxury.

In a special period of need there occurred to them one of those marvellous supplies which a less sceptical age would have called a miracle, but which we meet in every record of the lives of God's trusting children.

"Some demand came in for payment," writes Mrs. Spurgeon—" I think it must have been a tax or rate, for I never had bills owing to tradesmen—and we had nothing wherewith to meet it. What a distressing condition of excitement seized us! 'Wifey, what can we do? I must give up hiring the horse and walk to New Park Street every time I preach!' 'Impossible!' I replied. 'With so many services you simply could not do it.' Long and anxiously we pondered over ways and means, and laid our burden before the Lord, entreating Him to come to our aid. And of course He heard and answered, for He is a faithful God. That night, or next day, a letter was received containing £20 for our own use, and we never knew who sent it, save that it came in answer to prayer!"

How happy were the peaceful Sabbath evenings of that first wedded year, when, the labours of the day being over, the weary young preacher would rest in an easy-chair by the fireside, while his little wife nestled on a low stool at his feet, and sought to soothe and refresh his spirit by reading aloud! Sometimes the volume chosen would be Christian poetry, but there were occasions when the pastor's tender conscience (and, we venture to add, overwrought nerves!) sought the self-flagellation of Baxter's *Reformed Pastor*, and he would sob over his shortcomings, while the sympathetic girl cried too, because she "loved him, and wanted to share his grief."

But tears are the heritage of all, and even those blissful months were not wholly undimmed by them. Not indeed on account of any lack of

love or tenderness on the husband's part towards his young wife—she had by this time learned to laugh at even the absorption of mind that now and then caused him to ceremoniously shake hands with her in his own vestry, with a cool "How are you?" as if to a stranger—but his frequent absences from home on preaching engagements were a sore trial to her.

How we can go with her, as she paced up and down the little front passage late at night, longing and listening for his return, praying with trembling heart that the train might bring him safely, and rushing to the door in an ecstasy of relief and thankfulness the moment his footstep was heard outside!

Once, when he was leaving her, she broke down and sobbed at the thought of the coming hours of loneliness. But he tenderly reminded her that she was offering him as a sacrifice to God, in thus letting him go from her to preach the Gospel, and must not spoil it by weeping.

She took the reproof at once to heart, and, ever after, the half-bantering query, "What, crying over your lamb, wifey?" would keep back the rising tears, at least until the parting was over.

One very striking incident of Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon's early married life we must not omit.

On a certain Saturday evening the pastor had wrestled long but vainly with the text from which he wished to speak the following day. He was utterly worn out and dispirited. He sat up long past his usual hour for retiring, but his mind seemed completely blank on the subject. Only his wife's promise to arouse him very early in the morning to renew his efforts at length induced him to go to bed and get the rest he so much needed.

In the early hours of Sunday, Mrs. Spurgeon was herself awakened by the sound of his voice. He was preaching in his sleep, and, wonderful to relate, was giving a clear, fresh, and forceful exposition of the very verse which had baffled him the night before!

It was a quaint situation—the preacher himself asleep, the solitary hearer intensely wide-awake, listening to his unconscious discourse with trembling eagerness, fearful of letting one precious word slip.

She had meant to keep awake till it was time to call her husband, but while going over and over in her mind the points she was so anxious to remember, she, not unnaturally, dropped off again, and they both slept on until with a cry of dismay Mr. Spurgeon sprang up to find the time

he had hoped to spend in preparation already past.

What was his amazement and joy to hear from the lips of his wife the extraordinary result of the "unconscious cerebration" that had been going on while his body was in a state of repose! "Why, that's just what I wanted!" he exclaimed. "That is the true explanation of the whole verse! ... It is wonderful!"

"And we both," adds Mrs. Spurgeon, "praised the Lord for so remarkable a manifestation of His power and love."

On September 20, 1856, the young people found themselves the parents of twin sons. Needless to say the advent of the babies was hailed with joy. Charles and Thomas were the names chosen for them, and great were the hopes of what, given to God and trained for Him, those precious children might some day do for the world.

Meanwhile, the ever-increasing numbers of those who crowded to hear the famous young preacher suggested the desirability of finding a larger building in which his powers might have fuller scope. After some negotiation, the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, capable of seating ten or twelve thousand people, was secured for Sunday evening services. And on October 19, just one month after the birth of the twins, Mr. Spurgeon, full of prayerful anticipation of the great task before him, left home to preach in that immense building for the first time.

Alone on her sofa, in the Sabbath evening stillness, his wife was thinking of him, and of the darling little ones asleep at her side—"dreaming," she says, "of all sorts of lovely possibilities and pleasures"—when she was startled by the unaccustomed sound of wheels stopping at the garden gate. It was far too early for the preacher to be coming back, and Mrs. Spurgeon wondered much who the arrival could be.

Soon, a deacon from the chapel entered the room, his grave and embarrassed air portending serious news to the frightened young wife. What could it be? What had happened? She begged him to tell her quickly, her thoughts doubtless reverting to those occasions when the strain of addressing large congregations had reduced her dear one to the verge of fainting.

It was a terrible tale which the good deacon was forced to unfold.

The Music Hall was crammed to overflowing, when, during the hush of the second prayer, wild cries had suddenly rent the air—"Fire!"

"The galleries are giving way!" "The place is falling!" "Fire—Fire!"

It is difficult to imagine the scene of awful confusion at once created. People struggling and fighting their way to the doors, some in the excess of terror even flinging themselves over the balconies upon the seething mass below. With marvellous self-possession the young preacher, believing the panic to be groundless, besought his audience to be calm, and tried to go on with the service. But his efforts were unavailing. The tragic result of the episode was the death of seven persons and the injury of many others, while Mr. Spurgeon himself, after being for some time unconscious, was carried home to his wife a mere wreck of the buoyant and hopeful young man who had left her little over an hour before. The bitterest drop in his cup was the conviction that, the alarm having been utterly unfounded, the whole disaster was the work of the Evil One, acting either upon the malice or cupidity of his emissaries, and uncontrollable anguish of mind, that at one time seemed to threaten reason itself, overcame him.

At length, however, light was restored, and the dedication service of the twin babies was performed amid the returning health and hopefulness of the young parents.

The following year they removed to Helensburgh House, Nightingale Lane, Clapham, then a countrified spot, where a large, rambling, half-wild garden was a delight to them both.

The house was very old, but its quaintness was half its charm, and the grounds were almost unique in possessing a well nearly five hundred feet deep. Some former owner, with both money and perseverance, had had such firm faith that water would eventually be reached, that he persisted in borings being continued down to and through the solid rock, till the efforts of his workmen were at last rewarded by a gush of water, "pure, sparkling, and cold as ice." So delicious was it, that in Mrs. Spurgeon's time neighbours frequently sent jugs to Helensburgh House, begging to have them filled from this spring.

Here, although Mrs. Spurgeon's strength had never been fully restored since that terrible shock of the Music Hall disaster, she passed what she decided, on looking back upon them, were the least shadowed years of her married life. Tending the garden, taming the wild song-birds in which it abounded, and wandering in the pleasant green lanes in the neighbourhood, free from the too great observation, flattering but not always welcome, to which the popular pastor and his wife had in the New Kent Road been subjected, the life of the young couple was at that time an ideally happy one.

The large sale of Mr. Spurgeon's sermons, the generous treatment of his publishers, and an increased income from his pastorate, rendered possible the purchase of the freehold of Helensburgh House, and the carrying out of improvements which otherwise it might not have been worth while to make.

An amusing incident occurring during the early days of residence in Nightingale Lane, proves that the ability to keep a gardener and to take holiday trips is not always an unmixed joy.

Returning to their beloved garden, after a short absence, Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon found that the man left in charge had made great preparations to welcome them. But these, to their horror, had included the painting of certain ancient stone vases and stucco work a brilliant combination of blue and yellow! "Only dear Mr. Spurgeon," writes his fond wife, "could have managed to get them restored to their former purity without hurting the feelings of the well-meaning gardener."

It was at Helensburgh House that the Spurgeons had the pleasure of entertaining John Ruskin. He was a neighbour, and frequently attended Mr. Spurgeon's ministry. On one occasion, when Mr. Spurgeon was recovering from an illness, the great teacher came to see him, bringing the characteristic offering of two choice engravings and some bottles of rare wine.

On seeing the preacher lie weak and prostrate on the sofa, Ruskin flung himself on his knees beside him, and "embracing him with tender affection and tears," exclaimed: "My brother! my dear brother, how grieved I am to see you thus!"

In the pure, sweet air of the Clapham of the "fifties" the twin boys grew and flourished apace. Often unable, owing to the weak state of her health, to attend evening service at the Tabernacle, Mrs. Spurgeon would devote the sacred hour to reading to and teaching her darling children. Her son Thomas directly traces his conversion to these early lessons, and years afterwards she was able with deep thankfulness to write: "Happy mother! whose two beloved sons count it their highest honour to spend and be spent in the service of God!"

But it was in her intense love for her husband that Mrs. Spurgeon then, as ever, found her chief joy. Writing long afterwards, when suffering the deprivations of a confirmed invalid, she says: "I may here record my heartfelt gratitude to God that for a period of ten blessed years I was permitted to encircle him with all the comforting care and tender affection which it was in a wife's power to bestow. Afterwards, God ordered it otherwise. He saw fit to reverse our position to each other,

and for a long season, suffering instead of service became my daily portion, and the care of comforting a sick wife fell upon my beloved."

As long as her health admitted, Mrs. Spurgeon faithfully fulfilled the duties of a pastor's wife. Especially was her sympathy and loving wisdom appreciated by the female candidates for baptism. She would counsel, cheer, and advise them in preparation for that important rite, and when the hour for immersion came, the courtly dignity and inimitable modesty with which she assisted the trembling neophytes was "the admiration of all who beheld her."

"To this day," writes the Rev. Thomas Spurgeon, "many greet me with such glad words as these: 'She led me to the baptismal pool, you know, and I shall never forget her loving words to me.'"

That Mrs. Spurgeon's wifely devotion was fully appreciated, the following inscription in the first volume of a set of Calvin's Commentaries, presented by her to the pastor, will testify—

"The volumes making up a complete set of Calvin were a gift to me from my own most dear and tender wife. Blessed may she be among women. How much of comfort and strength she has ministered unto me it is not in my power to estimate. She has been to me God's best earthly gift, and not a little even of Heavenly treasure has come to me by her means. She has often been as an angel of God unto me. —C. H. Spurgeon."

Chapter 3.—The Prisoner of Pain.

It was in the year 1868 that Mrs. Spurgeon's failing health became so alarmingly worse as to cause a complete breakdown. An operation was performed under the direction of the distinguished surgeon, Sir James Simpson, of Edinburgh, but although her life was prolonged thereby, she was thenceforward doomed to the secluded existence of an invalid.

One of the bitterest privations which such a condition entailed was that of being no longer able to accompany her husband on his holiday trips to the Continent. After thirteen years of married life, the pastor's wife was the same tender-hearted "Susie" who had such hard work to keep from weeping over her sacrificial "lamb," and these partings were a constantly recurring wrench to her clinging affections. Added to this natural loneliness was at one period the torture of nervous terrors at night. Thoughts of burglars, fire, and other imaginations of a similar nature that will occur when body and mind are alike worn by sickness, made the hours of darkness a horror to her.

One night, when dwelling upon the two texts, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee," and "I will trust and not be afraid," Mrs. Spurgeon suddenly realized that "'What time' meant now' when the creaking of a piece of furniture startles me, and the very thought of the bark of a dog strikes terror to my heart."

"I will trust in Thee!" murmured the timid soul, and as she said it deliverance came. "I will trust, and not be afraid.' I surrendered myself and all my belongings to the Father's keeping, and," she writes, "I have had no more gloomy fancies, or midnight watchings. I have laid me down in peace and slept, because 'He only made me to dwell in safety.'"

There is no recipe for nervous fears to be compared with this, and many a one besides Mrs. Spurgeon has proved its efficacy; but this glimpse of weakness makes the subject of our sketch appear very human and lovable.

The silver lining to these separations between the fond couple was doubtless to be found in the lovely letters to which they necessarily gave rise. No wife could possibly have craved more tender outpourings of affection than those which Charles Haddon Spurgeon showered in such lavish profusion upon his suffering "wifey."

Nothing, for example, could be more lover-like than the following, written to Mrs. Spurgeon when, during her absence in Brighton for the operation above named, her husband had been superintending the rebuilding of Helensburgh House—which took place about this time—and the refurnishing of his wife's rooms in particular.

"My own Dear Sufferer,

"I am pained indeed to learn from T——'s kind note that you are still in so sad a condition. Oh, may the ever-merciful God be pleased to give you ease!

"I have been quite a long round to-day—if a 'round' can be 'long.' First to Finsbury, to buy the wardrobe,— a beauty. I hope you will live long to hang your garments in it, every thread of them precious to me for your dear sake. Next to Hewlett's, for a chandelier for the dining-room. Found one quite to my taste and yours. Then to Negretti and Zambra's to buy a barometer for my own very fancy, for I have long promised to treat myself to one. On the road I obtained the Presburg biscuits, and within their box I send this note, hoping it may reach you the more quickly. They are sweetened with my love and prayers.

"The bedroom will look well with the wardrobe in it; at least, so I hope. It is well made, and I believe, as nearly as I could tell, precisely all you wished for. Joe" (Mr. Joseph Passmore had given this as a present) "is very good, and should have a wee note whenever darling feels she could write it without too much fatigue; but not yet. I bought also a table for you, in case you should have to keep your bed. It rises or falls by a screw, and also winds sideways, so as to go over the bed, and then has a flap for a book or a paper, so that my dear one may read or write in comfort while lying down. I could not resist the pleasure of making this little gift to my poor suffering wifey, only hoping it might not often be in requisition, but might be a help when there was a needs-be for it. Remember, all I buy I pay for. I have paid for everything as yet with the earnings of my pen, graciously sent me in time of need. It is my ambition to leave nothing for you to be anxious about. I shall find the money for the curtains, etc., and you will amuse yourself by giving orders for them after your own delightful taste.

"I must not write more; and indeed matter runs short except the old, old story of a love which grieves over you and would fain work a miracle and raise you up to perfect health. I fear the heat afflicts you. Well did the Elder say to John in Patmos concerning those who are before the throne of God, 'Neither shall the sun light on. them nor any heat.'

"Yours to love in life and death and eternally, C. H. S."

Mrs. Spurgeon's keen sense of the beautiful in Nature, and her ability to take pleasure in small things, were also a source of much delight to her in her secluded life.

One summer day we find her noticing with something approaching rapture, "on one of the broad-leaved grasses, a rain-drop sparkling like a diamond, and by its side had settled a large and beautiful greenish-blue fly. The safety of the drop was secured by its position on the leaf, and from this crystal goblet so cunningly contrived and balanced the insect was drinking, with full enjoyment and satisfaction. ... Looking long and lovingly," the invalid thought she learned this lesson—

"Teach them that not a leaf can grow,
Till life from Thee within it flow,
That not a drop of dew can be,
O Fount of being, save by Thee."

Another time she was charmed as a child in having succeeded in tempting a "Red Admiral" butterfly to settle on a bursting egg-plum in her hand, and so be carried down the garden in triumph. "The exquisite contrast of colour," said Mrs. Spurgeon, "was perfect between the topaz-hued fruit and the regal robes of the quivering little beauty upon it, while her fairy-like poise on the plum, and the alternate opening and folding of her gorgeous wings were details which completed the fascination of the beholders." And she realized a fellowship of feeling with the poet Wordsworth, when he writes—

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Thus was a spiritual and poetic nature ever drawn heavenward by the innocent loveliness that lies all around us upon God's earth.

Sometimes the tender lessons drawn from bird or flower were a means of blessing to others, as was notably the case in the story of "The Lark's Nest," which was embodied in one of Mrs. Spurgeon's Book Fund Reports.

Rambling in a meadow near their home one day, Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon came upon a lark's nest with eggs in it, almost hidden among the long grass. Having carefully peeped at the treasure they went away, determined, if possible, to watch the progress of the hatching brood. But what was their horror next day to see that several cows had been turned into the meadow to graze! This must mean inevitable destruction to the birdies' lowly home; and quite anxiously Mrs. Spurgeon revisited the spot as soon as she could to see how the little family had fared.

Some readers may be able in imagination to share the relief which she felt to find the nest intact, and the nestlings alive and safe! The grass had been closely cropped all round, but the lark's home had, almost miraculously as it seemed, been preserved from the devouring mouths and clumsy hoofs of the huge creatures which had trampled so near it. From this Mrs. Spurgeon's ready pen wove a parable of our Father's providence.

The little story, in due course, was read to a dying woman, whose fatherless little ones lay a heavy burden upon her heart. It came as a message from God, and so cheered her last hours that she died happily confiding in the goodness of Him who has even the falling sparrow in His care.

The widow's faith was justified, her four bairnies were all provided for

by a relative, and for years afterwards they all sent tiny donations to Mrs. Spurgeon's Book Fund, "for mother's sake." Even by and by, from a new home in Canada, came little remembrances from "Birdie No. 1," or "Birdie No. 2," to show that "The Lark's Nest" was not forgotten.

Their story was in its turn related in a subsequent report, and this again reached the hands of another poor mother whom death was calling from her dear ones. In this case, there is every reason to believe that the message of the birds was the means not only of comforting the dying one's heart, but of turning it towards God. Thus, Mrs. Spurgeon had the happiness of knowing that her little parable was doubly blessed, and how much of unknown good it may have done, eternity only can show.

Possessing such an instinct for beauty, and the spiritual truths of which it is the garment, we are not surprised to find that the subject of our sketch was attracted to the production of literary work.

Mrs. Spurgeon's *magnum opus* was of course the editing, and no inconsiderable share in the writing, of her illustrious husband's Autobiography. This work, in four large volumes, contains many interesting and charmingly written chapters by the pastor's wife. In addition to this, however, she published a series of three little devotional books—*A Cluster of Camphire, or Words of Cheer and Comfort for Sick and Sorrowful Souls*, *A Carillon of Bells*, and *A Basket of Summer Fruit*.

The graceful and poetic touch of the author is well illustrated in the opening words of *A Carillon of Bells*. "He that spared not His own Son, ... how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 'Dear Lord, faith's fingers are touching the keys of this carillon of sweet bells this morning, and making them sing jubilantly to the praise of Thy gracious name!

"How shall He not!
How shall He not!
He that spared not!
How shall He not!"

"What a peal of absolute triumph it is! Not a note of doubt or uncertainty mars the Heavenly music. Awake, my heart, and realize that it is *thy faith* which is making such glorious melody.... These silver bells have truly the power to scare away all evil things."

The attractiveness of these little volumes was enhanced by their dainty get-up; shape, tint of covers, and outward embellishment being in

every respect most artistic. Her husband used to say, with a twinkle in his eye, that her books were much superior to his in taste and finish, but that he was not without serious misgivings as to the *contents!*

A friend and frequent visitor after the Spurgeons' removal to "Westwood," relates an incident in which the pastor's admiration for his wife's taste led to one of the many witticisms for which he was noted.

Sitting at tea with the pair was one of the Tabernacle deacons, a silk mercer, noticeable for the brilliant auburn shade of his beard. Repeating to the latter a complimentary remark of Mrs. Spurgeon's respecting the artistic arrangement of goods in the mercer's window, Mr. Spurgeon added, "But I can't imagine how a man of your exquisite taste in colours could have chosen red whiskers!"

"Golden, you mean! " rejoined the mercer, good-humouredly.

"Golden!" responded Mr. Spurgeon instantly, "then I'll pledge my word it is twenty-two *carrot!*"

Mrs. Spurgeon wrote her cheering words for fellow-Christians out of the wealth of her own experience. Again and again had she proved the Father's loving care for His children in small things as well as great. But in none of the incidents which we might easily multiply is that minute care so wonderfully exemplified as in the story of her wish for "an opal ring and a piping bullfinch."

It was during one of the invalid's serious attacks of illness that she half-jokingly mentioned to her husband her longing for these two luxuries. But even he, tender as he was, and solicitous to gratify her every possible desire, did not seriously consider the question of procuring either the jewel or the bird.

But not long after, he came into her room with a small box in his hand and delight upon his face. "There is your opal ring, my darling!" he said, and then told the astonishing tale of how an old lady he had once seen when she was ill had sent a note to the Tabernacle to say that she wished to give Mrs. Spurgeon a little present, if some one could be sent to fetch it.

Mr. Spurgeon's private secretary accordingly went, and received from the old lady's hands a small parcel, which on being opened was found to contain an opal ring!

As if this were almost, had it stood alone, too wonderful to believe, the gift—to the Spurgeons beyond doubt a proof of gracious indulgence to

the sick one from the Lord Himself—was shortly after followed by the arrival of the coveted bullfinch, and in quite as singular a manner.

Mrs. Spurgeon had been removed to Brighton, there to undergo the operation to which we have already alluded. While she was away, the wife of a sick friend of the pastor's asked him to give a home to her pet songster, whose piping was too much for the sufferer. "I would give him to none but Mrs. Spurgeon," she said; "Bully will interest and amuse her in her loneliness while you are so much away from her."

We can imagine the pleasure with which Mr. Spurgeon carried the bird to Brighton, and the joy with which it was received. We can hardly be surprised that the pastor's comment to his wife was, "I think you are one of your Heavenly Father's spoiled children, and He just gives you whatever you ask for."

Allowing that this conclusion bears somewhat hardly on many who are as undoubtedly God's children, but nevertheless do not have every wish gratified, we leave the remarkable story on record for our readers to furnish their own theory with regard to it. Mrs. Spurgeon herself says: "If our faith were stronger and our love more perfect, we should see far greater marvels than these in our daily lives."

On September 21, 1874, Mrs. Spurgeon had the joy of being present at the baptism of her two sons. The ceremony was of course performed by their father at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and an immense crowd of spectators were present.

The thankful and happy mother was presented by the church on this occasion with an illuminated address, commemorating the goodness of "Our gracious Lord that it should have pleased Him to use so greatly the pious teachings and example of our dear sister, Mrs. Spurgeon, to the quickening and fostering of the Divine life in the hearts of her twin sons."

But doubtless the greatest blessing, the most unflinching solace and alleviation of Mrs. Spurgeon's invalid seclusion which was ever bestowed upon her, was that which arose from her many years of loving service for the Book Fund. The story of this inspired work we must reserve to speak of in a separate chapter.

Chapter 4.—A Tree of the Lord's Own Planting.

The inception of the Book Fund scheme dates from the summer of 1875.

In that year Mr. Spurgeon finished the first volume of his *Lectures to*

my Students. Lying on the couch in her husband's study, Mrs. Spurgeon eagerly perused the proof-sheets.

"How do you like it?" asked the pastor.

"I wish," was the enthusiastic reply, "that I could place it in the hands of every minister in England."

The author of *John Ploughman* was nothing if not practical. He promptly struck the iron while it was hot by rejoining, "Then why not do so? How much will you give?"

Now it just happened that in a drawer upstairs was a pile of crown-pieces, which it had been a kind of hobby with Mrs. Spurgeon to withdraw from circulation whenever they fell into her hands. She little guessed all through those years for what purpose the cumbrous, medal-like coins were being reserved! She went to her hoard, and counted the money out. There was exactly sufficient to pay for one hundred copies of her husband's book. She at once resolved to offer the treasured coins to the Lord, and "in that moment ... the Book Fund was inaugurated." The next number of the *Sword and Trowel* contained an invitation to poor Baptist ministers to apply for gratuitous copies of *Lectures to my Students*. They responded so freely, that Mrs. Spurgeon distributed two hundred of the volumes instead of the one hundred she had at first contemplated.

The next month Mr. Spurgeon inserted in his magazine a brief appeal to friends who would like to help in this work of free circulation. "Cannot something be done to provide ministers with books?" he asked. "If they cannot be made rich in money, they ought not, for their people's sake, to be starved in soul."

This resulted in a generous response, and the scheme was soon officially known as "Mrs. Spurgeon's Book Fund." It was an interesting coincidence that just about the time that the pastor's invalid wife was watching the early development of her plan for helping needy ministers, she was also carefully cherishing a tiny lemon-plant grown from a pip placed some months before in a garden-pot. The idea suggested itself that the seedling was a fitting emblem of her embryo Fund, and thenceforward the two were inseparably connected in her mind.

At first this notion was the source of a good deal of merry teasing from the mirthful twins, who would saucily ask whether any lemons had yet appeared. But "You'll see," answered their mother, "the Lord will send me hundreds of pounds for this work yet."

Friends outside were rather charmed with the poetical fancy, and would send donations as "A few drops of water for the lemon-plant," or "Another leaf for your tree."

In little over twelve months the tiny tree boasted no less than twenty-one leaves, and one of the boys, who was clever enough to not only draw but engrave, executed a small picture of it for insertion in the magazine. And the growth of the Fund kept pace with the plant.

The receiving of the gifts of subscribers, the sending out of the parcels of books, and the arrival of the letters of delighted thanks which were evoked, combined to constitute a source of perpetual interest and pleasure to the invalid. "The gold," she wrote, "has seemed to lose its earthly dross when consecrated to Him, and has often shed a light as of Heaven's own golden streets upon my pathway! Coming in seasons of great pain and suffering, these gifts have been like precious anodynes to soothe my weary spirit and hush my restless thoughts. ... They have almost charmed away my sorrow, by teaching me to plan for others' joy, and ... leading to blessed commerce with Heaven, by supplying frequent occasions for prayer and praise."

One little girl wrote:—"Dear Mrs. Spurgeon,—I shall be eleven years old to-morrow, and papa says it will be your silver wedding-day. I have not a present worth sending you, but I should like to send you half-a-crown towards a book for some poor minister who cannot buy books for himself. My papa is a minister, and I know how pleased he is if we make him a present of a book, but mamma says there are scores of ministers who have no one to make them presents of books except you. I wish I could send you ever so much more. Papa and mamma hope you and Mr. Spurgeon will live to see your golden wedding. I shall be grown up by that time, and perhaps have more money; then I can give you what will send more than one book. Yours affectionately, Nellie."

Several times Mrs. Spurgeon was helped by large gifts of books and cards from publishers; and one friend sent an annual Easter Gift of a generous quantity of note-paper and envelopes, all prettily stamped with initials and address, for the Book Fund correspondence. The same friend subsequently sent parcels of stationery for enclosure with the books for the use of poor ministers.

The year Frances Havergal died, Mrs. Spurgeon decided to send out as long as she could afford it the poetess' beautiful little work on Consecration—that "pearl of books," as Mrs. Spurgeon called it—as an extra blessing with every parcel dispatched.

In the year 1880 the lemon-tree was found to have attained a height of seven feet, while the Book Fund had distributed considerably over 20,000 volumes.

Very touching were many of the letters of application and tributes of thanks which found their way to Mrs. Spurgeon's hands. The appalling fact was revealed that many ministers' incomes were far below a hundred a year! No wonder that such confessions as the following were common:—

"I have little to spend on books. My salary is only £60 per annum, so that when a new book comes it is like bread to the hungry. I do not say this to make you think I am a martyr—if so I am a very happy one, for I have chosen willingly Christ's service, and my very wants are a means of grace to me."

"Dear Mrs. Spurgeon,—I have this morning enjoyed the almost forgotten luxury of inspecting and handling a parcel of new books. ... As I sat with your books spread before me, a gleam of the old happiness returned, and I was glad to find that my old love had not been quite starved nor crushed to death."

Another, as warmly, but somewhat less sadly, wrote:— "The parcel of books has arrived safely. No words of mine can express my gratitude to you for so rich a gift. It is the most valuable present I have received during my twenty years' ministry. ... May the Lord Jesus bless you more and more, and spare you many, many years, and send you friends and give you joy in seeing this noble work growing by your hands! If those who contribute of their wealth only knew the gladness awakened in our hearts, the stimulus and food supplied to weary, jaded minds, the instruction and precious truth which find their way into our sermons, and which in turn cheer and bless many other souls through these noble presents, they would feel themselves more than recompensed even in this world, and before the Master shall say 'Well done!'"

But there were some that suggested, in their very gratitude, needs more urgent even than the want of books. For example, one poor minister says:—

"When I witness the self-denial, and hard, unremitting labour to which my wife cheerfully submits herself to keep our household moving in comfort in the sphere God has given, I cannot with any pleasure add to her difficulty by purchasing the books I often covet, though this doubtless hinders the freshness and variety of my ministry."

Another, with still greater frankness, wrote:—"I never dare now to

think of a new book. Two or three times I have begun to save a little money towards the purchase of a long-coveted work, but every time it has gone for something else. John, or little Harry or Walter, must have boots, or mother is ill, or the girls' frocks are getting shabby, and so the precious volumes are still unattainable."

Glimpses into the lives of poor ministers as letters such as these afforded suggested to Mrs. Spurgeon's mind the need for another fund. Thus was presently started the Pastors' Aid Society, which, running side by side with the Book Fund, assisted poor ministers with grants of money in times of special adversity, as well as of clothing both new and second-hand.

When it came to be known that sometimes a pastor's children were forced to lie in bed while their clothes were washed because they did not possess a change, friends came forward who thought it a joy to subscribe to this Fund in both coin and kind, as well as to that for providing books.

The letters of thanks these gifts evoked were even more touching than those received in response to the parcels of books, though revealing a most deplorable state of things in some cases.

A friend in Scotland having sent a regular supply of soft woollen shawls, one of these was, said the recipient, "a strangely acceptable present, as you will see when I tell you that last winter I so much needed a large scarf or plaid such as Scotchmen wear, that my wife cut her shawl (of the same kind as the one now sent, but a different colour) to make this said wrap, and now, as the winter is upon us and she requires such a comfort, it comes!"

One might indeed devote a whole chapter to incidents showing how marvellously in numberless instances did the presents sent fit in detail the needs of the particular persons to whom they were dispatched.

"You must have been Divinely directed what to send," wrote one grateful recipient." Only about ten days ago my dear wife said that she really ought to have a waterproof cloak; we both agreed that it was quite needful, but how to get one was the difficulty; when, lo! on opening your parcel, almost the first thing we came across was the very garment we had been talking about, and it fits splendidly!"

"Was this," asks Mrs. Spurgeon, "a mere matter of chance, think you?"

Another time she wrote:—"A mother put on a dress which I had sent her, and found that, if measurements had been taken, its proportions

could not have been more correct. Her children were in the room, all delighted to see how nice she looked, when her eldest girl thoughtfully said, 'Mother, what puzzles me is, how Mrs. Spurgeon knows our fit for boots and dresses, and all those things she sends us; it is as if they had been made for us!' 'My darling,' was the answer, 'Mrs. Spurgeon herself could not know, but our God does, and He put it into her heart to send just the things suitable for us.'

One more instance, and surely our readers will be ready to agree with Mrs. Spurgeon that the Father by whom even the hairs of our head are numbered was specially watching—if there could be such a thing as specialty with the Infinite!—over the distribution of the bounty committed to her trust.

There reached her, on one occasion, a huge package of gentlemen's clothes, the whole of an extensive and valuable wardrobe, sufficient in quantity to supply substantial outfits to six or seven poor pastors. It was unsolicited and unexpected, and at the moment Mrs. Spurgeon felt rather at a loss as to its disposal. But almost immediately after came letters of appeal from six different applicants, disclosing such pressing need that the almoner could but exclaim, "The Lord must have *meant* these coats and vests and beautiful under-garments for these special people!"

One of those who shared in this bounty wrote:—"I had been asking God to send me a pair of new shoes and a pair of trousers, and how to begin to thank Him I do not know." Besides clothing, the money gifts disbursed amounted to an average of £350 per annum, and represented assistance in every variety of need. Doctors' bills were paid in innumerable cases, food and medicine procured, comforts provided for the new baby and its mother, or the little gathered flower laid decently away under the turf without privation to those who were left. How many heavy burdens were lightened, how many precious lives prolonged by the timely help of the Pastors' Aid Fund, He only knows from whom its inspiration came.

And still the lemon-tree flourished. "It is brought up to the house, ma'am," said the gardener one day. "It's making a deal of new wood." While to the Book Fund, and the Pastors' Aid Fund, and the clothing supply was added another branch of usefulness, the regular grant of *The Sword and Trowel* to a number of poor ministers unable to afford to buy it themselves; and other off-shoots were still to follow.

The year 1878 was a season of great suffering to Mrs. Spurgeon. Her chronic malady reached a crisis at that time, through which it at one

period seemed doubtful if she would survive.

It was during these days of pain and darkness that she who had so often been strangely and sweetly comforted by unlooked-for messages from her Heavenly Father, received one of the loveliest through the simple vehicle of an oaken log burning upon her fire.

After describing her trouble of mind one very gloomy day, as she strove in vain to understand what seemed the hard dealings of Providence in permitting her service to be so often hindered by ill-health, Mrs. Spurgeon goes on to say:—

"For a while silence reigned in the little room ... Suddenly I heard a sweet, soft sound, a little clear musical note, like the tender trill of a robin beneath my window. 'What *can* it be?' I said to my companion, who was dozing in the firelight; 'surely no bird can be singing out there at this time of the year and night!' We listened, and again heard the faint, plaintive notes, so sweet, so melodious, yet mysterious enough to provoke for a moment our undisguised wonder. Presently my friend exclaimed, 'It comes from the log on the fire!' and we soon ascertained that her surprised assertion was correct. The fire was letting loose the imprisoned music from the old oak's inmost heart. Perchance he had garnered up this song in the days when all went well with him, when birds twittered merrily on his branches, and the soft sunlight flecked his tender leaves with gold ; but he had grown old since then, and hardened ; ring after ring of knotty growth had sealed up the long-forgotten melody until the fierce tongues of the flame came to consume his callousness and the vehement heat of the fire wrung from him at once a song and a sacrifice.

"'Oh!' thought I, 'when the fire of affliction draws songs of praise from us, then indeed are we purified and our God glorified! Perhaps some of us are like this old oak log—cold, hard, and insensible; we should give forth no melodious sounds were it not for the fire which kindles round us, and releases tender notes of trust in Him, and cheerful compliance with His will. As I mused, the fire burned and my soul found sweet comfort in the parable so strangely set forth before me. Singing in the fire! Yes, God helping us, if that is the only way to get harmony out of these hard, apathetic hearts, let the furnace be heated seven times hotter than before.'"

Thus did the gracious, poetic soul draw honey from the humblest flowers that bloomed around her path.

Once more the suffering abated, and eagerly did Mrs. Spurgeon resume her beloved work. Year by year was published the cheering

record of growing usefulness. Ministers of all denominations were assisted. In one year, amongst thousands of others, applications were received from and granted to Quakers, Waldensians, Irvingites, Moravians, and a Unitarian. Even members of the Anglican section of the Church of England were not loth to avail themselves of the opportunity of enriching their minds with *Lectures to my Students* or *The Treasury of David*, and Mrs. Spurgeon records the fact that some of the most courteous and gracefully appreciative letters of thanks she received were those from clergymen.

The countries to which parcels of books and packets of sermons were dispatched were as diversified and wide apart as the religious views of the recipients—India, America, China, Labrador, Jamaica, the West Indies, Natal, Newfoundland, Buenos Ayres, every comer of the globe was visited by these ever-welcome gifts. The correspondence entailed was enormous, the average number of letters received per month being about five hundred, and once the total for four weeks reached the amazing number of seven hundred and fifty-five.

As in the annals of every work carried on in childlike faith from the pure motive of love to God and desire to help the needy, the story of Mrs. Spurgeon's Book Fund abounds in instances of gifts that came, unasked, save of Him; sweet surprises, and timely deliverances from threatened debt which cannot be ascribed to anything but Divine intervention. Donations of £25 or £50 from individuals were comparatively common, and on one memorable occasion a friend called with a cheque for £100, just before the arrival of a quarterly account for expenditure so unexpectedly heavy that a sleepless night of anxiety would have been the inevitable result but for this merciful provision. "Before I called, He answered," is Mrs. Spurgeon's thankful record. "And though trouble was not very distant, He had said, 'It shall not come nigh thee.' O, my soul, bless thou the Lord and forget not this His loving 'benefit!'"

By the close of the year 1880 the lemon-tree had reached the height of seven feet. It had also developed some sharp thorns, which found a parallel in sundry experiences in connection with the Book Fund, causing its owner to exclaim, "Dear emblem tree, are you so true to your mystical character as all that?"

Some of these prickings were inflicted by the donors of books from their own libraries. There were instances, of course, in which most valuable additions were by this means made to the parcels sent out, but there was the usual tendency among the "benevolent" to clear lumber off their shelves by dispatching it to Mrs. Spurgeon.

The lady almoner thought the depths of disappointment from this source had been reached when a *French Grammar*, *Mangnall's Questions*, and *Advice to a Newly-Married Pair* had been received as aids to pulpit preparation. But soon after came *The Complete Housewife and Accomplished Gentlewoman's Companion*, published in 1766.

"After this," she says, "I thought I might have borne anything, but to-day has brought me a sharper experience. ... I had received an anonymous note, bidding me expect the arrival of a case of books for the 'Clerical Library,' 'Carriage paid as far as possible.' With much anxiety I awaited the advent of the case. When it made its appearance its size was so imposing that I did not grudge the nine shillings I had to pay for transit, confidently hoping to find many choice treasures in the contents. ... But the case was chiefly filled with old hymn-books, works by Unitarians, and books against Believers' Baptism."

Mrs. Spurgeon's justifiable chagrin at such a slap in the face might well be imagined, especially as she was compelled to disappoint several longing applicants, to whom she had promised a share in the hoped-for treasure.

Occasionally, also, painful rebuffs were dealt to her kind heart even by those whom she desired to benefit. A few ministers so strangely misunderstood the spirit of her service that the gifts were either "claimed as a right or disdained as a charity." But, after all, the thorns on the tree were few and far between compared with its foliage and flowers.

The last record we have of the lemon-tree is in 1895, when it had reached a height of eleven feet, while it measured seven feet across. The total receipts of the Book Fund up to the same date were £23,500, in addition to many thousands distributed through the Pastors' Aid Fund, together with the substantial total of the fund "For General use in the Lord's Work," and also the value of books and clothes given by friends.

Writing at the close of twenty years' labour, when a magnificent total of 199,315 volumes had been distributed, Mrs. Spurgeon writes—keeping up the symbolism between the fund and the tree—"The great central stem is, metaphorically, *The Book Fund* itself, out of which all the branches have naturally grown, and with which they all continue to be vitally connected. Springing from the main trunk, and almost rivalling it in strength and usefulness, is the largest limb of the tree, which represents *The Pastors' Aid Fund*. This, in its turn, has thrown

out the widely-spreading branch from which the well-filled boxes of *The Westwood Clothing Society* have dropped into many a poor pastor's home. Peering between the thickly-interlaced foliage I spy a sturdy bough bearing the inscription *Home Distribution of Sermons*, and an equally vigorous off-shoot dedicated to *The Circulation of Sermons Abroad*, while the topmost twigs, on which I can plainly read the words *Foreign Translations of Sermons*, bid fair to rival in all respects their older companions."

Perhaps we cannot do better than close this chapter of our sketch with a few verses from the conclusion of a cheerful poem on the Book Fund and the lemon-tree which "darling son Tom" sent his mother when he was in New Zealand.

"From what a very tiny seed
The glorious Book Fund grew;
To what proportions it would reach
Not e'en its planter knew.

And now the Fund Tree firmly stands
With shade, and sap, and scent;
A tree of knowledge—all its leaves
For Pastors' blessing meant.

Live on, live on, dear lemon-tree
Be never moribund,
Fit emblem from the very first
Of Mrs. Spurgeon's Fund."

Chapter 5.—Walking Alone.

Over the closing years of Mrs. Spurgeon's life space forbids us to linger.

On January 31, 1892, the light of her eyes, the chosen of her youth, and the no less fond lover of her grey hairs, was taken from her. It is not for us to venture to describe the anguish of that bereavement; but many years before, in one of those pictures or parables by means of which this sensitively organized woman so many times received spiritual teaching, a foreshadowing had been given her of the manner in which her soul should be sustained when the dreaded moment came.

At the time of her great sorrow, Mrs. Spurgeon recalled as almost prophetic the words in which she had recorded a memorable natural phenomenon of the year 1881, during one of her husband's health-seeking visits to the south of France.

"At 3.30 p.m.," she wrote—the exact date is not given, but the circumstance will be in the memory of many of our readers—"midnight had taken the place of day, and spread its sable wings over the earth prematurely. Nothing could be seen all around but black, lowering masses of dense darkness, which hung like funeral palls from the sky, and now and again lifted their heavy folds only to reveal a deeper gloom beyond. Not a ray of heaven's light pierced this dreadful overshadowing, and a stillness more awesome than that of real night hushed all familiar sounds.

"Into this dismal murkiness came two letters from Mentone, telling of a placid sea, warm breezes, and clear, bright skies—letters so full of joy and good news and glad delight, that for the moment the unbidden tears would gather from the sheer longing I had to be in the sunshine too! But when the shutters were closed and the curtains drawn, and the dreary scene without excluded, I found I still had light in my dwelling, for, like a star, better seen from the depths of a well than from higher ground, shone the conspicuous mercy that my beloved was spared this doleful experience. I knew that the fearful darkness could not spread its black wings as far as the Riviera, and I blessed God for the comfortable certainty that 'over there' the beauty and splendour of an unclouded sky were doing their sweet, restful work on a tired heart and brain. So my gloom was dispelled by the light of my husband's happiness, and the sunbeams imprisoned in his precious letters had travelled a thousand miles to turn my night into day!

"I wonder if this is a faint picture of the comfort wherewith God consoles His bereaved children by enabling them to realize the unspeakable blessedness of those who have 'gone before.' Temporary separations by distance are but the foreshadowing of a sterner parting, which, sooner or later, must divide us from those whose love seems to be our very life. Happy they who can look beyond the grim darkness of such a sorrow to the unsullied light and bliss which the hope of eternal reunion affords!"

This was ever the one unbroken string of her harp of joy, in which, like the pathetic figure of "Hope" conceived by Mr. G. F. Watts, the heart-wrung widow still found heavenly music. We see the same thought constantly recurring in all she wrote on the subject of her great loss through the twelve solitary years that remained of her life.

Before long she was able to testify: "In my deep and increasing loneliness I still found sweetest comfort in praising God for His will concerning my beloved and myself, and have even been able to thank Him for taking His dear servant from this sorrowful land of sin and

darkness to the bliss and glory of His eternal presence. ... Many a time, when the weight of my dreadful loss seemed as if it must crush me, it has been lifted by the remembrance that in heaven my dear one is now perfectly praising his Lord, and that if I can sing too, I shall even here on earth be joining him in holy service and acceptable worship."

It had been a source of joy to the devoted couple that on Mr. Spurgeon's last visit to Mentone his wife had accompanied him; thus their wish of many unsatisfied years was granted, and together they gazed upon those scenes of beauty which previously Mrs. Spurgeon had only known through her husband's description of them. But this added poignancy to the grief of the one left behind, when, staying for a while as the guest of Mr. Hanbury in his palatial home at La Martola, she constantly came upon new treasures—something "more rare, costly or beautiful" than she had ever seen before, and her first impulse was to *go* and *tell* him about it, and bring him to share her pleasure. Then, remembering that he was gone, her grief would awaken again with terrible intensity, till it was borne in upon her that our Lord's estimate of true affection was expressed in the words, "If ye loved Me, ye would *rejoice*," and she strove to calm the passionate yearning of her spirit by dwelling on the thought that no matter how she longed to share with him the loveliness all around her, he was "with Christ, which is *far better*."

In 1895 the balm of Divine healing had so far accomplished its blessed work that Mrs. Spurgeon was able to write: "The thought of my dear one's happiness in Heaven always brings soothing to my heart, be its pain never so fierce. There is a likeness of him in the study just over against where he used to sit—so natural, so life-like, that for these three years I have averted my eyes from it when entering the room rather than have the fountain of tears and grief continually unlocked. But I am now beginning to school myself to look up in his dear face, and say, with hands uplifted to God in praise, 'I give thee joy, beloved, that thou art with Him!'"

It was during this year that Mrs. Spurgeon, while visiting Bexhill, learned that the town possessed no Baptist Chapel. It occurred to her to busy herself in establishing one as a memorial of her husband. Soon, through the instrumentality of her prayers and work, a school-chapel was opened, and two years later she had the privilege of laying the foundation-stone of a handsome building, erected "To the glory of God, and in perpetual remembrance of her beloved husband's blameless life, forty years' public ministry, and still continued proclamation of the Gospel by his printed sermons."

In 1899, on February 8, Mrs. Spurgeon held a reception in the basement of the Tabernacle, where, in one day, she received no less than £6,367 towards the Rebuilding Fund.

Thus the years of separation wore on, cheered by the presence of both her sons and the love of a wide circle of friends. Her constant companion was Miss E. H. Thorne, with whom she enjoyed a close and happy intimacy for nearly forty years. As long as strength would permit Mrs. Spurgeon continued to work for her beloved Book Fund, with its many branches, and also to expend much loving care upon the selection of the daily texts for "Spurgeon's Illustrated Almanack," which had been her pleasant task for about thirty years. But the special occupation of her widowhood was, of course, her biography of her husband, to which we have already alluded, a work in four large volumes, in the compilation of which she was assisted by Mr. Spurgeon's private secretary, Mr. Harrald.

In the summer of 1903 Mrs. Spurgeon was seized by the malady, the result of a chill, from which she never really recovered. She did not leave her bed again. Early in September it was believed that every day might be her last, yet she lingered for nearly two months.

Miss Thorne was her constant and devoted nurse. One day, when growing steadily weaker, the invalid asked, "Whom shall I see next?" referring to the many friends who craved the privilege of a farewell visit.

"Whom would you like to see, darling?" inquired Miss Thorne.

Her face radiant with deathless love, Mrs. Spurgeon at once exclaimed, "My husband!"

The weary waiting time was fast drawing to its close. On October 17 the Rev. Thomas Spurgeon received from his dying mother her blessing for himself and his twin brother. "The blessing—the double blessing of your father's God be upon you!" she murmured, and bade him a tender farewell.

Later still, with clasped hands, she breathed, "Blessed Jesus! Blessed Jesus! I can see the King in His Glory!"

In the forenoon of Thursday, October 22, 1903, a notice was placed outside the Tabernacle to announce that "Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon entered Heaven at 8.30 this morning."

The crowded funeral service, which was conducted by the Rev. Archibald Brown and the Rev. C. B. Sawday, was divested, as far as

possible, of the usual sombre trappings of grief. No black horses drew the many mourning carriages, no crape or hat-bands were seen, and there was no black border to the special sheet of hymns.

Concluding his touching and appropriate address, Mr. Brown reminded his hearers, in words with which we may fitly bring this sketch of a true woman and devoted worker to a close, that, in the early days of their mutual love, Mr. Spurgeon's frequent word to his dear one would be—"Meet me at the Palace," and the Crystal Fountain was the appointed spot.

"The phrase," said Mr. Brown, "seemed to glow with prophetic fire. The tryst is kept, and there is glory at the fountain to-day."

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