The Spurgeon Centenary.

III. SOCIAL LIFE IN SPURGEON'S DAY.

ON June 19th, 1834, Charles Haddon Spurgeon opened his eyes on the world in a small, old-fashioned house at Kelvedon, in Essex. It would be interesting if we could have a peep at the world then; or at least at that part of it in which he was destined to become so famous a figure. If we have industry enough to search for the facts, and imagination enough to clothe them with human form, that should not be impossible. But it will not be easy, because the facts are so varied, and these 100 years have affected such tremendous changes in our social life, that the most imaginative of us will find it difficult really to see the England which they represent.

Eight years ago, Joseph McCabe wrote a book entitled, *1825-1925, a century of stupendous progress.* It contains a fund of information gathered from authoritative sources, on the progress of wealth, the life of the worker, the social life of the people, the morals, education, and political life of the nineteenth century. In the preface of his book he states that his object is " to give clear, precise, and ample proof that there has been in the last 100 years, more progress in every respect than had ever before been witnessed in 500, if not a 1,000 years." That that claim is not as extravagant as at first sight it appears to be, will show the difficulty of our task.

Figures are always difficult to make interesting and I am going, as far as possible, to escape from them, and give a few broad and rapid impressions of the England upon which the eyes of Spurgeon opened.

We will begin on the lighter side of life, the open air and recreative side, of which we think so much to-day. Imagine England just after the nineteenth century dawned. There were, of course, no motor-cars, no charabancs, no trains (we are just celebrating the centenary of railways), no excursions, no week-ends, no trams, no buses, no bicycles. Coaches were the general means of travelling and few but the gentry could afford them. Except for a friendly lift in a farmer's cart, or the luxury of a seat in a carrier's van, no worker rode anywhere. No matter how distant the place of his employment might be, he walked there in the morning and back at night. Very few working folk

travelled more than ten miles from their own home. If a son or daughter went twenty miles from home they were rarely seen again. Villagers never saw a big town, and scarcely any man who lived ten miles from the sea, ever saw it in his life.

There were no picture-houses, of course, no football matches, no parks, no playing grounds. There were no bank holidays, no half-holidays, no holidays at all for workers, save Christmas Day and the King's birthday, and occasional "Wakes" or fairs, of which we get a glimpse in Dickens' *Old Curiosity Shop*. Games which fill, in some form or other, so large a part of the leisure hours of the people to-day, were almost, if not altogether, absent, and the four favourite recreations (?) were sex, drunkenness, fighting and gambling.

In fact that is a negative impression of the people's leisure, for the simple fact is that they had no leisure. Agricultural labourers worked sixteen hours a day, while a Parliamentary Enquiry revealed the fact that the average hours of adults (all over sixteen) was fourteen hours a day, for six days a week. Sunday was the only day the wage-earner had any leisure, and he was too tired for any physical activity. He was left, on that day, the alternative of the church or the chapel, and the ale-house, and he was often content to patronise both.

Child-life, at least the child-life of the poor, is a horror even to think of. When Spurgeon came to London, Charles Dickens' novels were pouring from the press, and the story of the great novelist's own childhood allows us to see a little way into the tragedy of a child's life in London. Only a few years before Spurgeon was born, Dickens, a boy of twelve, was working long hours at a blacking factory for the miserable pittance of 1s. per day, "A little lonely prey to the London streets." "I know that I have lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. For any care that was taken of me, I might easily have been a little robber or a little vagabond." And that picture, dark as it is, is not nearly black enough for the children of the poor, and the hosts of unwanted children. One of the darkest pages in the story of the nineteenth century is that which deals with child labour. Children, from the age of five, were worked twelve to fourteen hours a day in the mills and factories. Thomas Carlyle, whose *Sartor Resartus* was given to the world the year that Spurgeon was born, wrote a letter in 1833, in which, referring to the factories, he speaks of "little children labouring for sixteen hours a day, falling asleep over their wheels and roused again by the lash of the thongs over their backs, or the slap of the 'billy-rollers' over their little crowns." Not until 1834, the year of Spurgeon's birth, was any attempt made to mitigate the hardships under which they suffered. Then, through

the efforts of Lord Shaftesbury, child labour was limited to eight hours a day for children under thirteen.

And that brings us to a glimpse, from another angle, at life 100 years ago. The mind as well as the body was neglected. Recall Dickens' description of "Poor Joe," the crossing sweeper. "He is not one of Mrs. Pardiggle's Tockahoopo Indians; he is not the genuine foreign made savage; he is the ordinary, home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Native ignorance . . . sinks his immortal soul lower than the beasts that perish." There were thousands like that. No one believed that it was the duty of the Government to provide a scheme of National Education, and it was not until 1870 that education was made universal and compulsory. There were a few attempts, mainly by religious people, to provide some sort of education; a few charity schools, dame's schools; some "Do-the-Boys Halls," where children were exploited for gain; some ragged schools, night schools and Sunday Schools. But the children of the poor were left largely to "native ignorance." In the course of a year, according to an official return of 1834, there were found, in London alone, 3,098 children living as mendicants or thieves.

And that mental poverty was reflected through all the grades of life among the wage-earners. The adults were largely illiterate, and few of them could read. We know what interest and delight come to us through music and books. The piano, the gramophone, the wireless, are in almost every home. Many of the greatest authors are on our shelves, and a flood of newspapers and periodicals are constantly issuing from the press. We have even our *Children's Newspaper.* Which all means that life is for us rich in interest; the world is at our door, and our intercourse with one another is informative and varied. We can hardly imagine what life would be without this mental activity. What would we do without our daily paper? A hundred years ago no daily newspaper could be procured under sixpence. It was only a few years before Spurgeon came to London that a new morning paper, the *Daily News,* of which Charles Dickens was the first editor, appeared at fivepence. Books were within the reach of few; a cheap edition of the *Arabian Nights,* for instance, cost six shillings and sixpence. There were no public reading rooms, and no free libraries, and no penny post. Life, for the masses of the people, was without the interest and joy of mental activity and interchange; and the world of thought and imagination was a hidden realm save to the few.

The conditions under which the workers lived, either in country or city, are difficult to imagine to-day. They were badly

paid, badly fed, badly housed, and the most sober and industrious were always fighting a hard battle with destitution, dirt and disease. "There is a submerged tenth to-day," says J. McCabe, "whereas a hundred years ago there was a submerged nine-tenths." A Parliamentary Enquiry in 1825 (and things had changed very little by 1833), showed ten million workers.

Three million children earned 1s. per week.

Two to three million women and girls earned less than men.

Four to five million adult males, the overwhelming majority of whom were agricultural or industrial labourers or factory hands, earned 8s. to 12s. per week.

One million domestic servants earned 3s. per week and their food.

One million paupers.

There were only a few thousand skilled artisans who earned more than £1 per week and very few of these more than 25s.

"When two millions of one's brother men sit in workhouses, and five million, as is insolently said, 'rejoice in potatoes,' there are various things that must begin, let them end where they can," wrote Thomas Carlyle in 1834, on what he called "the Condition-of-England question."

My limited space will not allow me to dwell on the cost of living. Are not these years known to us as the "hungry forties"? A suggestive description? Almost every necessity of life was dearer then than it is to-day, excepting beer, on which the skilled artisan spent a large part of his wage; for the sobriety of the people, and the general outlook on drink and drinking habits, has tremendously improved, at least amongst the working-classes, in these 100 years.

With no means of transport and long hours of work, the workers, of necessity, were huddled together in tenements as near as possible to their work, and commonly built back to back, so that there was no draught through the houses. Windows were taxed, so light was a luxury; soap was taxed, so cleanliness was a luxury. There were no public baths, and no water was laid on to the houses. There was no Public Health Department, of course. Very few streets were paved, or lit, or cleansed, and there was practically no drainage system. It was not until 1842 that the Government procured "General Local Reports on the sanitary conditions of the working-classes," and the mass of evidence collected was too revolting to publish. Our magnificent free hospital treatment and cheap medical attendance are all developments of the last 100 years, and the poor in birth and life and death had little skilled care. Disease often stalked abroad unchecked. You may recall Carlyle's "forlorn Irish widow," who died of typhus fever; died and infected her lane

with fever so that seventeen other people died there in consequence. " Very curious. The forlorn Irish widow applies for help. They answer, 'No; impossible! thou art no sister of ours.' But she proves her sisterhood; her typhus fever kills *them*: they actually were her brothers, though denying it." The first year of Spurgeon's ministry in London an epidemic of cholera broke out in the city from which over 6,000 died in eight weeks.

We have still cause to be greatly troubled, concerning the slums of our towns and cities: but it *is* something that we *are* troubled. The slum areas have become a matter of public conscience. But 100 years ago there was practically no conscience at all about them, and no sense of responsibility for the hopeless misery and crime that was bred in them. I still have a horrible memory of an occasion in my boyhood, when I went with an uncle of mine to a common lodging-house in London, where he was to conduct a service. But hopeless and horrible as that sight was, it must have been infinitely worse when Spurgeon came to London, for it was only a few years before that Lord Shaftesbury secured the passing of his Bill for the control of the Common Lodging-House, which he described as an "inferno of poverty where tens of thousands of miserable beings languished or rotted in lairs fitted to be the habitation of hogs than of human beings."

This rapid, and wholly incomplete, glimpse into the "good old days," for which we sometimes foolishly yearn, will have given us some idea of the London into which the Boy Preacher from Waterbeach entered in 1854, with his message of the Grace of God for sinful men. He, too, with his heart of compassion, could say with his great contemporary, Charles Dickens, " Heart of London . . . I seem to hear a voice within thee . . . bidding me, as I elbow my way among the crowd, to have some thought for the meanest wretch that passes, and being a man, to turn away with scorn and pride from none that bear the human shape." And *he* had a *greater Gospel* than Dickens' gospel of human kindness.

But that is not, by a long way, the whole story. There is a brighter page to which we can turn. The year of Spurgeon's birth may be regarded in a sense as the beginning of a new era. In June, 1832, the first Reform Bill was passed. The House of Commons, previously to this, consisted of 489 members—332 of which were returned from small boroughs in which a few score of voters either took orders from the lord of the district, or shamelessly sold their votes to the highest bidders. London, with a tenth of the population, had only four members. Manchester and Birmingham had none. The Reform Bill of 1832 altered all that. Its enfranchisement was severely limited; it was not,

indeed, until 1867 that the vote was given to all householders, but the Reform Bill of 1832 marked the beginning of the reign of the middle-classes.

And the middle classes, whatever their faults, were distinctly religious. "The qualities of the middle classes at their best," says Leathes, in his *People on Trial,* "were embodied in William Ewart Gladstone." The old story of Queen Victoria giving a Native Prince a Bible, with the remark that "that was the secret of England's greatness," is quite possibly apocryphal, but it *was* representative of the general conviction of middle-class England. They did believe that it was righteousness which exalted a nation, and that the essence of that righteousness was in the Bible. The day after Spurgeon died, one of the daily papers commenced its leading article with the words, "The last of the puritans is dead," and during the first part of the Victorian era the middle classes did represent much that was best in the puritans. The Victorian homes were religious; the Victorian habits were religious, and Victorian politics were not divorced from religion. The Victorian age, with its crinolines and anti-macassars and Mrs. Grundy has become a sort of by-word in these days of short skirts and unrestricted liberties, but it had some qualities that we have no need to dismiss with a smile. It may have taken itself too seriously, but it did believe that it had a duty and a destiny above cocktails and jazz, and it has something to show for its heavy seriousness. It was because the soil was there, the soil of a genuine religious life, that the seed of a new social order began to take root in men's minds.

If the novelist gives us the picture of the age in which he lives, the prophet gives expression to the thoughts that are crying out for utterance in the hearts of the people. The prophet is usually in front of his age, but he is in a real sense the product of the deepest thought and feeling of his age. A flood of light is thrown upon the life of 100 years ago, when we remember that when Spurgeon came to London two voices were speaking to all serious-thinking people. Ruskin (a frequent visitor to the Tabernacle) was calling for a new definition of riches, and preaching a political economy whose wealth was "the purple veins of happy hearted human creatures"; while Thomas Carlyle was thundering forth the rights of man in an age of machinery.

Jesus has a little parable of the yeast and the dough, and that is a fine description of the process that was at work in the nation. The minds of the middle classes were seething with half understood ideas of what life was meant to be for all men; the conscience of the community was stirring; the humanities were awakening; they were beginning to hear "the still sad music

of humanity," and Christ was leading them out not by an easy way.

The Victorian era is often spoken of as that of a respectable individualism that paid its bills, and attended church or chapel, and whose behaviour was proper and decent. But the story of the Victorian era is, as I see it, the story of an era that found its *resistance* to social obligation, slowly, but surely, *breaking down in the face of its own faith in the worth of the soul* of every man, woman and child. A gospel that was purely a social gospel was anathema to many evangelicals (it was particularly so to Lord Shaftesbury) because they believed in a greater gospel than that, but the last hundred years are the proof that social service inevitably follows in the train of that greater gospel. No one more strongly contended than Spurgeon that the Gospel was not a social gospel, but a redeeming gospel; but that redeeming gospel carried with it social implications that meant the Stockwell Orphanage, the Ragged School, and The Homes for old people. The Redemptive Gospel carries the social gospel in its bosom, and the nineteenth century shows a redeeming Lord thrusting out His people upon the social demands of His gospel. We have come a long way in these hundred years in the amelioration of the conditions of the poor; in the sobriety and conduct of the people; in the health and happiness of children; in human interest and education; in fuller life and larger liberties, but in the story you will find you are never far away from that crucified Christ that Spurgeon was upholding at New Park Street and the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Let us give no churlish or stinting recognition to those forces outside religion that have contributed to a better England. A noble chapter can be written of scientific discovery, of political enfranchisement, of educational effort, of Temperance reform, of purely social service, but still the largest chapter, and the chapter that runs through all other chapters as their inspiration and incentive, must be the religious chapter. It was the evangelical Lord Shaftesbury that freed England from child serfdom and slavery, and who was the outstanding figure of social reform in the early years of the last century. It was General Booth, and the few evangelical forerunners of that great soul, who taught us that God was in the slums, and waiting for us there to right the curse of " darkest England."

> By your young children's eyes so red with weeping,
> By their white faces aged with want and fear,
> By the dark cities where your babes are creeping,
> Naked of joy and all that makes life dear;
> From each wretched slum
> Let the loud cry come,
> Arise, O England, for the day is here.

People of England! all your valleys call you,
High in the rising sun the lark sings clear;
Will you dream on, let shameful slumber thrall you?
Will you disown your native land so dear?
Shall it die unheard—
That sweet pleading word?
Arise, O England, for the day is here.

Other men than Christian men have joined in that song, but it was the Christian reformer who struck the first note. It was that Christian lady, Josephine Butler, who originated the crusade to save those fallen women, whom Christ died to win back to purity. It was Bright and Cobden, both noble Christian leaders, who gave a voice to the hungry and the starved. It was those seven men of Preston, Christian men, who launched the Temperance movement and led the way to greater issues than they dreamed; while the sobriety and prosperity of our country owes not a small debt to the blue ribbon movement of the Victorian era—a distinctly Christian movement. The story of education, marred as it is by religious conflict and difference, by prejudice and partisanship and bigotry, is still a religious story, and the greatest educational reformers were moved by Christian conceptions. The finest parliaments of the Victorian era, and the most fruitful in social legislation, were distinctly religious, as were the great Premiers, Gladstone and Salisbury. The name of God was frequently heard in the House of Commons, and His authority impressively appealed to. Those were the days when the "nonconformist conscience" emerged as a force, and the "nonconformist conscience" was not merely a church conscience, but a social conscience.

A host of social and philanthropic institutions minister to-day to the needs physical, mental, and social of men, women, and children—in many cases indeed private charities have passed into public legislation—but you could number on the fingers of your hand those that did not have their beginning in the Christian faith and spirit. Recall the story of the Homes for orphan and neglected children; Quarrier's in Scotland, Muller's in Bristol, Barnardo's in Stepney, Home for Little Boys at Farningham, Stephenson's and Spurgeon's. Who were their founders? All poor men, all Christian men, all men deeply moved by the love of Christ, and appealing to a constituency of men and women moved by a like love. Spurgeon's Orphanage has its message to us to-day as well as Spurgeon's sermons and Spurgeon's College, and it is a reminder that we are always doing more than we appear to be doing when we sow the seed of a divine life in the heart of men. A man cannot be related to Christ in saving faith without becoming related to his fellow man in social service. "He who loveth God loveth his brother also." Christ is the

Lord of all good life, and the Saviour from all human ills, and the holy passion of the Cross sends us forth to the service of all needy souls.

Our fathers wrote a great chapter of social uplift in these 100 years, simply because they followed Christ to all the issues of His call.

> Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,
> And not on paper leaves or leaves of stone;
> Each age, each kindred, adds a verse to it,
> Texts of despair, or hope; of joy, or moan.

May God help us, in our age, to write our text of hope and joy.

W. RIDLEY CHESTERTON.

How the Infallibility of the Pope was Decreed.[1]

FREE Churchmen do not need convincing as to the fallibility of the Pope, but, perhaps, comparatively few of them know *how* fallible were the persons and proceedings through which the decree of his infallibility was secured. This at least must be my excuse for dealing with the subject here.

And first let us see what causes determined the definition in 1870. Among Catholics there was a strong desire to honour and console the Pope. Pius IX. was a man of amiable personal character, and his misfortunes elicited warm sympathy even from some who were not Catholics. He had undergone the hardship of exile, and now he seemed to be on the point of losing what yet remained of the Papal States, and therewith the last remnant of his so-called temporal power. But the chief reason was the desire to check, if possible, the ravages caused by the steady and alarming advance of rationalism in the lands of western civilisation in all departments of thought. It was supposed that the only effective remedy lay in the strengthening

[1] This paper is substantially the latter part of a lecture entitled, "The Story of Papal Infallibility," delivered at New College, London, as the Inaugural Lecture of the session 1932-3.