

The Revival of the Spirit of Spurgeon in the Theology and Life of To-day.

SPURGEON has been termed "The Last of the Puritans." It is a misnomer, since the thinkers and preachers who share his faith and outlook are throughout all the Churches. Their number grows daily. There was a quality in his presentation of the Evangel which can never be lost. It may seem to die out of one generation, only to return in force with a later. His sons in the faith are not only those who have been the recipients of a specific theological discipline forwarded in a given area through his vision: they belong to a variety of schools; men who never came within the walls are associated with his name. The number who share his pristine quality of vision and faith cannot be numbered. They do so because they must; it is a compulsion of light, of soul. Though Spurgeon delighted to say "My Gospel," it did not mean that it was one held by caprice, a view of things he could take up or lay down as he chose. He was a spirit under strict command. He thought as he was compelled to think; and his thinking became an awed worship. Like Isaiah, he had entered into a temple, and the Lord of it did with him as He chose. It was his Gospel, therefore, because it had made him, as it did Saul of Tarsus, a slave for ever. The slave of Jesus Christ is not a normal slave—he is one in thought as well as in flesh, in love, and in daring expression.

It is not a mere literary coincidence, therefore, that Marshall, Morgan and Scott have recently published *The Treasury of the New Testament*, the Second Covenant of God opened up in a series of Spurgeon's matchless sermons. There has been a great demand for these volumes, and the reason lies bare: the Christian heart needs to go back and up to this presentation of the truth as it is in Christ. Some years in the North has made clear to the present writer how strong a grip Spurgeon still has upon some of the finest scholars in communions other than our own; not a few of them owe their standing in God because in early years these sermons came home week by week. In these four volumes the preacher has an incomparable library of exposition, devotion and intercession. A few moments spent even upon the index pages will reveal the daring and reverent adventures of

this man in the realms of God and Christ and the soul. It was this blend of awe and daring faith that made Spurgeon the incomparable thinker and preacher he was. Our present ministry might well go back to learn their craft from this master workman.

The deeper theology of to-day, the theology with iron in its blood, creative of a thrill that draws one back to renewed prayer and thought and preaching, on all sides is calling the Church back to the unfathomable reaches of God's revelation. Its biggest, deepest note, that finds us as nothing else, is but a renewed emphasis on what Spurgeon held as fundamentally true. On the Continent, in America, as well as at home, especially in the North perhaps, there is a steady drive back to puritan faith.

For our present purpose, three phases might be touched upon :

- I. A Graver Conception of Sin.
- II. The severe inadequacy of modern man to grapple with his need.
- III. The Sovereign Grace of God.

I. A GRAVER CONCEPTION OF SIN.

The modern man, perhaps, in general, is not concerned with his *sin*, because in many quarters another term, "God," is elbowed out of court. When there is no holy God against whom man sins, the term "sin" almost loses its meaning, if not quite. Some other term, though, has to denote the malady of his soul. The curious fact is, however, that there is really no other word that bears its inevitable connotation; all other terms have less. Thus, "vice" is the offence against our presumably higher life; "wrong" is that against our fellow-man; and "crime" is against society and its expression in law; but "sin," though any or all of these, is more and other—it is against God. When a man comes there he enters a more awful world, sometimes unbearable; indeed, it can only be borne one way: The awakened soul cries out, as under sheer compulsion, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." It is there the soul becomes aware of the *graver* conception of sin. Out of that hour, either a pessimistic philosophy comes to birth, or a passionate theology; either is an inevitable reaction, though only one is of grace.

What the modern man feels, however much he may change his vocabulary, is that there is a terrible tragedy in his personal world: a moral madness; a malady that borders on despair; a moral disquiet that not all his poets—a frequent refuge—can resolve. It is "The Slough of Despond" in modern annotation.

Awakening to his own condition, he becomes aware that this inner malady is as universal as it is personal to himself;

it is as deep as his own soul, as universal as the race. It runs back into history as far as research can go, and presumably beyond. It fronts all the future man can vision. As a result, it is not in this generation the easy, readily understood thing it was to the earlier.

The disguises of this malady are as many and as fertile as the mind can frame: but all bespeak collapse, a dire hurt, and an insoluble problem. "Repression" is one of the most familiar in our day, the thrusting below the level of the consciousness what cannot be borne in peace within consciousness. It has been found that psycho-therapy can resolve the dissonance caused by shock, or accident, or sorrow, or a burden that cannot be carried, with the result that peace comes back once inner harmony has been achieved. A graver repression, far beyond any of these mentioned, is that of sin. It may be repressed, but now, often to our horror, we find that it is alive with a range of expression inconceivable in the early periods of psychology. It is sin wilfully forgotten but not forgiven; and forgotten sin is not forgiven sin—neither by God nor *man*.

Two effects may be noted in passing. One is neurasthenia. As is well known, this may be caused by any of the above factors, and it is part of our task to understand these distressed people, and to aid them by all means in our power, often by sending them for diagnosis to those who are competent to lay bare the inner strata of life. Once the diagnosis is made, the minister of Jesus Christ who knows himself and his Lord should be of incalculable service.

The other effect is a terrific sense of fear. The world, personal and otherwise, is out of joint. It undermines even the most disciplined mind and body. One recalls an athlete, trained to a hair, who was robbed of a coveted prize that lay within his grasp because of a sudden inrush of fear from unconscious levels.

Now, if shock or sorrow can cause such trouble—and the day has gone when it was a debatable issue—how much more does sin. This is a shock not only to the mind, but to the moral constitution of the soul; deeper than any other, this effect reverberates within the foundations of life. Here is the fundamental disquiet, and only God in Christ is available for the sin-sick soul. The comparative rose-water of average therapy is inadequate. This is an hour when only the man of God has a chance of healing. There are the Macbeths of life: is there a Gospel even for them? That is a therapy worthy of God!

In this connection, though I may be wrong, it seems to me that there is definitely in theology a return in *principle* to what Spurgeon stressed as the essential differences in sin, *viz.*, Original and Personal. We become sinners by consent, though in a world

that is itself lost. There is a common lostness that affects every one born into it. Denied in many theological quarters, camouflaged earlier by such terms as "A Fall Upward," it is yet coming back in two modern quarters, viz., in psycho-analytical centres and Continental theology, e.g., in Heim and Barth and Brunner.

Freud and his quondam disciple, Jung, are not exactly the type of thinker to forward our thesis, yet, differing greatly in their respective spheres, they both underscore the malady of the race. Jung lays down as the basic principle of his system that there is a "collective unconscious," a reservoir, as it were, of knowledge and ability acquired by the race through the centuries, and which forms part of the inheritance of individuals. He is careful to state that in his judgment this is not instinct—as others would have it—nor is it a case of racial habit in action and thought. It is the body of concepts, of ideas, of decisions consciously acquired by our forefathers and handed down to us, their descendants, as part of our unconscious psychic equipment. Mark the distinction he draws between our personal unconscious and collective unconscious. It is the latter which is common property, binding all races, ages and histories together. In his own words: "I am so profoundly convinced of this homogeneity of the human psyche that I have actually embraced it in the concept of the collective unconscious, as a universal and homogeneous substratum whose homogeneity extends even into a world-wide identity or similarity of myths and fairy tales, so that a negro of the Southern States of America dreams in the motives of Grecian mythology, and a Swiss grocer's apprentice repeats in his psychosis the vision of an Egyptian gnostic."

A famous preacher recently spoke about Freud's "nastiness," and truly there is an appalling amount of nastiness in his writings, but—and this is the point—it is our own nastiness that forms the stuff out of which he spins his theories and working principles. Whatever account we, as preachers, may make concerning him, the fact that Christian and non-Christian psychologists admit that he is a true pioneer, in the main, in the realm of man's inner life, must give us pause before we repudiate his main findings. His frankly pagan nastiness is our sin. If he is correct in his dictum that in the unconscious there is no feeling of right and wrong, that it is a-moral, then he is but repeating in his own words what the New Testament lays down in nobler, viz., that our world is one divorced from God, and must therefore be reconciled on a cosmic and a personal scale. In many lives, undoubtedly, he must have found—as his books attest—that the unconscious when hauled up to light underscores his twin principle:

1. Is mainly concerned with sexual matters;
2. Has only to do with "wishing," and works along the pleasure-principle. That is, a lost world, lost to God and higher reaches.

Jung, therefore, differs greatly in his concept of the unconscious from that of Freud: he is wider in holding to two phases, the racial and the personal, the former being the background of all experience, the latter containing only what we have repressed ourselves.

Surely it is not without pertinence that in days when the pulpit has greatly slackened in its diagnosis and prognosis of sin (due perhaps to modern philosophy, from which it is difficult to break away once you have had a heady draught or two), the scientific psychologist has been compelled to affirm in other terms its dread reality, and to look around, often wistfully, as with Jung, for a remedy. So real is this quest for soul-synthesis that Jung is even prepared to consider religion as an ally, though he is unable to admit its objective validity. In his book, for example, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, he stresses strongly the need of religion if analysis is to be complete, though he is nonplussed where to find the religion he himself can accept.

Were Spurgeon alive would he not say, with trumpet tones, as of old: "He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him"? All too long, under humanistic optimism, now practically exploded, we have all sought to tone down man's tragedy, itself an affront to the sufferer "sick-unto-death" (to quote Barth). It seems as though God, tired somewhat with His Church, as earlier with Israel, is raising up even antagonists of the Church in order to drive us back upon graver conceptions and graver tasks than we have envisaged for years.

Is not this the reason for the movement within our own borders of faith—the deeper note now being sounded within the major theology of our time? The easy note has gone, or is going; it is the tragic note, both in philosophy and theology, that is now sounding in our ears. The specialist of the soul is again at his task, though not before the time. To quote but one example: (Brunner, *Mediator*, p. 443): "We only conceive our life as a whole when we see it in this dark shadow of guilt. Thus the sense of guilt means that our eyes have been opened to the utmost seriousness of life." The section from which this excerpt is taken deals profoundly with the whole situation in which we now find ourselves, a situation that throws up for us the need of a graver conception of sin. In almost every case, correct diagnosis means life or death for the patient. Have we, as preachers, always the sense of responsibility common to the medical calling?

II. THE SEVERE INADEQUACY OF MODERN MAN TO GRAPPLE WITH HIS VITAL NEED.

We have two main disciplines, apart from theology, that bear on this matter, viz., Philosophy and Science.

The failure of philosophy seems written large over all its attempts to meet the moral need of man. It is its dark hour. Not now, as yesterday, is it of optimistic mood. Its standard, long since, has fallen in the dust, and so far as one can see there is no hand capable of lifting it to the proud position it had years ago. The philosopher, even more than the theologian, is not listened to with a tittle of the respect that men pay to the presentments of the scientist. Philosophy, perhaps for the good of its soul, is in the wilderness—we trust, with God. Caird of Glasgow used to say that the function of philosophy was "thinking things together." Far from doing that, philosophy is almost wringing its abstract hands together as the needs of to-day thrust themselves upon it. Yesterday, in poetic mood, it loved to quote Browning's lines:

"Evil is null, is naught,
Is silence implying sound."

Not so to-day. A terrific storm from all quarters of its former cosmos is blowing wildly about all the philosophic chairs, and the main task of the moment is to anchor them to some bed-rock lest they be driven helplessly before implacable gales.

Two phases might engage our attention here—ethics and humanism. Ethics, in which so much earlier seemed to be permanent, is definitely under the weather. The Kantian, "I ought, therefore I can," has broken loose from its moorings, and drifts before the moral gale it is unable to control. In this respect, as with so many others, man's peril was never so momentous as now.

The main reason for this debacle, perhaps, lies at the door of science, the discipline to which philosophy looked for confirmation of its theses. It is the scientific gift of "Relativity" that has launched this gale. Now, more than morals are adrift—the modern soul itself goes out, it knows not whither. In a relativity-ordered (or disordered) world, ethics has only expediency with which to account for its life. Man has always been able to put up a stout fight for his ideals when he has felt ethical rock beneath his feet; but now—all is shifting sand, plus a swirling whirlpool of passion and caprice. It is a fell day.

Humanism, the cult of the self as its own ideal, is as hopelessly discredited as its ethical relation. It goes steadily over to discredit the more clearly the fact is seen that it has no objective validity. It is a web of man-spun dream and theory.

Plato held that the soul feeds on Truth, Goodness and Beauty; that is, upon the Eternal to which or whom we all consciously or unconsciously aspire. Humanism holds no such "values," and loses grip-hold daily. Its treatment of humanity as self-centred, self-contained and sufficient, as framing and capable of maintaining its own ideal, and therefore as adequate for every emergency, has gone down in the storm. For without objectivity, with no reliance upon a God above and beyond our ambiguous and fragmentary experience, it has no gripping power—it is "built upon the sand."

Science registers the same inadequacy to deal with this malady of the soul. Hence the reason, possibly, why it makes strenuous endeavours to wipe out the word "sin."

Though it can engirdle the world within a few seconds with its wireless, it cannot bring upon the soul one tithe of like power. It has given to this generation powers that baffle imagination, alike for creation and destruction, yet, on the lips of its most eminent exponents, it confesses an inability to increase the moral and spiritual force with which to guide these new powers aright. It seems to stand within its own shadow. Of an "Alpha" and an "Omega" it has no word; it has only an interim report of tangibilities. It has much to say about the earth; of the heavens it is necessarily silent; it has no revelation, save by inference from a source other than its own.

This is as true of its therapy as of all its other branches. By way of its special technique, the inner sickness of the soul is laid bare, upon which it has one special command: "Pull yourself together; your sin is a bugbear, a creature of your own fashioning. Treat it as negligible, and live above it." Effective as this often is for shock or accident, in the case of sin it is equivalent to asking a man to lift himself up above his height by his shoelaces: he tugs with might, and the laces snap! The tragedies that all too often star our bill-boards are but snapped minds.

Let us look at reality with eyes as widely flung open as we dare. Here is the patent fact: In man's proudest hour of research and garnered wisdom he is sensing an utter inadequacy to command inner peace with moral power. Is it because God is being forgotten? History suggests that there has ever been a dread nemesis in all such forgetting. That nemesis is—the unanchored mind! There comes back to mind "The Tramp" in David Grayson's *Adventures in Contentment*. The man had drifted into his knowledge, and he was trying to serve his temporal need with the hope that he might do something more towards helping him to find his moral feet again. Here is the bit that lingers in memory: "In reality, I am no tramp. I began

as well as anyone . . . *I am afraid before life.* It makes me dizzy with thought . . . If I am a tramp at all, I am a mental tramp. *I have an unanchored mind.*" (Italics our own.)

And yet it is science that has shattered materialism as a philosophy, at least in its latest thinkers, only, however, to pulverise ethics, and leave man lonelier than ever under the stars. Formerly he walked with God, with a puritan heart; now that August Companion is dead! Man is therefore unanchored!

Here partly we have the reason why Jung and other eminent psycho-therapists endeavour to pay some respect to religion. They are aware that they must find a religious-equivalent in order to carry through their programme of inner reconstruction; and this despite the fact that they have no faith in religious-objectivity. It may be a species of natural pride, or of frank inability to hear the call of faith that can win the citadel of mind and heart. In either case, Jung only thinks of religion as an avenue to sublimation, and is only prepared to accept it on that basis. He ignores the fact that the validity of religion rests on its ultimate, not pragmatic, truth. To treat religion with private reserve is an impossibility. Religion refuses to be a Cinderella of the mental laboratory.

Nevertheless, it is of no mean significance that he and others of his calibre feel, the need of the calculus that only religion can provide. It is the quest for inner power. The lines of Drinkwater are apposite:

"Knowledge we ask not, for knowledge Thou hast lent;
But, Lord, the will, there lies our bitter need—
To build above the brave intent
The deed, the deed."

A return to Spurgeon's conception of the sovereignty of God is the vital need of this scientific day. It may be that not a little of our present disquiet is the judgment of the hidden God to bring this generation back to Him—on its knees.

III. THE SOVEREIGN GRACE OF GOD.

Grace as a vital term of religion is not much in use to-day, certainly not in the front rank of thought as was the case in other generations. Still, there is no other term that can express just what it connotes. There is an intensity and an amplitude in it that no other word can even approach. Theologians and preachers will have to come back to it, and in doing so forward its teaching in book and pulpit once again. We have already lost much by losing the word. There were many points of difference between Spurgeon and Forsyth, but both men rested their soul on the grace of God. In all probability, had Forsyth won for himself the limpid clarity of the greater preacher, Barth

would not have been so much of a surprise to British readers as he is now.

There is that in sovereign grace that awes and holds a man as no other presentation of truth can. It speaks more adequately than any other term of the love that stooped from heaven to climb Calvary. Sovereign grace connotes a fulness to meet every need of non-sovereign man; a saving principle and quality able to avert doom, to cancel guilt, to cleanse the stained, to reconcile this wandered world to the holy God.

Whether we use the word freely or not, we must recapture its immensity, its range and wonder. It is that in Christ which throws open eternal gates to lost man, brings him back from every far country into which he has flung himself, that annuls his transgression and re-makes him a son of God. It speaks of a redemption adequate to the crack of doom. "Though you have raked in the kennels of hell," cried Spurgeon, "the grace of God can save your soul." It calls forth gratitude from a man that makes him ransack mind and heart for appropriate expression. "I was common clay," said one, "until roses were planted in me." Now it is this order of transcendent experience to which philosophy and science seem to be such strangers. These men and women of grace walk as citizens of another world. "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen." Henry Drummond's emendation is very suggestive: "We look through the things that are seen," a characteristic of all who are captured by the grace of God.

This grace is manifold in its nature and operation. For brevity's sake we can only draw attention to three phases:

I. *There is the Grace of the Written Word.*—The present generation does not seem to have the reverence for the Bible that our forebears had. It is a sacred book, it is true, but is it to them the Word of the Living God? One of the chief tasks to-day is to win back our people's reverence for it. Perhaps our critical faculties in dealing with it have cost us the greater faculty of wonder. That Transcendent Book! what we lose when it becomes one of many books to us! when we come to it at our caprice, and open it with a casual mind and an unstirred soul.

We must re-emphasise its sovereign uniqueness. Like Jesus Himself, it has no fellow. It has no need to suggest a cancelling of other literatures of the soul: like Kant's Categorical Imperative, it shines by its own light. To read it sensitively is to awake to a wonder unseen, unfelt elsewhere. This Word is so unlike all others because it is alive with the Spirit of God. There are other august volumes which reveal to us the tireless quest of man for God: but here we have it from the other side—God's inbreaking within man's chequered world. Here we

have Grace, the Grace of God, not quest; if quest at all, a quest because there has come a revelation that makes all quests possible. Whether it offend ears that have given themselves up to comparative studies or not, this must be said: Here God speaks, and man listens; here God finds, and man adores; here God forgives; and man stammers out a broken gratitude a-thrill with the glory of a world that has broken in on him to his amazement. We all love comparative research, and have been indebted to it beyond any word we can speak: but this Book is not of that order, and what is more, we know it. This Word is the Written Grace of God. Let us come back again to it, and with the simplicity of children learn its mystery and wonder again.

II. *The Grace of the Incarnate Word.*—Only of One do we say this. There is but one Jesus, and He is the Christ of the Jew, and the Logos of the Gentile, and the Saviour of every mind and heart and will that really discover His saving wonder. He is God's fulness for our poverty, God's hope in our despair, God's light for our darkness. Unlike all others of history, He only has His footing in innocence; the only one who never had to cry out to a Greater and Nobler for forgiveness which He could not compass for Himself. As Forsyth said years ago, through Him we do not get a faith in metaphysics, but a metaphysics of faith. All others have to point to what is beyond themselves: He was content to call attention to Himself. Jesus is either the Grace of God incarnate or we are lost. If on this fundamental issue He is not our Alpha and Omega, then we have neither: we have no eternity either before or beyond. All we have is our time-hour, at the end of which we die in our sin.

Spurgeon, it needs no telling, based his whole faith upon the transcendence of Jesus. It is to this Christ that modern theology goes back quickly. The attenuated psychological Jesus is a modern creation, one who was as capable of mistake in His quest as all others, not the Lord from Heaven. To faith, He is the solitary Figure in history, the Holy One whom men must adore would they come to the Father. And His Cross is as unique among the vicarious sacrifices of all time. The more this is felt the quicker will the terms one heard a few years ago die out of Christian vocabulary; for example, "The Manliness of Christ," "The Bravery of Jesus," "The Greatest of all heroes is One," and "Jesus the Pilgrim." One does not quarrel with these as wrong, but as effete, as weakened beyond true value. They belong to a sub-Christian order of reality. They are apposite to the better class of men; for Jesus they have little or no value. They are on our lips when we wish to put Him in a class with others, only being careful to see that He is in the first class. He becomes a *primus inter pares*, a position that

has no pertinence when He is truly seen. To put it as bluntly as it should be put: He will have none of us, nor anything to do with us, when in our impertinence or patronage we beckon Him into a *relative* position. Let an illustration point out to us our folly. A visitor to an academy in which a great picture of Jesus was on view, looked at it dispassionately and then turned away to go elsewhere, when a girl stepped to him, saying: "Oh, sir, do not go away like that. See, the way to look at Him is on your knees, looking up into His face. You cannot see Him in this picture any other way." Those who know Christ best tell us lesser folk that no one knows Christ until he learns to adore Him.

III. *The Grace of the Inbreathed Word*—the Holy Spirit of Jesus' promise and gift. It is grace still. Until He speaks within the soul, who, by listening, can hear? Until He takes the Written to reveal the Incarnate Word, the light that falls upon the fact and the Face is not of heaven but of our own shifting speculation; this latter may be interesting, it is simply not revelation.

But when He takes the Word and His light falls upon it and upon the soul of the reader or listener, then is wrought the miracle that has brought the Church across the centuries. He takes the "Jesus of History" only to make us know that One has no limiting horizon—He is the Logos that became Flesh. What is a horizon but the limit of vision? Intensify the vision and the horizon lifts; we are in a roomier universe. That is precisely the action of the Holy Spirit; He sets Jesus within eternal dimensions. It is then we know again the meaning of Grace, if we ever may. Has not Paul, therefore, a word to put to the soul of our day: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Perhaps a number of us would be compelled to reply: "Nay, we did not so much as hear whether there is a Holy Ghost."

Spurgeon, with all his power, pleaded for the recognition and reception of the Spirit. All the men who have done lasting work in the Church have to a man testified to a similar need and later experience. The time of the Spirit's coming, so they say, is the springtide of the soul. In that springtide Christ is seen and known and experienced unforgettably. To-day, receding from many rationalistic standpoints, the Christian thinker falls back gratefully upon these memorable words: "I will send Him unto you . . . He shall take of mine and shall shew it unto you."

To the present writer, himself back to not a few early visions and conceptions after years of mental uncertainty and strife, the need of the hour seems to be a closer acquaintance with the great realities that stormed and held Spurgeon's mind and heart.

These will be expressed in the idiom of the day, but being necessarily timeless in themselves will not be the creatures of to-day. In effect, we must move back to a Christ who is at home in and fills the very throne of God. No lesser Christ can be the Saviour of our ambiguous day. Naturally, this will be denied on many a lip. There is, however, a word that comes in answer, that unforgettable saying of the Agrapha: "My mystery," said Jesus, "is for Me and for the sons of My house." The Christian heart, when it is a case of "either-or," has ever chosen to stand in the straits with Him and welcome the consequences.

F. CAWLEY.

ANABAPTISM. *The Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* for September, 1935, and August, 1936, contain an article on "Anabaptism in England during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," by Dr. Duncan B. Heriot, who suggests there are four probable reasons why Anabaptism has not received the attention it deserves. (1) The difficulty of tracing the Anabaptists as such. (2) The authorities themselves are not too clear in the way they use the term "Anabaptists." (3) The focus of interest to-day has moved away from Anabaptism in England. (4) Modern research along this line has been done chiefly by Baptist scholars.

Dr. Heriot has gone for his facts to the original documents, and he has been fortunate in the opportunity to examine an unexplored tributary of Anabaptist history. Dr. Whitley suggested that something *might* be found in the Dutch Church, Austin Friars, and there, stored in a specially built strong room in the church, Dr. Heriot found records which, he states, must be among the most interesting in the country. Anabaptist references are in these records from 1560.

The article merits the attention of students of our history, and it would be well to secure the two magazines before they go out of print.