

Recollections of S. A. Tipple.

I.

THE Editor asks me tell you what I knew of the now-famed Samuel Augustus Tipple. He and my father were Staffordshire neighbours in the eighteen-fifties—he the Baptist minister in Wolverhampton and my father in Walsall. They were kindred spirits and great friends. My father used to express his admiration and affection through occasional gifts of choice cigars. When S. A. Tipple was called to London, he advised the Wolverhampton Baptists to invite my father to succeed him, and it ended in his settling there, and presently in his building of the Waterloo Road Chapel. In Wolverhampton my father made his first real home, and there all we, his first five children, were born. Mr. Tipple and he nurtured their friendship through all their years, and I can readily recall his letters ever and again arriving with their spidery sharp-pointed script which father would challenge us to read. Mr. Tipple became in Norwood, South London, a personality and preacher of rare distinction, though never of popular fame. My father greatly prized the first volume of sermons which his friend ventured to publish—*Echoes of Spoken Words*—and gave it to me on my going to “Regent’s.” In outer appearance and type, and in inner charm of style and thought, it was an unusual volume. There I found for the first time Biblical and human problems freshly and fearlessly treated, just the book for a young truth-seeker. If you are ever lucky enough to see it for sale at second-hand, seize your chance. You won’t find it out of date even now. I am reminded of another book on my father’s not-too-often-replenished shelves—his quiver was too full for many such purchases—which he owed to Mr. Tipple’s counsel: *Catholic Thoughts on the Bible and Theology*, by Vicar Frederick Myers of St. John’s, Keswick, the father of F. W. H. Myers, the poet of *St. Paul*, and the founder of the *Psychical Research Society*. It seems to me now to have anticipated the many master-problems that were destined to emerge and challenge the Church’s honesty and courage, when—with the new light that was to break forth from science, history and criticism—God would be calling and compelling His own to reconsider the data and doctrine of Scripture. That was the book which, in my later ’teens, became a light to my path and a lamp to my feet, and saved me from many a stumble. I owe a deep debt to S. A. Tipple for advising my father

to its purchase. I can see that it was the very book he himself would greatly value.

When I entered "Regent's," my fond father informed Mr. Tipple, from whom I soon received an invitation to spend a Sunday in Norwood. I can never forget that Sunday morning—the little building, seating about three hundred, filled to capacity with, as I afterwards learned, faithful listeners from all parts of London. Not a child was to be seen. They could scarcely be brought there from such distances. Nor could the high-strung preacher himself bear their innocent little restlessnesses. Nobody was late. Everyone had evidently been disciplined to the due demands of the hour. A stiller and devouter fellowship could scarcely have been found. Presently, the preacher's presence hushed the assembly into awe. I was fascinated by his refined, tense, reverend face, and by his every movement. He was aged, of course, and his hair was snowy-white. His prayings were meditations and communions that expressed deep yearnings of the soul, to be classed with the devotions of McLaren and George Dawson, of Joseph Parker and Rabindranath Tagore. His reading of Scripture was a revelation of fresh significance in things familiar. And his preaching! Not a note, yet not a wasted ragged word! Pure artistry! A perfect bit of intellectual and exegetical and spiritual workmanship. Far removed from the spheres of the dogmatic and the ecclesiastical, but woven into all the warp of life. Every eye was fastened upon him. We almost held our breath. I remember how vivid was his quoted stanza from Tennyson that morning :

"A fuller light illumined all,
A breeze through all the garden swift,
A sudden hubbub shook the hall,
And sixty feet the fountain leapt."

That one hour taught me, beyond any earlier experience, what public worship and preaching might become. In his home he and Mrs. Tipple were for my father's sake the kindest of hosts to me, a very shy young student. Though it was Sunday, he made me join him in his study, before he rested to renew his day's strength. I caught sight on his desk of the scripts of the morning's prayings and preaching. I saw, too, the tea, with sliced lemon, that he was wont to sip, too often probably, day by day. He told me how, till the last moment before entering the pulpit, he always clung to the hope that someone might arrive to relieve him of his pulpit charge. Also, that he could not much longer bear the strain of the double service, and that he feared that then the Chapel would have to be closed for the evenings, as two-fold attendance could scarcely be expected of his

far-travelling people. And this, as is well known, was eventually done.

I have often recalled what he told me that day of his spiritualistic and psychic investigations, in the course of which he had come upon many inexplicable things—especially a farm-labourer, who under his own critical testings had seemed typically torpid and dull, yet in a trance had given off a brilliant discourse on Inspiration. He told me that he himself had ceased to attend séances lest he should lose the due balance of his intellect and judgement.

A little while after I first knew him his *Sunday Mornings at Norwood* was published, and this time, to the enrichment of his readers, the prayers of the preacher were also added.

I was only able to get to Norwood very rarely, for the distance from "Regent's" was great and, for a student, expensive, and I shrank from intruding upon an Elder whom I so much revered. The last time I ventured he constrained me to conduct his evening service. With fear and trembling I strove to do my best. He himself was sitting just to my right below. From the text "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ," I reminded my hearers that we were being frequently and continually tested and judged by Christ through the experiences of life; "perhaps," I said, "by the reading of a book like *Sartor Resartus*." At this I was almost upset, for the great preacher became rather excited. He jerked up in his corner seat and fixed me with a disconcerting look. I had to pull myself together to carry on. As soon as the service was over, he came into the vestry and challenged me, "Why did you say that about Carlyle?" "Because it had been my own experience," I answered, "it was *Sartor Resartus* that became my 'baptism of fire'." "Why, that was the book," he replied, "that woke my spirit. I could scarcely believe my ears as I listened. You swept me back in that instant into my own earliest years."

The last time I saw and heard him was in Bloomsbury, in the pulpit of Stopford Brooke. I doubt whether any other preacher of ours would thus have been chosen. Nor were the grounds of the choice, I am confident, theological. It was the expression of the spiritual kinship of two sensitive poetic souls. But I couldn't feel it to be a success. The surroundings were too unusual for the Norwood preacher, and Stopford Brooke's gown, which I suppose he was asked to wear, distressed him, and in the midst of the sermon he threw it aside. I felt his discomfort. He was one who could scarcely be himself save in his own familiar fellowship. But there he was sovereign.

S. PEARCE CAREY.

II

The years of my boyhood, from eight to fourteen, were spent at my birthplace, Upper Norwood, where Charles Haddon Spurgeon had his home, and where, at Central Hill Chapel, Samuel Augustus Tipple exercised his ministry. Spurgeon I never saw; but I remember being sent by my father to read the bulletins which were posted at the gate of his house during his last illness. I also have a couple of autograph notes which he sent to my father with reference to the project of starting a Church in the neighbourhood. As Tipple's theological outlook was too advanced for my father's taste we did not attend Central Hill Chapel but had sittings instead in St. Aubyn's Congregational Church, under the Rev. George Martin, whose views were much more akin to Spurgeon's. Not until schooldays were over did I claim the privilege of occasionally absenting myself from the family pew and going to hear Tipple. That I was able to do so at all I count as one of the supreme privileges of a life rich in privileges. For no other preacher I have ever listened to made such an impression on me as he did.

With his slight, frail figure, his broad forehead, his mouth thin-lipped and sensitive, his whole face luminous with keen spiritual intelligence and fervour he conveyed an impression of finely-strung but intense vitality. His voice, although not a strong one, was very expressive. He seemed to preach with his whole being, down to his very finger-tips, and worshippers were held under a spell from the first word of the service to the last. He preached without notes, yet so choice and apt was his diction that it could not possibly have been—as it appeared from its manner of delivery to be—extempore. I was at a loss to think what could be the preacher's method of preparation until, many years later, I met the Rev. R. F. Guyton, who had once been Tipple's assistant, acting as *locum tenens* for him when he visited India. Mr. Guyton told me that Tipple's memory was of the kind that is called visual. On Sunday evening he would choose his text for the following Sunday. (In his later years he preached only once a Sunday.) He would read widely during the week and on Saturday write his sermon. While he was preaching he could with his mind's eye see what he had written, and would mentally turn over one by one the pages of the manuscript which he carried with him in his pocket. A week later he would find that manuscript indecipherable even by himself.

His sermons were characterized by remarkable range and freshness of thought, absolutely fearless candour, searching

psychological insight and delicately sensitive accuracy of expression. Four volumes of them were published, viz. : *Echoes of Spoken Words* in 1877 (originally issued for private circulation), *Sunday Mornings at Norwood*, which reached a second edition in 1895, *The Admiring Guest* in 1896, and *Days of Old* in 1911. In addition a book of selections from his prayers, under the title *Spoken Words of Prayer and Praise*, appeared in 1912, shortly before his death. But the printed page, while it preserves the lucidity and choiceness of the preacher's diction and the beauty of his phrasing, inevitably fails to convey the tense vividness of his living utterance.

When I reached home after hearing him I made fragmentary jottings of such sentences as my memory retained: and my younger brother, who heard him rather more frequently in subsequent years, followed a similar practice. My brother was killed by a sniper at Inverness Copse in 1917, but the notebook containing his jottings has been preserved, and selections from it will be given in a later issue of the *Baptist Quarterly*.

A distinctive feature of Mr. Tipple's services was the Scripture readings. Instead of reading a whole chapter he would make an anthology of verses from Old and New Testaments bearing on the subject of his sermon. And how tellingly he could read! It seemed remarkable to me at the time—and still seems so—that on one occasion I found that I could remember the complete chain of verses and jot them down along with my recollections of the sermon. These readings are given with the first of the sermon notes hereafter to be printed.

ERIC J. ROBERTS.

The October issue of the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* maintains the high standard associated with that Society's productions. Of interest to Baptists is the first part of an article on The Old Meeting House, Bessels Green.