

THE
SWORD AND THE TROWEL.

SEPTEMBER, 1887.

Our Reply to Sundry Critics and Enquirers.

BY C. H. SPURGEON.

ACCORDING to the best of our ability we sounded an alarm in Zion concerning the growing evils of the times, and we have received abundant proof that it was none too soon. Letters from all quarters declare that the case of the church at this present is even worse than we thought it to be. It seems that, instead of being guilty of exaggeration, we should have been justified in the production of a far more terrible picture. This fact causes us real sorrow. Had we been convicted of mis-statement we would have recanted with sincerely penitent confessions, and we should have been glad to have had our fears removed. It is no joy to us to bring accusations; it is no pleasure to our heart to seem to be in antagonism with so many. We are never better pleased than when, in fellowship with our brethren, we can rejoice in the progress of the gospel.

But no one has set himself to disprove our allegations. One gentleman, of neutral tint, has dared to speak of them as vague, when he knows that nothing could be more definite. But no one has shown that prayer-meetings are valued, and are largely attended; no one has denied that certain ministers frequent theatres; no one has claimed that the Broad School newspapers have respected a single truth of revelation; and no one has borne witness to the sound doctrine of our entire ministry. Now we submit that these are the main points at issue: at least, these are the only things we contend about. Differences of judgment upon minor matters, and varieties of mode in action, are not now under question; but matters vital to religion. Others may trifle about such things; we cannot, and dare not.

Instead of dealing with these weighty things, our opponents have set to work to make sneering allusions to our sickness. All the solemn things we have written are the suggestions of our pain, and we are advised to take a long rest. With pretended compassion, but with real insolence, they would detract from the truth by pointing to the lameness of its witness. Upon this trifling we have this much to say:—In the first place, our article was written when we were in vigorous health, and it was in print before any sign of an approaching attack was discoverable. In the second place, if we were in a debate with Christians we should feel sure that, however short they might run of arguments, they would not resort to personalities; least of all, to those

personalities which make a painful malady their target. Incidentally, this breach of Christian courtesy goes to show that the new theology is introducing, not only a new code of morals, but a new tone and spirit. It would seem to be taken for granted, that if men are such fools as to adhere to an old-fashioned faith, of course they must be idiots, and they deserve to be treated with that contemptuous pity which is the quintessence of hate. If you can find out that they are sufferers, impute their faith to their disease, and pretend that their earnestness is nothing but petulance arising from their pain. But enough of this: we are so little embittered in spirit by our pangs that we can laugh at the arrows aimed at our weaker member. Do our critics think that, like Achilles, our vulnerable point lies, not in our head, but in our heel?

We are grateful to the editor of *Word and Work* for speaking out so plainly. He says:—

“In *The Sword and the Trowel* for the present month Mr. Spurgeon gives no uncertain sound concerning departures from the faith. His exposure of the dishonesty which, under the cover of orthodoxy, assails the very foundations of faith is opportune in the interests of truth. No doubt, like a faithful prophet in like evil times, he will be called a ‘troubler of Israel,’ and already we have noticed he has been spoken of as a pessimist; but any such attempts to lessen the weight of his testimony are only certain to make it more effective. When a strong sense of duty prompts public speech, it will be no easy task to silence it.

“The preachers of false doctrine dislike nothing more than the premature detection of their doings. Only give them time enough to prepare men’s minds for the reception of their ‘new views,’ and they are confident of success. They have had too much time already, and any who refuse to speak out now must be held to be ‘partakers of their evil deeds.’ As Mr. Spurgeon says, ‘A little plain-speaking would do a world of good just now. These gentlemen desire to be let alone. They want no noise raised. Of course, thieves hate watch-dogs, and love darkness. It is time that somebody should spring his rattle, and call attention to the way in which God is being robbed of his glory and man of his hope.’

“Only those who have given some attention to the progress of error during recent years can form any just idea of the rapid strides with which it is now advancing. Under the plea of liberalism, unscriptural doctrines are allowed to pass current in sermons and periodicals, which, only a few years ago, would have been faithfully resisted unto the death. When anyone even mildly protests, preachers and journalists are almost unanimous in drowning the feeble testimony either by sneers or shouts. Throughout the wide realm of literature there seems to be a conspiracy to hate and hunt down every Scriptural truth. Let any man, especially if he belongs to an

evangelical church, denounce or deny any part of the creed he has solemnly vowed to defend, and at once his fortune is made. The press makes the world ring with his fame, and even defends the dishonesty which clings to a stipend forfeited by the violation of his vow. It is far otherwise with the defender of the faith. He is mocked, insulted, and laughed to scorn. The spirit of the age is against him. So in greater or lesser measure it has always been. But when he remembers who the prince of this world and the ruler of the age is, he may be well content to possess his soul in patience.”

This witness is true.

Let no man dream that a sudden crotchet has entered our head, and that we have written in hot haste: we have waited long, perhaps too long, and have been slow to speak. Neither let anyone suppose that we build up our statements upon a few isolated facts, and bring to the front certain regrettable incidents which might as well have been forgotten. He who knows all things can alone reveal the wretched facts which have come under our notice. Their memory will, we trust, die and be buried with the man who has borne their burden, and held his peace because he had no wish to create disunion. Resolved to respect the claims both of truth and love, we have pursued an anxious pathway. To protest when nothing could come of it but anger, has seemed senseless; to assail evil and crush a vast amount of good in the process, has appeared to be injurious. If all knew all, our reticence would be wondered at and we are not sure that it would be approved. Whether approved or not, we have had no motive but the general progress of the cause of truth, and the glory of God.

Had there been a right spirit in those who resent our warning, they would either have disproved our charge, or else they would have lamented its truthfulness, and have set to work to correct the evil which we lamented. Alas, the levity which plays ducks and drakes with doctrines, makes game of all earnestness, and finds sport in Christian decision! Yet, surely there is a remnant of faithful ones, and these will be stirred to action, and will cry mightily unto God that the plague may be stayed. The gospel is too precious for us to be indifferent to its adulteration. By the love we bear to the Lord Jesus we are bound to defend the treasure with which he has put us in trust.

That ugly word “pessimist” has been hurled at our devoted head. We are denounced as “gloomy.” Well, well! The day was when we were censured for being wickedly humorous, and many were the floggings we received for our unseemly jests. Now we are morose and bitter. So the world’s opinion changes. A half-a-farthing would be an extravagant price to pay for the verdict one way or another. In truth, we are quite able to take an *optimistic* view of things. (Is that the correct word, Sir Critic?) We are glad to admit that there is much of Christian zeal, self-sacrifice, and holy perseverance in the world. Possibly there is more than ever. Did we ever

say otherwise? We rejoice in the thousands of gracious, holy, large-hearted men around us. Who dares to say we do not? We see much that is hopeful and delightful in many quarters. Is this at all to the point? May there not be much that is beautiful and healthful in a countenance where yet there may be the symptoms of a foul disease? The church is large, and while one end of her field may rejoice us with golden grain, another part of it may be full of thorns and briers. It often happens that causes of sorrow may be increased at the very same moment when occasions of joy are most numerous. We judge that it is so just now. The cause of God goes on in spite of foes, and his truth is sure to conquer in the long run, however influential its opposers. No, no, we are by no means despondent for the Lord's kingdom. That would be a dishonour to his eternal power and Godhead. Our amiable critics may possibly be pleased to know that they will not find us bathing in vinegar, nor covering our swollen foot with wormwood, nor even drinking quinine with our vegetables; but they will find us rejoicing in the Lord, and buckling on our harness for the war with as firm a confidence as if all men were on our side. Bad as things are from one point of view, there is a bright side to affairs: the Lord has yet his men in reserve who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

We have said, with deep grief that we should have had to say it, that many ministers have departed from the faith; and this was no unkind suspicion on our part, but a matter of fact, ascertained in many ways, and made most sadly sure. We trust that the Baptists are by no means so far gone as the Independents: indeed, we feel sure that they are not. Still, we do not say this in order to throw stones at others. A well-known Congregational minister, who is preparing a book upon this painful subject, writes us—"I have not a large acquaintance with the state of opinion in your denomination. I groan over my own. There are many faithful to Christ, and to the souls of men; but, alas! it seems to me that many have no kind of gospel to preach, and the people are willing that it should be so. Some of our colleges are poisoning the churches at the fountains. I very much fear that an unconverted ministry is multiplying." To the same import is a letter from another brother of the same denomination, who says—"I cannot agree with *The British Weekly*, that you take an 'extremely pessimistic' view of the evil. On the contrary, I am disposed to think that your conviction is faint compared with what the reality would warrant. — College, for example, continues to pour forth men to take charge of our churches who do not believe, in any proper sense, in the inspiration of the Scriptures, who deny the vicarious sacrifice on the cross, and hold that, if sinners are not saved on this side the grave, they may, can, or must be on the other. And the worst of it is, the people love it." We could multiply this painful evidence, but there is no need, since the charge is not denied. It is ridiculed; it is treated as a

matter of no consequence, but it is not seriously met. Is this what we have come to? Is there no doctrine left which is to be maintained? Is there no revelation? Or is that revelation a nose of wax to be shaped by the finger of fashion? Are the sceptics so much to the fore that no man will open his mouth against them? Are all the orthodox afraid of the ridicule of the “cultured”? We cannot believe it. The private knowledge which we possess will not allow of so unhappy a conclusion; yet Christian people are now so tame that they shrink from expressing themselves. The house is being robbed, its very walls are being digged down, but the good people who are in bed are too fond of the warmth, and too much afraid of getting broken heads, to go downstairs and meet the burglars; they are even half vexed that a certain noisy fellow will spring his rattle, or cry, “Thieves!”

That the evil leaven is working in the churches as well as among the ministers, is also sadly certain. A heterodox party exists in many congregations, and those who compose it are causing trouble to the faithful, and sadly influencing the more timid towards a vacillating policy. An earnest preacher, who is only one of a class, says: “The old truths are unpopular here. I am told that I have preached the doctrines of grace to my cost—that is, in a pecuniary aspect; and I know that it is so. I cannot find anything to rest upon in the modern theories, but this places me in antagonism to the supporters of the chapel. They find fault, not with the style of my preaching, but with the subjects of it.” In another place the witness is—“Our minister is an able and gracious man, but there are those in the church who are determined that no one shall remain here unless he is in favour of advanced opinions.” Yes, the divergence is every day becoming more manifest. A chasm is opening between the men who believe their Bibles and the men who are prepared for an advance upon Scripture. Inspiration and speculation cannot long abide in peace. Compromise there can be none. We cannot hold the inspiration of the Word, and yet reject it; we cannot believe in the atonement and deny it; we cannot hold the doctrine of the fall and yet talk of the evolution of spiritual life from human nature; we cannot recognise the punishment of the impenitent and yet indulge the “larger hope.” One way or the other we must go. Decision is the virtue of the hour.

Neither when we have chosen our way can we keep company with those who go the other way. There must come with decision for truth a corresponding protest against error. Let those who will keep the narrow way keep it, and suffer for their choice; but to hope to follow the broad road at the same time is an absurdity. What communion hath Christ with Belial?

Thus far we come, and pause. Let us, as many as are of one mind, wait upon the Lord to know what Israel ought to do. With steadfast faith let us take our places; not in anger, not in the spirit of suspicion or division, but in watchfulness and resolve. Let us not pretend to a fellowship which we

do not feel, nor hide convictions which are burning in our hearts. The times are perilous, and the responsibility of every individual believer is a burden which he must bear, or prove a traitor. What each man's place and course should be the Lord will make clear unto him.