

[“Down-Grade” comments from]

THE

SWORD AND THE TROWEL.

1888.

By Charles H. Spurgeon.

Note (September)

To many enquiring friends the editor would gratefully say that he is much better, though specially weak. Changing weather, with so much wet and cold, prevent a quick return to usual health. After a severe illness strength is slow in returning. Yet the work of the Lord has gone on with not less of blessing than in years past.

Hosts of American friends have been at the Tabernacle, and have greeted the preacher with loving sympathy. With these have come men of eminence, and plain lovers of the gospel belonging to all the denominations, bringing warm and tender words of sympathy and cheer. God is very gracious, and sends consolation by the hands of those whose very manner adds sweetness to their words. It is hard to make Christian people understand that there is a Union of professed Christians, which receives into its fellowship persons of any creed, or no creed, so long as they have been baptized. It is not easy to believe that men professing to hold the truth of God will retain in their communion men whose views are far removed from what is understood to be the evangelical faith. We are not anxious that Christians of other lands should be assured of a fact which is so greatly to be deplored; but certainly it is to the most of them a great surprise.

Few who have spoken with us have failed to see that there is a tremendous current, both broad and deep, which is running counter to the inspiration of Holy Scripture, and to those fundamental truths which until lately have been considered vital to the Christian religion. The question now raised strikes at the root of all true religion. It is not so much which doctrine is Scriptural, but is there any inspired Scripture from which doctrine can be drawn with certainty?

After dreaming and doting upon a future other than Scripture reveals, men now dream about Scripture itself. However, all this will have its day, and before long true hearts will turn from it with loathing. We believe that God and his great future are on the side of the old faith, and we are content to wait, and see what he will do.

The Pastor and Church at the Tabernacle are now free from all hampering connections with Unions and Associations, but by no means without communion of the warmest kind with the Lord's faithful people. We have no doubt that ways will be found in which all the benefits of fellowship will be enjoyed with those churches with which we can honestly and heartily unite. Of any movement our friends shall be informed. We hope they will believe nothing which the newspapers may insert, since in the absence of information they are apt to make guesses, and state them as facts. Our attitude is that of waiting for divine direction. Unbelief is in a hurry, faith can bide its time.

Mr. Henry Varley is doing grand service by his papers upon inspiration in *Word and Work*, in answer to Mr. Horton's book. No doubt there will, as the struggle is intensified, be raised up other brave advocates for the eternal Word; but meanwhile our brother is doing the work in a thoroughly efficient manner. Although the policy of silence is again adopted by the Loose School in the matter of the "Down-Grade," it is happily the case that it is impossible to apply the pitch-plaster to all mouths; there are yet men and papers which cannot be burked or bought. All our readers should see what Mr. Varley has written, and Baptists especially, since the author whom he criticizes is chosen by the Baptist Union to take a leading part at its autumnal session.

The prayers of the Lord's people at the Tabernacle have been graciously heard in the restoration to us of our beloved brother and deacon, William Olney, after long suffering, borne with a cheerful patience which has been a lesson to us all. Long may he now be spared to the Lord's work! His son, Mr. William Olney, jun., continues his laborious service at Haddon Hall, and week by week we see persons, some from the poorest and most degraded districts, brought to Jesus. Week by week our numbers receive additions. The College is not in session, for the men are having their vacation; the orphans are nearly all away; the seatholders are most of them at the seaside; yet through the influx of strangers the crowds are even greater than usual, and many feel the power of the Word, though as they mostly return to the country, we shall not have the home church thus increased. The Lord is with us, and we magnify his name.

Note (October)

EVERY day affords more and more evidence that while many are true to their Lord, unbelief has sadly eaten into Congregational and Baptist churches. It is not the ministers only who have espoused the modern inventions; but in some instances where the pastor remains true to evangelical doctrine, the deacons and leading members have gone aside to novel theories. The inspiration of Holy Scripture in the sense of its being the infallible Word of God, is not held sincerely by all those who wish to appear evangelical. This is the most serious matter of all, since it removes the very foundations of faith. We do not bring hasty accusations, but know what we affirm; and those of whom we make the affirmation know that we speak the truth. The varied views of the future which now obtain are naturally linked in with other errors, or logically involve them. The door is open, and droves of falsehoods enter by it. Numbers of good brethren in different ways remain in fellowship with those who are undermining the gospel; and they talk of their conduct as though it were a loving course which the Lord will approve of in the day of his appearing. We cannot understand them. The bounden duty of a true believer towards men who profess to be Christians, and yet deny the Word of the Lord, and reject the fundamentals of the gospel, is to come out from among them. If it be said that efforts should be made to produce reform, we agree with the remark; but when you know that they will be useless, what is the use? Where the basis of association allows error, and almost invites it, and there is an evident determination not to alter that basis, nothing remains to be done inside, which can be of any radical service. The operation of an evangelical party within can only repress, and, perhaps, conceal, the evil for a time; but meanwhile, sin is committed by the compromise itself, and no permanently good result can follow. To stay in a community which fellowships all beliefs in the hope of setting matters right, is as though Abraham had stayed at Ur, or at Haran, in the hope of converting the household out of which he was called.

Complicity with error will take from the best of men the power to enter any successful protest against it. If any body of believers had errorists among them, but were resolute to deal with them in the name of the Lord, all might come right; but confederacies founded upon the principle that all may enter, whatever views they hold, are based upon disloyalty to the truth of God. If truth is optional, error is justifiable. If some supposed "life" is to be all, and "truth" is to be thrust out of doors, then there is room for all except the believer in the doctrines which have been revealed by the Eternal Spirit.

Our present sorrowful protest is not a matter of this man or that, this error or that; but of principle. There either is something essential to a true faith—some truth which is to be believed; or else everything is left to each man's taste.

We believe in the first of these opinions, and hence we cannot dream of religious association with those who might on the second theory be acceptable. Those who are of our mind should, at all cost, act upon it. The Lord give them decision, and wean them from all policy and trimming!

Our one sole aim is the preservation and spread of the gospel of our Lord Jesus, and we mourn that godly men should be parties to a system which is destructive of good, and only promotive of error. It is clear that, as a general rule, error by itself has not the power to maintain communities in a flourishing condition among Nonconformists. As a general fact, churches avowedly Unitarian, or anti-evangelical, gradually dwindle. The Old General Baptists, once rid of the evangelicals, made a rapid descent to their present moribund condition, while the evangelicals multiplied abundantly. The plan of the enemy now is to lay the egg of error in the nest of our churches. It is hoped that among a people so tolerant of false doctrine as many Baptists and Congregationalists now are, this new doctrine will work secretly, and gain too strong a hold to be removed. The plan is a very crafty one, and seems likely to succeed. It is hard to get leaven out of dough, and easy to put it in. This leaven is already working. Our daring to unveil this deep design is inconvenient, and of course it brings upon our devoted head all manner of abuse. But that matters nothing so long as the plague is stayed. Oh, that those who are spiritually alive in the churches may look to this thing, and may the Lord himself baffle the adversary!

We are represented as wishing to force upon the churches a narrow creed. Nothing was further from our mind. We do not consider that the demand for agreement to vital truths common to all Christians can be looked upon as a piece of sectarian bigotry. Here is a man, who is himself a Calvinist, who does not ask that a Union should draw up a Calvinistic creed, but only begs for one which will let the whole world know that brethren are associated as Christians, and that those who do not agree to the first principles of our faith will be intruders. Is this narrowness? If, after a basis is laid down, errorists do intrude, the case will be very different from what it is at present, and less of responsibility will lie upon the members of the community. It is mere cant to cry, "We are evangelical; we are all evangelical," and yet decline to say what evangelical means. If men are really evangelical, they delight to spread as glad tidings the truths from which they take the name.

Waiting still for guidance, we begin to see our way in a measure, but implore prayer that every step maybe of the Lord.

Note (November)

The following resolution of sympathy with us in our action in the “Down-Grade” controversy came to hand just too late for last month’s magazine. We feel sure that our readers will be glad to see it, even now. It was unanimously passed at the annual meeting of the Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces of Canada— *i.e.*, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island:—

“*Whereas* the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon has for more than thirty years been known to the Christian world as a most devoted man of God, a noble defender of the faith, and a man greatly honoured of God, in the wonderful success which has constantly attended his labours in the gospel, and in the many religious and philanthropic works he has originated, and in which he is still most earnestly engaged; and *whereas* he has felt it to be his duty of late to sever his connection with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and also with the London Baptist Association, on account of the laxity of doctrine of some of the brethren, and the unwillingness on the part of the said societies to adopt such articles of faith as would commit the membership to orthodoxy, and have a tendency to check the ‘Down-Grade’ drift in the churches; therefore *resolved* that this Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces of Canada, now in annual session, this twenty-fifth day of August, 1888, representing some forty-four thousand members of Baptist churches, take this opportunity to place on record the high esteem in which our honoured brother, Pastor Spurgeon, is held by us; and we hereby express our hearty sympathy with him in his bold and unflinching contention for the truths of the gospel; and it is our earnest prayer to Almighty God that his faith may remain unshaken, and that he may long be spared to wield valiantly the sword of the Spirit, and that in the future, as in the past, God may continue to make the weapons of his warfare mighty to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan and the building up of the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour in the world.”