

C. H. Spurgeon
A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



FROM PILGRIM FOOTPRINTS
by Dr. Ken Connolly

Charles Haddon SPURGEON

1834-1892



"The Prince of Preachers"

1834 Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born in Kelvedon, Essex, on June 19. He lived his first 18 months there.

1835 He moved to live with his grandparents in Stambourne. His grandfather was a Congregational minister. His 18-year-old aunt Ann loved him and taught him to read.

1840 When his father became the minister of a Congregational church in Colchester, he returned to live with his parents. He now had a younger brother, James, and two younger sisters. He played the role of their teacher.

1849 He enrolled in his third school, at Newmarket, for one year.

1850 On January 6th, with deep conviction of sin, a severe snowstorm changed his plans and he ended up in a Primitive Methodist Church in Colchester. A layman preached that morning on: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved..." Sitting under the gallery, he "looked" and was "saved."

He immediately undertook the task of distributing tracts while he visited 70 homes every week.

He walked eight miles on a chilly May 3rd to be baptized by the Rev. W. W. Cantlow of Isleham. It was his mother's birthday.

He moved to Cambridge that summer and joined the St. Andrew Street Baptist Church. There he fell under the influence of James Vinter and his "Layman Preacher's Association," which thrust him into a public speaking experience.

1851 He became the pastor of the Waterbeach Baptist Chapel in October. His two years there saw the village transformed and the congregation grow from 40 to 400. It was here that he first started his printing ministry by producing his "Waterbeach Tracts."

1853 He spoke to a Sunday School Union at Cambridge in November. A Mr. George Gould from London's New Park Street Chapel was present and reported most favorably to Mr. William Olney. Mr. Olney then extended an invitation for Spurgeon to speak on Sunday, December 18, at New Park Street Chapel. Spurgeon agreed and spoke from James 1:17.

1854 Spurgeon supplied for three Sundays in January, as requested, and was called to be their new pastor. Benjamin Keach and John Gill had previously pastored that church. Spurgeon agreed to the call in April.

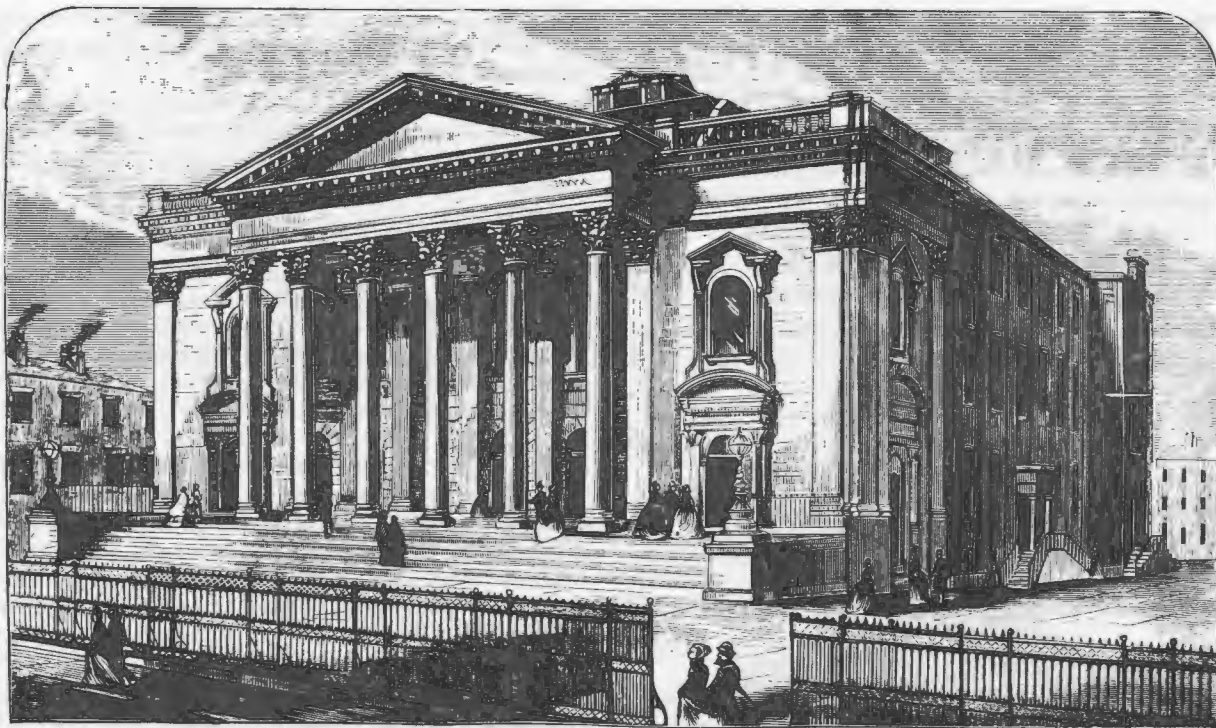
On April 20th he sent a gift of the *Pilgrim's Progress* to Susannah Thompson. She was later to become his wife.

1855 Mr. Joseph Passmore, a publisher and member of the church, encouraged the new minister to publish his sermons so that others could enjoy them. The first of these *Penny Pulpit* messages came off the press on January 7th. This continued after his death until 1917, producing 3,561 sermons, which were bound in 62 volumes. This ministry left Spurgeon financially independent, allowing him to minister without a salary from the church.

Included in his publications are his monthly *The Sword and the Trowel*, plus 140 other titles. These include seven volumes on the *Treasury of David*, which took 20 years to complete and sold over 148,000 volumes while he was living. His two devotional volumes, *Morning by Morning* and *Evening by Evening* had sold 230,000 while he lived. His work on *Commentating and Commentaries* required an examination of nearly 4,000 books, of which he made comment on 1,437 of them. When he compiled *Our Own Hymnbook* for his own congregation, he included some of his own compositions of the metric versions of the Psalms. Add to all this some 500 personal letters he wrote every week, in longhand.

In February, because the chapel had become overcrowded and needed to be repaired, Spurgeon moved to the Exeter Hall. It could seat 4,000 and still allow another 1,000 to stand and hear the message. It was packed for every service, with hundreds being turned away. Remarkable, when you consider that the renovated chapel would still seat only 1500, with additional space for another 500 to stand.

In July, Spurgeon first met a Mr. Thomas Medhurst. He was a converted actor who had engaged in preaching on the streets. Spurgeon offered to give him one afternoon a week for instruction in theology and on practical matters. The Pastor's College was to develop from this association when, in 1857, a second student applied for such assistance.



Metropolitan Tabernacle (Exterior)

1856 On January 8th Spurgeon and Miss Susannah Thompson were married, after an 18-month engagement. Spurgeon was of medium height; his chest was powerful; the upper part of his legs were shorter than usual, while his head was larger than usual. He began growing his beard in his early 30s. When he first arrived in London he had long, badly trimmed, unkempt hair. He wore black satin stockings and a blue pocket handkerchief with white spots. He was the talk of all London.

In June a committee was formed for the building of a Metropolitan Tabernacle.

On September 10th the Spurgeons moved into their new home – the Helensburgh House. They were to live there for the next 23 years. The Helensburgh House of today is not the same as the one into which they moved. When Mrs. Spurgeon became ill in the late 1860s, she moved to Brighton for her health, and a Mr. Higgs, with his son, both members of the church, tore down the old house and completely rebuilt it. A small closet had now both hot and cold running water entering the house. During that sickness Mrs. Spurgeon was treated by the famous Sir James Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform.

Their twins were born 10 days after they first moved to Helensburgh House, arriving on September 20th.

Mounting opposition to Spurgeon, both secular and religious, caused him to lose the use of the Exeter Hall. Spurgeon then decided to use the Surrey Gardens Music Hall. This location had 10,000 seats. The first service was held on October 9th, for which the Hall was full and thousands were turned away. During the opening prayer, someone in the balcony yelled, "Fire!" Another voice on the ground floor shouted, "The balconies are falling!" The stairways were crowded and a panic ensued, causing a railing to give way. Some fell from the balcony to the ground floor and were killed. Seven died, 28 were taken to the hospital, and Mr. Spurgeon physically collapsed. This event for him was both tragic and traumatic. However, by November 23rd Mr. Spurgeon had recovered and he returned to reconvene

services at the Music Hall. It was believed that this tragic event was engineered by those who resented him.

1857 Two events of significance occurred this year. The first was that a second student applied for Mr. Spurgeon's tutorage and this gave birth to the formation of the Pastor's College. The following facts speak for this endeavor:

Mr. George Rogers was the first principal. He was a Congregationalist and the school, with board, was conducted in his own home. It consisted of a two-year course with neither exams, diplomas nor cost. In fact, the school provided beds, food, clothing, books and pocket money. The student was tutored in mathematics, logic, homiletics, pastoral theology, English composition, Greek and Hebrew. When an evening college was later added which included shorthand, attendance grew to 300. Mr. Spurgeon addressed these future ministers on Friday afternoons, and his comments evolved into *Lectures to my Students*. Within eight years there was a student body of 93 students and they had formed 18 new churches. One student, for example, took over a work with only 18 people, but, within a few years, had baptized over 800 new converts. Within the first 12 years of the school's existence, the students were collectively responsible for baptizing 39,000 converts. Two of these graduates had become evangelists who, in one year alone, had conducted 1100 services. When one of the students preached during a six-week absence of Mr. Spurgeon, 400 people professed conversion.

D. L. Moody spoke at the Tabernacle in 1884 and made reference to "the 600 servants of God who have gone out from this college."

The college did not have its own building until 1873. It was situated immediately behind the Tabernacle. In 1923, the college and the Tabernacle became disassociated.

1858 On October 7, Spurgeon addressed an audience of 23,654 at the Crystal Palace. He preached from John 1:29: "Behold

the Lamb of God..." The gathering was occasioned out of sympathy for those who suffered in the Indian mutiny, and it voiced a Christian view contrary to that taken by the British government. A relief fund was instituted and the offering was L675.

1859 On August 15th, the foundation stone for the future Metropolitan Tabernacle was laid. The property had been purchased at Newington Butts for L5,000 and Spurgeon determined that the L13,000 estimated cost would be paid by the time the project would be completed. He traveled to preach with the previous agreement that half of the offering would go to this project and the other half to that local church. The Tabernacle eventually cost L31,000 and took two years to build. It was paid for at completion.

1860 His travels included a visit to Paris where he received favorable response from the Roman Catholic Press of that city. He also visited Geneva, where he was flattered by the honor of preaching in Calvin's pulpit, wearing Calvin's gown.

1861 On March 18th, the Tabernacle was opened. The first services were prayer meetings and the first Sunday service took place on the 31st. In the first two years of Spurgeon's London ministry, the membership grew from less than 100 active members to over 2,000. These were active because, if they moved from London, died or were absent from four Communion, their names were dropped from membership. (Communion was admitted by ticket only; all members were required to be present.) The membership grew when someone applied for baptism. "Public invitations" were never given. They were required to give evidence of "a change of affection," as well as a desire to share their faith.

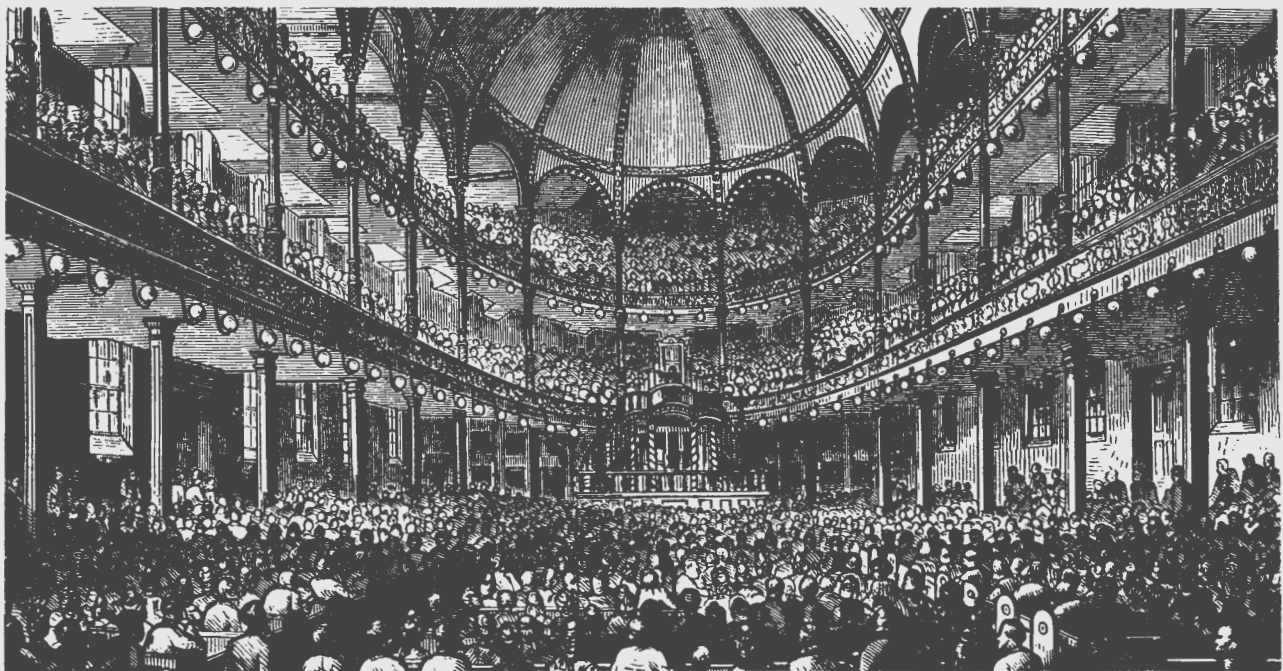
The Tabernacle served two functions. It was first and foremost a house of salvation. The first month of its existence brought 77 new members by baptism; the next month, 72; the next, 121, etc. Spurgeon spent every Tuesday afternoon

interviewing "approved" candidates. Over 70 every year were not accepted, being referred to Mrs. Bartlett's class for further instruction.

The second function of the Tabernacle was "service." The doors were open daily from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. There was continuous traffic to and from the building. Sixty-six subsidiary institutions, or "societies," were serviced from this center. The church eventually had 40 missions in the greater London area. Meals were constantly being served. For example, the Christian Butcher's Association held its annual meeting there, serving 1,600 people. They had 1,000 children enrolled in their Sunday School, engaging 100 teachers. On Sunday evenings there were as many as 1,000 members employed in various ministries outside the Tabernacle and every three months Spurgeon would request his congregation not to come to the services the following Sunday evening so that the unsaved might hear the gospel. This had to be done in the form of a request because admission was by ticket only until five minutes before opening. Those tickets were sold annually. No offerings were ever taken, "tickets" being the only form of income available. (Spurgeon would receive large donations, from members and non-members alike, for the various enterprises.)

Before Spurgeon's death, the membership had risen to 5,328; 127 lay ministers were serving in and around London. There were 23 mission stations, for a total of 4,000 seats, conducting 27 Sunday Schools, with 8,000 students taught by 600 teachers.

1864 On June 5th, Spurgeon preached his famous sermon on "Baptismal Regeneration." The influence of the "Tractarian Movement," or the Oxford Group, under the leadership of John Henry Newman, had caused a landslide toward Rome in the Anglican Church. Evangelicals within the Anglicans, under the leadership of J. C. Ryle, resisted the trend. Spurgeon felt, in spite of their good influence on that denomination, that their position was one of compromise on the issue of "infant baptism." Spurgeon believed that it proposed a "gospel of works" and he boldly stood against it. He honestly expected an adverse effect on the



Metropolitan Tabernacle (Interior)

sale of his sermons, but he was wrong. This one sermon immediately sold 180,000 copies, and the sales soon increased to 350,000. Nevertheless, this stand did cost him considerably. Many of his good supporters, Lord Shaftesbury among them, felt that he had betrayed their confidence.

This was not the first time that Spurgeon's convictions led him into conflict. Sometime before the Civil War, a black man who had escaped slavery spoke for Spurgeon on a Sunday evening. Americans were outraged and demanded to know his views on the subject. Spurgeon wrote for an American publication:

"...with a slaveholder I have no fellowship of any sort or kind ... I would as soon think of receiving a murderer into my church ... as a man-stealer."

His American publishers suspended their printing of his writings, and effigies of him were burned in several places.

He began *The Sword and the Trowel* the following year. This was a monthly publication. The edifying that he accomplished by the "Trowel" was not to soften the cutting he intended with the "Sword." Look, for example, at his famous *Down-Grade* article of August 1887. The background is as follows:

Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859. Its influence was such that, by the '60s, "higher criticism" was in Bible College classrooms and, by the '70s, it was in the pulpits. It became so widespread that it provoked the Secretary of the Baptist Union, Dr. S. H. Booth, to appraise Spurgeon of its influence. Booth specified the preachers and quoted their comments, leaving no doubt that they had left the historic faith. However, he requested Spurgeon not to expose his confidences. Spurgeon then attempted to get the Union to adopt a Statement of Faith. Failing, he openly accused the Union of apostasy, but, honoring Booth's request, his charges were unsubstantiated and he was most severely criticized.



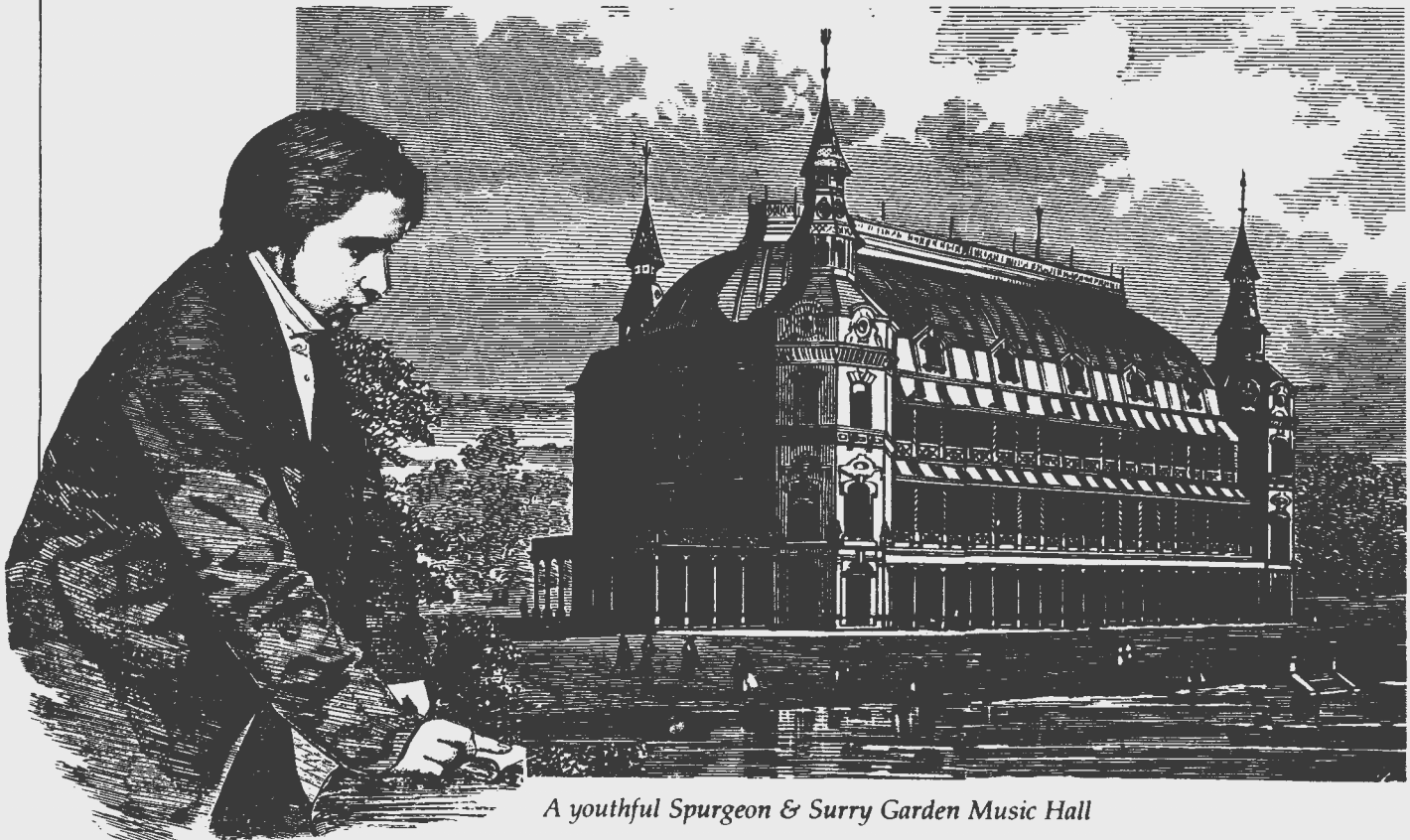
James A. Spurgeon

Two months after his first attack, he followed up his charges with the following:

"With deep regret we abstain from assembling with those whom we dearly love and heartily respect, since it would involve us in a confederacy with those with whom we can have no fellowship in the Lord."

The financial loss for this stand was most severe. Among others, the donor of the largest financial contributions to his orphanage, almshouses and College withdrew his support. Note that Spurgeon did among Baptists what he expected Ryle to do among Anglicans.

1866 Spurgeon organized the Metropolitan Tabernacle Colportage Association. A similar work in Scotland prompted the organization of men who would sell Bibles and other liter-



A youthful Spurgeon & Surry Garden Music Hall



Pastor's College

ature from door to door. Each man was promised L40 a year, on condition that he make at least the same amount by his sales. He was to be considered first a missionary, then a preacher, and finally a pastor. Two men pioneered the work, recounting great reports of people won to Christ. Within three years there were 15 men. By 1878, there were 94 colporteurs, reporting the remarkable number of 926,290 visits. The work grew even larger in the years that followed.

1867 The popularity of Spurgeon had not diminished. While the Tabernacle was being renovated, Spurgeon used the Agricultural Hall in Islington. It was nearly three times the size of the Tabernacle and located in north London, some distance away. With 15,000 chairs and standing room to accommodate another 5,000, thousands were still turned away.

At a prayer meeting the previous year, Spurgeon asked the Lord "for some new work," and that "the means also may be sent." A few days later, a Mrs. Hillyard, the widow of a Church of England clergyman, offered L20,000 for the training of orphaned boys. Spurgeon secured two and a half acres at Stockwell, about a mile from the Tabernacle. The children would walk "crocodile style" to sing at the Tabernacle on a Sunday evening. A girl's orphanage was added 12 years later. The children were accommodated in houses, 14 to a house, under the supervision of a matron. The facilities were built in typical Spurgeonian fashion: There was a gymnasium, an Olympic style swimming pool, and an "infirmary."

In October, Spurgeon was bedridden as a victim of rheumatic gout. This condition was to plague him for the rest of his life. His grandfather also had suffered from it.

1868 The expanding ministries and his decreasing health made it evident that "the gov'nor," as his students called him, needed an assistant. He had eight men who handled



George Rogers

various responsibilities, but none of them could substitute for him. His own brother James was selected for the task. James was well suited and became the comptroller of the entire Spurgeon enterprises. Years later, in the "downgrade" controversy, when the Union proposed a compromise motion between Spurgeon and the liberals, it was James who seconded the motion.



The Stockwell Orphanage

1871 In November Spurgeon, his publisher, and two friends traveled to Italy. Spurgeon's deteriorating health had plunged him into deep depression. They visited several countries and, on their way home, they stopped in Mentone, in southern France. It was then decided that he would make that his winter retreat. He spent nearly every winter thereafter in Mentone.

1887 This was the year of the "down-grade" controversy, and Spurgeon withdrew from the Baptist Union.

1891 Spurgeon preached his last sermon at the Tabernacle on June 7th. It was on the topic, "The statute of David for the

1874 On September 21st, Spurgeon, who had not been baptizing because of his failing health, descended the steps for the honor of baptizing his 18-year-old sons, Charles and Thomas.

1875 After preaching the first Sunday of the year, Spurgeon was absent for 12 straight Sundays due to illness. On Friday, April 16th, Moody and Sankey preached at the Tabernacle, but Spurgeon was unable to attend. It was this year, according to a biographer, that the preacher attempted to alter his style from the energetic, sudden bursts of oratory to a subdued emphasis on the message, that "he might be hidden behind the cross."

1880 The Spurgeons moved to Beulah Hill, in Norwood, named "Westwood." Its nine acres sprawled down a hillside, accommodating stables, gardens, pond and pasture. The Helensburgh House in which they had formerly lived sold for nearly enough to cover the cost of the new house. Nevertheless, he was severely criticized in the press.

1884 D. L. Moody came once again to preach for Spurgeon on June 19th, his 50th birthday. His father, his wife and his son Charles were present for the occasion. Mr. Moody acknowledged the enormous influence Spurgeon had had on his own life before he ever decided to become a preacher.



"Westwood"

sharing of the spoil." He was now suffering from a combination of rheumatism, gout and Bright's disease. A specialist was called in. Two prayer meetings were held daily at the Tabernacle. Prayers were also offered at Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral, as well as by the Chief Rabbi in London. Expressions of sympathy were received from the Prince of Wales, the Prime Minister, and several members of Parliament. He recovered slightly in September and, by the end of October, he traveled to Mentone, France and settled into the Hotel Beau Rivage. During his absence the pulpit was occupied by an American, Dr. A. T. Pierson.

1892 Mr. Spurgeon passed away at 11:00 p.m. on Sunday, January 31st. The news was headlined in the London newspapers on the following Monday morning. According to French law, the body was required to remain in the hotel for 24 hours. A service was conducted at the Scottish Presbyterian Church in Mentone. The telephone wires were blocked with messages of condolence from all around the world. The body was shipped back to London and lay in view at the Common Room of the College, while some 50,000 people passed by. Five funeral services were planned at the Tabernacle, four of them on Wednesday, February 10th. The first was for all the church members; the second, for ministers and students; the third, for the "Christian workers"; and the last one, for the general public. Another service was held the following morning before the body was transported to Norwood Cemetery. Hundreds of thousands lined the route. At the orphanage a stand had been erected for the children to stand on to sing while the body passed. However, they could only weep. Barriers had been placed around the tomb, within which 1,000 mourners assembled, and beyond which several thousand crowded. The last



Susannah Spurgeon

words were spoken by Archibald Brown, a graduate of the College. Others who joined in the funeral services included Dr. A. T. Pierson, Dr. Alexander MacLaren, Dr. F. B. Meyer, and Ira D. Sankey on behalf of D. L. Moody, who was conducting meetings in Scotland and was unable to attend.

After 57 years of living, 40 years of preaching, and 14,692 baptisms which led to membership at the Tabernacle, the "silver bell" was silenced, his "pen" still preaching to millions in our generation. If he is doing what he predicted, he is now standing on some street corner in the celestial city, proclaiming to passing angels "the old, old story of Jesus and His love."



Spurgeon baptizing below the pulpit

©Copyright Ken Connolly 1986

FAMILY FELLOWSHIP, INC.
P.O. Box 925
Orange, CA 92666