



❧ PREFACE FOR THE SUMMER
HOLIDAY WRITINGS, 1873 ❧

One of Spurgeon's 'most congenial recreations' was spending 'a long day in the country, driving over hill and dale,' in the 'charming county' of Surrey. As his wife Susannah recalled, 'many sweet days of rest' were thus 'snatched from weeks of heavy toil, and a furlough of a few hours ... helped to restore and refresh.'

For these occasions, Spurgeon went 'in good time, taking with him some choice companion, or, perchance, another weary worker; and, driving slowly, they would jog along till noon, when, at a pleasant wayside inn, they would rest the horse, and have their luncheon, returning in the cool of the evening for high tea ... at 6 or 7 o'clock.' Such rest was a gift; but it was 'surpassed, and completed, when a fortnight of similar days could be linked together to form a perfect holiday.'

For then, instead of driving back in the sunset, Spurgeon's trip 'would extend itself to many towns.' On these excursions, Susannah said, 'his ideas of comfort, and his disregard of external appearances, were equally conspicuous. He liked a cosy seat, and easy travelling;

but he cared nothing for the style of his equipage:—an old horse—most inappropriately named ‘Peacock,’—and a shabby carriage, were matters of perfect indifference to him; so long as they were safe and trustworthy, and carried him out of the noise of the crowded world into the stillness and beauty of nature’s quiet resting-places.’ Indeed Spurgeon had purchased, for these rambles, ‘a vehicle of so antiquated a pattern, and of such unfashionable proportions,’ that it was immediately dubbed ‘Punch’s coach,’ and ever after bore that name.



A travelling carriage, of the kind used in Spurgeon’s time.

When ‘packed and prepared for a journey,’ its overstuffed set of luggage ‘added exceedingly to its grotesque and inelegant appearance.’ Yet far from a nuisance, this ‘convenient provision’ was, in Spurgeon’s estimation, ‘one of its chief advantages.’

More than a few times, Susannah Spurgeon ‘laughed afresh’ at the sight of this carriage, but she loved the sight of her husband’s ‘beaming ... satisfied face, as he started

off on one of these country tours.' That recollection was 'far more deeply impressed' on her than the remembrance of his 'unsightly holiday caravan.'

And truly, Spurgeon was 'never more happy and exultant than when making excursions of this kind.' Those privileged to accompany him 'saw him at his social best;' and with one accord, they testified to 'the charm of his companionship.'

So to the reason for this book. From Spurgeon's daily letters to his wife, 'on one of these notable occasions,' it's possible to weave the story of his holiday drive into a personal narrative, setting forth traits in his character 'which could in no other way have been so naturally revealed.' These were his 'intense delight in the works of God, his fine appreciation of the minute, or half-concealed lovelinesses of nature, his care for all living creatures, [and] his calm and contented spirit.' All these, as Susannah said, are cast in distinct relief 'by the lively touches of his own vigorous pen.'

One further word remains ...

During the holiday described in the pages to follow, the 'old horse' mentioned above, 'Peacock,' who 'made so many delightful journeys,' was not pressed into service. Rather, the 'noble greys' referred to in the opening sentences of Spurgeon's letters were a team 'owned and driven by a member of the party.' All the same, these noble greys were harnessed, just as Peacock had been, to draw 'Punch's coach.'

That made for a colourful and memorable occasion all its own.¹

1. All quotes in this Preface are taken from *C.H. Spurgeon's Autobiography*, vol. 3 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1899), 258-259.

PART ONE

AN ENGLISH SUMMER
HOLIDAY, 1873



❧ THE HOLIDAY BEGINS ❧

I was sitting, one day, in the New Forest, under a beech tree. I like to look at the beech, and study it, as I do many other trees, for every one has its own peculiarities and habits, its special ways of twisting its boughs, and growing its bark, and opening its leaves, and so forth. As I looked up at that beech, and admired the wisdom of God in making it, I saw a squirrel running round and round the trunk, and up the branches, and I thought to myself:

‘Ah! this beech tree is a great deal more to you than it is to me, for it is your home, your living, your all.’

Its big branches were the main streets of his city, and its little boughs were the lanes; somewhere in that tree he had his house, and the beech-mast was his daily food, he lived on it. Well, now, the way to deal with God’s Word is not merely to contemplate it, or to study it, as a student does—but to live on it, as that squirrel lives on his beech tree. Let it be to you, spiritually, your house, your home, your food, your medicine, your clothing: the one essential element of your soul’s life and growth.

— ‘Living on the Word,’ (15 March 1883)

Surgeon was, to cite the old phrase, ‘a man of many parts.’ One lifelong, but lesser-known side of his character was a love of nature, and time in the country. He owned many books about the natural world, flora

and fauna, and he knew Gilbert White's classic text, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne*, well. Indeed, he was so fond of this book that he made retracing places White described a highlight of his summer holiday in 1873. So it is in this context that the letters about his summer journey commence ...



Alton.—June, 1873. I am having a grand time. The horses are noble greys; the carriage, with my luggage-basket behind, most comfortable. We go along with an ease and dignity seldom equalled, and never surpassed.

From Guildford, we drove to the foot of Martha's Chapel, and climbed to the very summit. What a view! Then down, and back to Guildford, and up the Hog's Back. Mistaking the route, we went up an old deserted Roman road, immensely broad, and all green.

What a piece of country! The road itself was a sight, and the views on either side were sublime. So on to Farnham, where we dined, and went into the Bishop's park, which you will remember, with its deer, and avenue of elms.

From Farnham to Alton is pretty and fruitful, but there were no incidents [to tell about]. I revised part of a sermon last night, and went to bed at 11:30; fell asleep at once, and neither stirred nor dreamed. I awoke at 6:00, then got up, and finished the sermon. Already, I am so much better that I feel able to go to work again,—quite.

THE HOLIDAY BEGINS



The market town of Farnham, near the close of the 1800s.

We go to Selbourne this afternoon. How I wish you were with me! But you shall know anything I see, which can help you to realize where I am, and what I am doing.

By the way, this morning we went into the church here, and saw an old door which was riddled by the Parliamentarians [during the Civil War in Cromwell's time]; we were also regaled with a superabundance of organ music which a young gentleman volunteered. The church is restored very beautifully, and in good taste.



Same day, later. The drive was delicious, and I feel so well. Selbourne is a little heaven of delights. It is Switzerland in miniature, where every turn changes the scene.

If it were in a foreign land, all the world would crowd to it. We were all charmed; who could be otherwise? Well might [Gilbert] White write so prettily upon so choice

a subject. Hill, dell, bourne, hanger, down, lane, and wood,—one has them all within a very small compass, and with endless variety.

We have returned to Alton to send off some of our party; and now, at a council of war, we have decided to visit Selbourne again to-morrow, and see more of that gem of a village.



The Hanger, Selbourne, from *Hampshire, with the Isle of Wight* (1901).

Selbourne.—what a grand morning we have had! Up the Hanger, above the village, we climbed by a zigzag path, and had a very extensive view.

It was delicious to ramble among the tall beeches, and peep down upon the village, and then to descend into

THE HOLIDAY BEGINS



The Wakes, naturalist Gilbert White's home.

the place itself by winding paths. We went to [Gilbert] White's house, and were received very kindly by Professor Bell and his wife, both very agèd persons. We were soon known, and had in honour ...

We rambled about as in a paradise, and then were off to Alresford.

What enjoyment I have had, and what health is upon me! I never felt better in my life. We are all so happy with the scenery, that we do not know how to be grateful enough. Oh, that you were here!



Alresford, as shown in John Duthy's *Sketches of Hampshire* (1839).

LETTERS AND TRAVELS

One of these days, I hope and pray you may be able to come.

From Alresford, we have driven here (Winchester), along the beautiful valley of the Itchen, and your dear note was all I wanted to make me full of joy. Letters had accumulated here up to Wednesday. I have already answered twenty-five ...