



---

## Fire and Ice Sermon Series

<http://www.puritansermons.com/>

---

# Life and Character of Charnock

by William Symington

**W**e have it on high authority, that “the memory of the just is blessed, and that the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.” It follows that exertions ought to be made to record and transmit the virtues and the doings of those who are the excellent ones of the earth. Contemporaries may, from personal knowledge, be enabled to cherish, with affectionate regard, the characters of those valued friends whom death has snatched from their embrace; and, by consecrating a portion of time to the recollection of their worth, they may contrive at once to maintain communion with the land of spirits, and to cause, for a time at least, the excellencies of the wise and the good to survive the grave. It is, however, desirable that, if possible, such also as live at a greater distance of time should have it in their power to profit by acquaintance with those who have gone before them, and, for their sakes, some more permanent memorials require to be constructed. Hence the origin of biographical compositions,—a species of writing to which no small importance attaches, being equally edifying and delightful.

If general history may be described as philosophy teaching by fact, what is religious biography but piety instructing by example? A well-written piece of this kind is just an account of the progress of an immortal being through time to eternity, and therefore cannot fail to supply an object of interest to every reflective mind. Nor is it calculated to be more interesting than improving. In scrutinizing the life and character of a fellow-creature, we are irresistibly led, by the comparisons, contrasts, and analogies that are suggested, to review our own. “As iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.” The knowledge of others is, in this way, rendered subservient to the knowledge of ourselves; and in proportion as we are led to institute a vigorous process of self-examination, so as to become acquainted with our own excellencies and defects, are we placed in more favourable circumstances for taking those steps by which we may advance in the scale of intelligence, holiness, and piety. The very sympathy that is awakened in our bosoms with the joys and griefs, the cares and struggles, the dangers and deliverances of others, has a direct tendency, in regard to ourselves, to transform the mind, to purify the heart, to strengthen the moral habits, and to elevate the tone and widen the sphere of religious experience.

---

---

It may be questioned whether there ever was a body of men whose characters, whether on their own account or that of posterity, were more worthy of being preserved and transmitted than those of the non-conforming divines of the seventeenth century. Men of undoubted talent, of extraordinary learning, of prodigious acquirements both in theology and general science, of uncompromising principle, of sleepless activity, and of sublime devotion, it were alike a scandal to ourselves and an injury to succeeding ages to suffer their memory to die. If ever lives deserved to escape the oblivion of the grave, they were theirs. Nor have their descendants been altogether insensible to this obligation. There are many memorials extant of their doings and sufferings, their sacrifices and worth,—some more and others less ample, but all of them teeming with pleasing reminiscences of the noblest achievements. and fragrant with the perfume of the most excellent Christian graces. We owe a deep debt of gratitude, in particular, to Calamy and Palmer, for their laborious researches in this field, and for the valuable materials they have collected. In some cases they have given us full-length portraits, every feature being brought prominently out, and the minutest shades accurately filled in with the most delicate touches. In other cases they have produced only humble miniatures, or rather rude sketches, in short, mere outlines; while of many they have been enabled to supply little more than the names; their history and characters having been irretrievably lost, from want of more timely care to secure them.

Unfortunately for us, the individual whose life and character we are now required to give, is one of those of whom there exist but scanty memorials. The whole of what is to be found, in some of the collections above referred to, occupies but a few pages. Nor, at such a distance of time from the period when the subject of the biography lived, is it possible to supply the deficiency. The duty of the biographer being of such a nature as to preclude altogether the exercise of the creative faculty, there is nothing left but to fall back on the labours of others, whatever these may have been. We can honestly say, that we have spared no pains in ransacking all known or supposable sources of information within our reach. The result we lay at our readers' feet, in the hope that they will give us full credit for having done all in our power to furnish them with a knowledge of one of the most useful and gifted of the Puritan Divines,—a man, whose general excellence, theological attainments, and fervent piety, entitle him to every mark of respect that can be strewn to the memory of the great and the good.

---

---

**S**tephen Charnock, B.D., was born in the year 1628, in the parish of St. Katharine Cree, London. His father, Mr. Richard Charnock, practiced as a solicitor in the Court of Chancery, and was descended from a family of some antiquity in Lancashire. Stephen, after a course of preparatory study, entered himself, at an early period of life, a student in Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he was placed under the immediate tuition of the celebrated Dr. William Sancroft, who became afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury. Although there is too much reason to fear that colleges seldom prove the spiritual birthplaces of the youth that attend them, it was otherwise in this case. The Sovereign Spirit, who worketh where and how he wills, had determined that this young man, while prosecuting his early studies, should undergo that essential change of heart which, besides yielding an amount of personal comfort, could not fail to exert a salutary influence on all his future inquiries, sanctify whatever learning he might hereafter acquire, and fit him for being eminently useful to thousands of his fellow-creatures. To this all-important event we may safely trace the eminence to which, both as a Preacher and as a Divine, he afterwards attained,—as he had thus a stimulus to exertion, a motive to vigorous and unremitting application, which could not otherwise have existed.

On his leaving the University he spent some time in a private family, either as a preceptor or for the purpose of qualifying himself the better for discharging the solemn and arduous duties of public life, on which he was about to enter. Soon after this, just as the Civil War broke out in England, he commenced his official labours as a minister of the gospel of peace, somewhere in Southwark. He does not appear to have held this situation long; but short as was his ministry there, it was not altogether without fruit. He who had made the student himself, while yet young, the subject of saving operations, was pleased also to give efficacy to the first efforts of the youthful pastor to win souls to Christ. Several individuals in this his first charge were led to own him as their spiritual father. Nor is this a solitary instance of the early ministry of an individual receiving that countenance from on high which has been withheld from the labours of his riper years. A circumstance this, full of encouragement to those who, in the days of youth, are entering with much fear and trembling on service in the Lord's vineyard. At the time when they may feel impelled to exclaim with most vehemence, *Who is sufficient for these things?* God may cheer them with practical confirmations of the truth, that their *sufficiency is of God*.

In 1649, Charnock removed from Southwark to Oxford, where, through favour of the Parliamentary Visitors, he obtained a fellowship in New College; and, not long afterwards, in consequence of his own merits, was incorporated

---

---

---

---

Master of Arts. His singular gifts, and unwearied exertions, so attracted the notice and gained the approbation of the learned and pious members of the University, that, in 1652, he was elevated to the dignity of Senior Proctor,—an office which he continued to hold till 1656, and the duties of which he discharged in a way which brought equal honor to himself and benefit to the community.

When the period of his proctorship expired, he went to Ireland, where he resided in the family of Mr. Henry Cromwell, who had been appointed by his father, the Protector, to the government of that country. It is remarkable how many of the eminent divines, both of England and Scotland, have spent some part of their time in Ireland, either as chaplains to the army or as refugees from persecuting bigotry. Charnock seems to have gone thither in the capacity of chaplain to the Governor, an office which, in his case at least, proved no sinecure. During his residence in Dublin, he appears to have exercised his ministry with great regularity and zeal. He preached, we are told, every Lord's day, with much acceptance, to an audience composed of persons of different religious denominations, and of opposite grades in society. His talents and worth attracted the members of other churches, and his connection with the family of the Governor secured the attendance of persons of rank. By these his ministrations were greatly esteemed and applauded; and it is hoped that to some of them they were also blessed. But even many who had no respect for his piety, and who reaped no saving benefits from his preaching, were unable to withhold their admiration of his learning and his gifts. Studying at once to be an "ensample to the flock," and to "walk within his house with a perfect heart," his qualities, both public and private, his appearances, whether in the pulpit or the domestic circle, commanded the esteem of all who were privileged to form his acquaintance. It is understood that the honorary degree of Bachelor in Divinity, which he held, was the gift of Trinity College, Dublin, conferred during his residence in that city.

The restoration of Charles, in 1660, put an end to Charnock's ministry in Ireland, and hindered his resuming it elsewhere for a considerable time. That event, leading, as it could not but do, to the re-establishment of arbitrary power, was followed, as a natural consequence, by the ejection of many of the most godly ministers that ever lived. Among these was the excellent individual of whom we are now speaking. Accordingly, although on his return to England he took up his residence in London, he was not permitted to hold any pastoral charge there. Nevertheless, he continued to prosecute his studies with ardour, and occasionally exercised his gifts in a private way for fifteen years, during which time he paid some visits to the continent, especially to France and Holland.

---

---

At length, in 1675, when the restrictions of the government were so far relaxed, he accepted a call from a congregation in Crosby Square, to become co-pastor with the Rev. Thomas Watson, the ejected minister of St. Stephen's, Walbrook, who, soon after the Act of Uniformity, had collected a church in that place. Mr. Watson was an eminent Presbyterian divine, and the society which he was instrumental in founding became afterwards, under the ministry of Dr. Grosvenor, one of the most flourishing in the city, in respect both of numbers and of wealth. It may not be uninteresting here to insert a few brief notices respecting the place of worship which this congregation occupied, being the scene of Charnock's labours during a principal part of his ministry, and that in connection with which he closed his official career.

The place in which this humble Presbyterian congregation assembled was a large hall of Crosby House, an ancient mansion on the east side of Bishopgate Street, erected by Sir John Crosby, Sheriff and Alderman of London, in 1470. After passing through the hands of several occupants, and, among others, those of Richard III., who thought it not unfit for being a royal residence, it became, about the year 1640, the property of Alderman Sir John Langham, a staunch Presbyterian and Loyalist. A calamitous fire afterwards so injured the building, as to render it unsuitable for a family residence; but the hall, celebrated for its magnificent oaken ceiling, happily escaped the conflagration, and was converted into a meeting-house for Mr. Watson's congregation, of which the proprietor is supposed to have been a member. The structure, though greatly dilapidated, still exists, and is said to be regarded as one of the most perfect specimens of the domestic architecture of the fifteenth century now remaining in the metropolis. But, as an illustration of the vicissitudes such edifices are destined to undergo, it may be stated that Crosby Hall, after having witnessed the splendours of royalty, and been consecrated to the solemnities of divine worship, was lately—perhaps it is still—dedicated to the inferior, if not ignoble, uses of a wool-packer.

After saying so much about the building, a word or two respecting the congregation which assembled for years under its vaulted roof, may not be deemed inappropriate. It was formed, as we have already said, by the Rev. Thomas Watson, the ejected minister of St. Stephen's, Walbrook. This took place in 1662, and Charnock was Mr. Watson's colleague for five years. Mr. Watson was succeeded by the son of an ejected minister, the Rev. Samuel Slater, who discharged the pastoral duties with great ability and faithfulness for twenty-four years, and closed his ministry and life with this solemn patriarchal sentence addressed to his people:—"I charge you before God, that you prepare to meet me at the day of judgment, as my crown of joy; and that not one of you be wanting at

---

---

the right hand of God.” Dr. Benjamin Grosvenor succeeded Mr. Slater. His singular acumen, graceful utterance, lively imagination, and fervid devotion, are said to have secured for the congregation a greater degree of prosperity than it had ever before enjoyed. A pleasing recollection has been preserved, of perhaps one of the most touching discourses ever composed, having been delivered by him in this Hall, on *The Temper of Christ*. In this discourse the Saviour is introduced, by way of illustrating his own command that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached unto all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem*,” as giving the Apostles directions how they are to proceed in carrying out this requirement. Amongst other things, he is represented as saying to them:—“Go into all nations and offer this salvation as you go; but lest the poor house of Israel should think themselves abandoned to despair, the seed of Abraham, mine ancient friend; as cruel and unkind as they have been, go, make them the *first offer* of grace; let them that struck the rock, drink first of its refreshing streams; and they that drew my blood, be welcome to its healing virtue. Tell them, that as I was sent to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*, so, if they will be gathered, I will be their shepherd still. Though they despised my tears which I shed over them, and imprecated my blood to be upon them, tell them ‘twas for their sakes I shed both; that by my tears I might soften their hearts towards God, and by my blood I might reconcile God to them.....Tell them, you have seen the prints of the nails upon my hands and feet, and the wounds of the spear in my side; and that those marks of their cruelty are so far from giving me vindictive thoughts, that, if they will but repent, every wound they have given me speaks in their behalf, pleads with the Father for the remission of their sins, and enables me to bestow it.....Nay, if you meet that poor wretch that thrust the spear into my side, tell him there is another way, a better way, of coming at my heart. If he will repent, and *look upon him whom he has pierced, and will mourn*, I will cherish him in that very bosom he has wounded; he shall find the blood he shed an ample atonement for the sin of shedding it. And tell him from me, he will put me to more pain and displeasure by refusing this offer of my blood, than when he first drew it forth.” In Dr. Grosvenor’s old age, notwithstanding that he was assisted, from time to time, by eminent divines, the congregation began to decline. After his death, the pastoral charge was held by Dr. Hodge and Mr. Jones successively, but, under the ministry of the latter, the church had become so enfeebled, that, on the expiration of the lease in 1769, the members agreed to dissolve, and were gradually absorbed in other societies.

From this digression we return, only to record the last circumstance necessary to complete this brief sketch. The death of Charnock took place July 27, 1680, when he was in the fifty-third year of his age. The particulars that have come down to us of this event, like those of the other parts of his history, are

---

---

---

---

scanty, yet they warrant us to remark that he died in a frame of mind every way worthy of his excellent character and holy life. He was engaged, at the time, in delivering to his people, at Crosby Hall, that series of Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God, on which his fame as a writer chiefly rests. The intense interest which he was observed to take in the subjects of which he treated, was regarded as an indication that he was nearly approaching that state in which he was to be “filled with all the fulness of God.” Not unfrequently was he heard to give utterance to a longing desire for that region for which he gave evidence of his being so well prepared. These circumstances were, naturally enough, looked upon as proofs that his mighty mind, though yet on earth, had begun to “put off its mortality,” and was fast ripening for the paradise of God. From his death taking place in the house of Mr. Richard Tymns, in the parish of Whitechapel, London, it may be inferred that his departure was sudden. The body was immediately after taken to the meeting-house at Crosby Square, which had been so often the scene of his prayers and preaching. From thence, accompanied by a long train of mourners, it was conveyed to St. Michael’s Church, Cornhill, where it was deposited hard by the Tower under the belfrey. The funeral sermon was preached by his early friend and fellow-student at Cambridge, Mr. John Johnson, from these apposite words:—“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

Such is an outline of the facts, as far as they are known, of the life of this great man. There are none, it is true, of those striking occurrences and marvellous incidents in the narrative, which attract the notice of the multitude, and which are so gratifying to those who are in quest of excitement more than of edification. But, let it not be thought that, for this reason, the narrative must be destitute of the materials of personal improvement. If the advantages to be derived from a piece of biography are at all proportioned to the degree in which the character and circumstances of the subject resemble those of the reader, a greater number, at least, may be expected to obtain benefit from a life, the incidents of which are more common, inasmuch as there are but comparatively few, the events of whose history are of an extraordinary and dazzling description. “When a character,” to use the language of a profound judge of human nature, “selected from the ordinary ranks of life, is faithfully and minutely delineated, no effort is requisite to enable us to place ourselves in the same situation; we accompany the subject of the narrative, with an interest undiminished by distance, unimpaired by dissimilarity of circumstances; and, from the efforts by which he surmounted difficulties and vanquished temptations, we derive the most useful practical lessons. He who desires to strengthen his virtue and purify his principles, will always prefer the solid to the specious; will be more disposed to contemplate an example of the

---

---

---

---

unostentatious piety and goodness which all men may obtain, than of those extraordinary achievements to which few can aspire; nor is it the mark of a superior, but rather a vulgar and superficial taste, to consider nothing as great or excellent but that which glitters with titles, or is elevated by rank.”

Let us endeavour to portray the character of Charnock.

**T**he mental qualities by which he was most distinguished as a man, were judgment and imagination. The reasoning faculty, naturally strong, was improved by diligent training and habitual exercise. In tracing the relations and tendencies of things, he greatly excelled; he could compare and contrast with admirable ease and beautiful discrimination; and his deductions, as was to be expected, were usually sound and logical. Judgment was, indeed, the presiding faculty in his, as it ought to be in all minds.

The more weighty qualities of intellect were in him united to a brilliant fancy. By this means he was enabled to adorn the more solid materials of thought with the attractive hues of inventive genius. His fine and teeming imagination, ever under the strict control of reason and virtue, was uniformly turned to the most important purposes. This department of mental phenomena, from the abuses to which it is liable, is apt to be undervalued; yet, were this the proper place, it would not be difficult to show that imagination is one of the noblest faculties with which man has been endowed—a faculty, indeed, the sound and proper use of which is not only necessary to the existence of sympathy and other social affections, but also intimately connected with those higher exercises of soul, by which men are enabled to realize the things that are not seen and eternal. Charnock’s imagination was under the most cautious and skilful management—the handmaid, not the mistress of his reason—and, doubtless, it tended, in no small degree, to free his character from that cold and contracted selfishness which is apt to predominate in those who are deficient in this quality; to impart a generous warmth to his intercourse with others; and to throw over his compositions as an author an animating and delightful glow.

These qualities of mind were associated with habits of intense application and persevering diligence, which alike tended to invigorate his original powers, and enabled him to turn them all to the best account. To the original vigour of his powers must be added that which culture supplied. Charnock was a highly educated man. As remarked by the first editors of his works, he was not only “a person of excellent parts, strong reason, great judgment, and curious fancy,” but “of high improvements and general learning, as having been all his days a most

---

---

diligent and methodical student.” An alumnus of both the English universities, he may be said to have drawn nourishment from each of these generous mothers. He had the reputation of being a general scholar; his acquisitions being by no means limited to the literature of his profession. Not only was his acquaintance with the original languages of Scripture great, but he had made considerable attainments in the study of medicine; and, indeed, there was scarcely any branch of learning with which he was unacquainted. All his mental powers were thus strengthened and refined by judicious discipline, and, as we shall see presently, he knew well how to devote his treasures, whether original or acquired, to the service of the Redeemer; and to consecrate the richest stores of natural genius and educational attainment, by laying them all at the foot of the Cross.

But that which gave the finish to Charnock’s intellectual character, was not the predominance of any one quality so much as the harmonious and nicely balanced union of all. Acute perception, sound judgment, masculine sense, brilliant imagination, habits of reflection, and a complete mastery over the succession of his thoughts, were all combined in that comely order and that due proportion which go to constitute a well-regulated mind. There was, in his case, none of that disproportionate development of any one particular faculty, which, in some cases, serves, like an overpowering glare, to dim, if not almost to quench the splendour of the rest. The various faculties of his soul, to make use of a figure, rather shone forth like so many glittering stars, from the calm and clear firmament of his mind, each supplying its allotted tribute of light, and contributing to the serene and solemn lustre of the whole. As has been said of another, so may it be said of him—“If it be rare to meet with an individual whose mental faculties are thus admirably balanced, in whom no tyrant faculty usurps dominion over the rest, or erects a despotism on the ruins of the intellectual republic; still more rare is it to meet with such a mind in union with the far higher qualities of religious and moral excellence.”

Nor were Charnock’s moral qualities less estimable than his intellectual. [He was a pre-eminently holy man, distinguished at once by personal purity, social equity, and habitual devotion. Early the subject of saving grace, he was in his own person an excellent example of the harmony of faith, with the philosophy of the moral feelings. Strongly he felt that while “not without law to God,” he was nevertheless “under law to Christ.” The motives from which he acted in every department of moral duty were evangelical motives; and so entirely was he imbued with the spirit, so completely under the power of the gospel, that whatever he did, no matter how humble in the scale of moral duty, he “served the Lord Christ.” The regulating principle of his whole life is embodied in the apostolical

---

---

---

---

injunction:—"Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." The various talents with which he was gifted by the God of nature, were all presided over by an enlightened and deep-toned piety, for which he was indebted to the sovereign grace of Cod in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was this that struck the key-note of the intellectual and moral harmony to which we have adverted as a prominent feature in his character. This at once directed each faculty to its proper object, and regulated the measure of its exercise. Devotion was the very element in which he lived and breathed, and had his being. Devout communion with Supreme Excellence, the contemplation of celestial themes, and preparation for a higher state of being, constituted the truest pleasures of his existence, elevated him far above the control of merely sentient and animal nature, and secured for him an undisturbed repose of mind, which was itself but an antepast of what awaited him in the unclouded region of glory. Nor was his devotion transient or occasional merely; it was habitual as it was deep, extending its plastic and sanctifying influence to every feature of character, and every event of life; dictating at once ceaseless efforts for the welfare of man, and intensest desires for the glory of God; and securing that rarest perhaps of all combinations, close communion with the future and the eternal, and the busy and conscientious discharge of the ordinary duties of everyday life.

His natural temper appears to have been reserved, and his manners grave. Regarding the advantages to be derived from general society as insufficient to compensate for the loss of those to be acquired by retirement, he cultivated the acquaintance of few, and these few the more intelligent and godly, with whom, however, putting aside his natural backwardness, he was wont to be perfectly affable and communicative. But his best and most highly cherished companions were his books, of which he had contrived to secure a valuable though select collection. With these he held frequent and familiar intercourse. Great part of his time, indeed, was spent in his study; and when the calls of unavoidable duty compelled him to leave it, so bent was he on redeeming time, that, not content with appropriating the hours usually devoted to sleep, he cultivated the habit of thinking while walking along the streets. So successful was he in his efforts of abstraction, that, amid the most crowded and attractive scenes, he could withdraw his mind easily from the vanities which solicited his attention, and give himself up to close thinking and useful meditation. The productions of his pen, and the character of his pulpit services, bore ample evidence that the hours of retirement were given neither to frivolous vacuity nor to self-indulgent sloth, but to the industrious cultivation of his powers, and to conscientious preparation for public duty. He was not content, like many, with the mere reputation of being a *recluse*; on the contrary, he was set on bringing forth the fruits of a *hard student*. There

---

---

---

---

was always one day in the week in which he made it to appear that the others were not misspent. His Sabbath ministrations were not the loose vapid effusions of a few hours' careless preparation, but were rather the substantial, well-arranged, well-compacted products of much intense thought and deep cogitation. "Had he been less in his study," says his editors quaintly, "he would have been less liked in the pulpit."

To a person of these studious habits it may easily be conceived what distress it must have occasioned to have his library swept away from him. In that dreadful misfortune which befell the metropolis in 1666, ever since known as "the fire of London," the whole of Charnock's books were destroyed. The amount of calamity involved in such an occurrence can be estimated aright only by those who know from experience the strength and sacredness of that endearment with which the real student regards those silent but instructive friends which he has drawn around him by slow degrees; with which he has cultivated a long and intimate acquaintance; which are ever at hand with their valuable assistance, counsel and consolation, when these are needed; which, unlike some less judicious companions, never intrude upon him against his will; and with whose very looks and positions, as they repose in their places around him, he has become so familiarized, that it is no difficult thing for him to call up their appearance when absent, or to go directly to them in the dark without the risk of a mistake. Some may be disposed to smile at this love of books. But where is the scholar who will do so? Where is the man of letters who, for a single moment, would place the stately mansions and large estates of the "sons of earth" in comparison with his own well-loaded shelves? Where the student who, on looking round upon the walls of his study, is not conscious of a satisfaction greater and better far than landed proprietor ever felt on surveying his fields and lawns—a satisfaction which almost unconsciously seeks vent in the exclamation, "My library! a dukedom large enough!" Such, and such only, can judge what must have been Charnock's feelings, when he found that his much cherished volumes had become a heap of smouldering ashes. The sympathetic regret is only rendered the more intense, when it is thought that, in all probability, much valuable manuscript perished in the conflagration.

Charnock excelled as a *Preacher*. This is an office which, whether as regards its origin, nature, design, or effects, it will be difficult to overrate. The relation in which it stands to the salvation of immortal souls, invests it with an interest overwhelmingly momentous. Our former remarks will serve to show how well he of whom we now speak was qualified for acting in this highest of all the capacities in which man is required to serve. His mental and moral endowments,

---

---

---

---

his educational acquirements, his habitual seriousness, his sanctified imagination, and his vigorous faith, pre-eminently fitted him for discharging with ability and effect the duties of a herald of the Cross. Of his style of preaching we may form a pretty accurate idea from the writings he has left, which were all of them transcribed from the notes of his sermons. We hence infer that his discourses, while excelling in solid divinity and argumentative power, were not by any means deficient in their practical bearing, being addressed not more to the understandings than to the hearts of his hearers. "Nothing," it has been justly remarked, "can be more vigorous than his reasoning, nothing more affecting than his applications." While able to unravel with great acuteness and judgment the intricacies of a subtle question in polemics, he could with no less dexterity and skill address himself to the business of the Christian life, or to the casuistry of religious experience. Perspicuous plainness, convincing cogency, great wisdom, fearless honesty, and affectionate earnestness, are the chief characteristics of his sermons.

To this it must be added that his preaching was eminently evangelical. So deeply imbued with gospel truth were his discourses, that, like the Book of the Law of old, they might be said to be sprinkled with blood, even the blood of atonement. The cross was at once the basis on which he rested his doctrinal statements, and the armoury from which he drew his most forcible and pointed appeals to the conscience. His aim seems never once to have been to catch applause to himself by the enticing words of man's wisdom, by arraying his thoughts in the motley garb of an affected and gorgeous style, or by having recourse to the tricks of an inflated and meretricious oratory. His sole ambition appears to have been to "turn sinners from the error of their ways;" and for this end he wisely judged nothing to be so well adapted as "holding forth the words of eternal life" in their native simplicity and power, and in a spirit of sincere and ardent devotion. His object was to move his hearers, not towards himself, but towards his Master; not to elicit expressions of admiration for the messenger, but to make the message bear on the salvation of those to whom it was delivered; not to please, so much as to convert, his hearers; not to tickle their fancy, but to save the soul from death, and thus to hide a multitude of sins.

The character of his preaching, it is true, was adapted to the higher and more intelligent classes; yet was it not altogether unsuited to those of humbler rank and pretensions. He could handle the mysteries of the gospel with great perspicuity and plainness, using his profound learning for the purpose, not of mystifying, but of making things clear, so that persons even in the ordinary walks of life felt him to be not beyond their capacity. The energy, gravity, and

---

---

---

---

earnestness of his manner, especially when young, contributed to render him a great favourite with the public, and accordingly he drew after him large and deeply interested audiences—a circumstance which, we can suppose, was valued by him, not because of the incense which it ministered to a spirit of vanity, but of the opportunity it afforded him of winning souls to the Redeemer. When more advanced in life, this kind of popularity, we are told, declined, in consequence of his being compelled from an infirmity of memory to read his sermons, with the additional disadvantage of requiring to supply defect of sight by the use of a glass. But an increasing weight and importance in the matter, fully compensated for any deficiency in the manner of his preaching. If the more flighty of his hearers retired, others—among whom were many of his brethren in the ministry—who knew how to prefer solidity to show, crowded to supply their places. Reckoning it no ordinary privilege to be permitted to sit devoutly at the feet of one so well qualified to initiate them into the knowledge of the deep things of God, they continued to listen to his instructions with as much admiration and profit as ever.

It is as a *Writer*, however, that Charnock is best known, and this, indeed, is the only character in which we can now come into contact with him. His works are extensive, but, with a single exception, posthumous. The only thing published by himself was the piece on “The Sinfulness and Cure of Thoughts,” which appeared originally in the Supplement to the Morning Exercise at Cripplegate. Yet such was the quantity of manuscript left behind him at his death, that two large folio volumes were soon transcribed, and published by his friends, Mr. Adams and Mr. Veal, to whom he had committed his papers. The Discourse on Providence was the first published; it appeared in 1680. The Discourses on the Existence and Attributes of God came next, in 1682. There followed in succession the treatises on Regeneration, Reconciliation, The Lord’s Supper, &c. A second edition of the whole works, in two volumes, folio, came out in 1684, and a third in 1702—no slight proof of the estimation in which they were held. Several of the treatises have appeared from time to time in a separate form, especially those on Divine Providence, on Man’s Enmity to God, and on Mercy for the Chief of Sinners. The best edition of Charnock’s works is that published in 1815, in nine volumes, royal 8vo; with a prefatory Dedication, and a Memoir of the Author, by the Rev. Edward Parsons of Leeds.

All Charnock’s writings are distinguished for sound theology, profound thinking, and lively imagination. They partake of that massive divinity for which the Puritan Divines were in general remarkable, and are of course orthodox in their doctrinal statements and reasonings. Everywhere the reader meets with the evidences and fruits of deep thought, of a mind, indeed, of unusual

---

---

---

---

comprehension and energy of grasp, that could penetrate with ease into the very core, and fathom at pleasure the profoundest depths of the most abstruse and obscure subjects; while, from the rich stores of an exuberant and hallowed fancy, he was enabled to throw over his compositions the most attractive ornaments, and to supply spontaneously such illustrations as were necessary to render his meaning more clear, or his lessons more impressive. In a word, for weight of matter, for energy of thought, for copiousness of improving reflection, for grandeur and force of illustration, and for accuracy and felicitousness of expression, Charnock is equalled by few, and surpassed by none of the writers of the age to which he belonged. The eulogy pronounced by a competent judge on the Treatise on the Attributes, applies with equal justice to all his other writings:—"Perspicuity and depth; metaphysical subtlety and evangelical simplicity; immense learning, and plain but irrefragable reasoning, conspire to render that work one of the most inestimable productions that ever did honor to the sanctified judgment and genius of a human being." [Toplady]

The correctness of the composition, in these works, is remarkable, considering that they were not prepared for the press by the author himself, and that they must have been originally written amid scenes of distraction and turmoil, arising out of the events of the times. The latter circumstance may account for the manly vigor by which they are characterized, but it only renders their accuracy and polish the more wonderful. Refinement of taste and extensive scholarship can alone explain the chasteness, ease, and elegance of style, so free from all verbosity and clumsiness, which mark these productions. There were giants in literature in those days, and STEPHEN CHARNOCK was not the least of the noble fraternity.

Charnock may not have all the brilliancy of Bunyan, nor all the metaphysical acumen and subtle analysis of Howe, nor all the awful earnestness of Baxter; but he is not less argumentative, while he is more theological than any of them, and his theology, too, is more sound than that of some. "He was not," say the original editors of his works, "for that modern divinity which is so much in vogue with some, who would be counted the only sound divines; having tasted the old, he did not desire the new, but said the old is better." There is, therefore, not one of all the Puritan Divines whose writings can with more safety be recommended to the attention of students of divinity and young ministers. It is one of the happy signs of the times in which we live, that a taste for reading such works is beginning to revive; and we can conceive no better wish for the interests of mankind in general, and of our country in particular, than that the minds of our young divines were thoroughly impregnated with the good old theology to be found in such writings as those which we now take the liberty to introduce and

---

---

---

---

recommend. “If a preacher wishes to recommend himself by the weight of his doctrines,” to use the language of Mr Parsons, “he will find in the writings of Charnock the great truths of Scripture illustrated and explained in the most lucid and masterly manner. If he wishes to be distinguished by the evangelical strain of his discourses, and by the continual exhibition of Christ and him crucified, he will here find the characters of Christ, and the adaptation of the gospel to the circumstances and wants of man as a fallen creature, invariably kept in view. If he wishes for usefulness in the Church of God, here he has the brightest example of forcible appeals to the conscience, and of the most impressive applications of Scripture truth, to the various conditions of mankind. And, finally, if he reads for his own advantage as a Christian, his mind will be delighted with the inexhaustible variety here provided for the employment of his enlightened faculties, and his improvement in every divine attainment.”

It is a circumstance resulting from their having been originally sermons, that all Charnock’s Treatises arise out of particular passages of Scripture. In every case, accordingly, after the fashion of the times, there is an elaborate analysis of the text and context, fitted to bring out the grand doctrinal proposition which is afterwards confirmed, illustrated, and enforced with much copiousness and power. This preliminary analysis is always clear and satisfactory, affording abundant evidence of the author’s critical skill and philosophical discrimination, without ever being so unduly protracted as to bring him within the censure implied in the remark of the good woman, who said of some other of the Puritan Fathers, that “he was so long laying the cloth, that she almost despaired of the dinner.” The preliminary arrangement is often itself a high treat, and such as rather to whet the reader’s appetite for the rich and wholesome repast that follows.

**T**o attempt a criticism of Charnock’s writings individually is here out of the question. But we cannot resist giving a few sentences from the original preface which his friends Adams and Veal prefixed to the treatise On the Existence and Attributes of God. “The sublimeness, variety, and rareness,” say they, “of the truths handled, together with the elegance of the composure, neatness of the style, and whatever is wont to make any book desirable, all concur in the recommendation of it.....It is not a book to be played with or slept over, but read with the most intense and serious mind; for, though it afford much pleasure for the fancy, yet much more work for the heart, and hath indeed in it enough to busy all the faculties. The dress is complete and decent, yet not garish nor theatrical; the rhetoric masculine and vigorous, such as became a pulpit, and was never borrowed from the stage. The expressions full, clear, apt, and such as are best suited to the weightiness and spirituality of the truths here delivered. He is not like

---

---

some *school writers* who attenuate and rarify the matter they discourse of to a degree bordering upon annihilation; at least beat it so thin that a puff of breath may blow it away; spin their thread so fine that the cloth when made up proves useless; solidity dwindles into niceties, and what we thought we had gained by their assertions we lose by their distinctions. But if our author have some subtleties and superfine notions in his argumentations, yet he condenseth them again and consolidates them into substantial corollaries in his application.”

Next in importance to that on the Attributes is the Treatise on Providence. A subject of great difficulty and delicacy is here handled with much discrimination and judgment, as well as with great copiousness, power, and beauty. In no part of his works do the peculiar excellencies of the writer shine forth with greater brightness. Difficulties are unravelled with the hand of a master; confirmations from the word of God are multiplied with a profusion that bespeaks the presence of one who is “mighty in the Scriptures;” and illustrations drawn from the kingdom of nature and the treasures of history, are scattered with all the ravish prodigality of wealth. We know, indeed, of no treatise on the subject which can be compared with this in regard to fulness, variety, satisfactory solution of difficulties, or abundance of consolatory reflection. Take a single specimen, selected from that part of the discourse in which he shews that all evil things are over-ruled for the good of the Church:—“God often lays the sum of his amazing providences in very dismal afflictions; as the draughtsman first puts on the dusky colours on which he intends to draw the portraiture of some illustrious beauty. The oppression of Israel, immediately before their deliverance, was the dusky colour on which God drew those gracious lines of their salvation from Egypt, the pattern of all the after-deliverances of the Church in all ages, and a type of our spiritual redemption by Christ. The humiliation, persecution, and death of the Son of God, was the dusky colour on which God drew that amazing piece of divine love and wisdom in man’s salvation, which the eyes of saints and angels will be fixed on with ravishing admiration to all eternity. All afflictions in the world, with which God exercises the Church, are parts of his providence, and are like mournful notes in music, which make the melody of the time more pleasant, and set off those sweeter airs following them. Afflictions here cause the joys of heaven to appear more glorious in the eyes of glorified saints. The persecutions of the martyrs did but heighten their graces, send them to the place of rest, and enlarge their robes of glory. God many times saves his people by sufferings, and brings them to the shore on the planks of a broken ship, and makes that which was the occasion of their loss to be the means of their safety. Herod’s murdering the children to destroy him that was born King of the Jews, made his birth more conspicuous in the world.

---

---

Snuffing the candle makes it burn the clearer.....The church grows by tears, and withers by smiles. God's vine thrives the better for pruning. He makes our persecutions fit us for that for which we are persecuted. God uses persecutors as lances which, while they wound us, let out the purulent and oppressive matter. When the Israelites were most oppressed in Egypt, the more they multiplied. When the dragon's fury did most swell against the woman, she brought forth a man-child. When the Roman empire was at the highest, and was most inflamed against the Christians; when the learning of the philosophers, the witchcrafts of heretics, the power of the emperors, and the strength of the whole world was set against them, the Christians grew more flourishing and numerous by those very means which were used to destroy them. Not only a new succession of saints sprang up from the ashes of martyrs, but their flames were the occasion of warming some so much with a heavenly fire, that some persecutors have become preachers. Their very bonds for the truth have sometimes a virtue in them to bring men to faith in Christ; *the things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the gospel.*"

But it were endless to proceed in this manner. Respecting the pieces included in the present publication, it may be remarked, that they have been selected more on account of their brevity and practical bearing than of their intrinsic superiority over others. One of these is that which, as before observed, was published by the author during his lifetime, and may therefore be concluded to be as finished a composition as any of the rest. The first, on Mercy for the Chief of Sinners. is probably not surpassed, in point of true excellence, by any thing which the author has written. Mr Veal informs us, that it was brought to light "by the unwearied diligence of Mr Ashton, one of the laborious transcribers of the first volume of this author's works." It will be observed that two doctrinal propositions had been founded on the text (1 Tim. i. 15), although only the latter is here illustrated, the discourse on the other having been lost. "The text was fruitful, and bore twins," says the original editor, in his own peculiar style, "whereof the younger only survives, the other is dead without recovery." We know nothing better calculated to lead men to admire the riches of sovereign grace, or to induce awakened souls, sinking under an oppressive sense of guilt, to betake in faith to Him who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, and whose blood cleanseth from all sin. Nor does the writer fail to warn the presumptuous against abusing the doctrine here set forth for continuing or increasing in sin, but expostulates with them freely on the danger, the folly, the ingratitude of thus turning the grace of God into licentiousness.

---

---

We beg to remind our readers, that what they have in this little volume\* forms but a small portion of the writings of the author. It is fondly hoped that the perusal of these minor pieces may induce them to seek access to the more elaborate productions of his pen. In the quaint language of the original editors:—“Thou hast here, reader, a specimen of the strain and spirit of this holy man, this being his familiar and holy way of preaching; if thou like this cluster, fear not but the vintage will be answerable; if this little earnest be good metal, the whole sum will be no less current.”

Happy shall we be, if what we have written shall, by the blessing of God, prove the means of producing or reviving a taste for reading the works of our author, being fully convinced with a former editor, that, “while talent is respected, or virtue revered—while holiness of conversation, consistency of character, or elevation of mind, are considered as worthy of imitation—while uniform and strenuous exertion for the welfare of man is honoured, and constant devotedness to the glory of God admired, the memory of CHARNOCK shall be held in grateful remembrance.”

Annfield Place,  
Glasgow, June 1846.

---

\* This Life of Charnock was prefaced to a volume of the *Works of the English Puritan Divines* edited by Symington in 1846. It is to be hoped (D.V.) that eventually the entire volume will be included in *Fire and Ice*.

Visit *Fire and Ice: Puritan and Reformed Sermons* at  
<http://www.puritansermons.com/>