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Charles Spurgeon on “Advanced Thinkers”

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Some claim that [Charles Spurgeon](#) was the most voluminous writer in the history of the English language. Given the fact that his writings — often based on his preaching — were a publishing phenomenon of Victorian times and remain a publishing phenomenon even now.

Some of Spurgeon’s sharpest words and clearest thoughts are found in the pages of his magazine, *Sword and Trowel*. In “[Advanced Thinkers](#),” published in the November 1871 edition of the magazine, Spurgeon considered the rise of an intellectual elite devoted to doctrinal compromise. His words are as prophetic today as when they were first written. An excerpt:

Manliness and moral courage are the attributes in which they consider themselves to excel, and they are constantly asserting that hundreds of ministers see with them, but dare not enunciate their views, and so continue to preach one thing and believe another. It may be so here and there, and the more is the cause for sorrow; but we are not sure of the statement, for the accusers themselves may, after all, fancy that they see in others what is really in themselves. The glass in their own houses should forbid their throwing stones. If they were straightforward themselves, they might call others to account; but, in too many cases, their own policy savors of the serpent in a very high degree. The charge could not be fairly brought against all, but it can be proven against many, that they have fought the battles of liberality, not with the broad sword of honest men, but with the cloak and dagger of assassins. They have occupied positions which could not be reconciled with their beliefs, and have clung to them with all the tenacity with which limpets adhere to rocks. Their testimony has, in some cases, been rendered evidently worthless, from the fact that with all their outcry against orthodoxy, they did their best to eat the bread of the orthodox, and would still have continued to profess, and yet to assail, orthodox opinions had they been permitted to do so. Whether this is honest is doubtful: that it is not manly is certain.

□ *These gentlemen of culture have certainly adopted peculiar tactics. The misbelievers and unbelievers of former ages withdrew themselves from churches as soon as they found out they could not honestly endorse their fundamental articles; but these abide by the stuff, and great is their indignation at the creeds which render their position morally dubious. Churches have no right to believe anything; comprehensiveness is the only virtue of a denomination; precise definitions are a sin, and fundamental doctrines are a myth: this is the notion of “our foremost men.” For earnest people to band themselves together to propagate what they hold to be the very truth of God, is in their eyes the miserable endeavor of bigots to stem the torrent of modern thought; for zealous Christians to contribute of their substance for the erection of a house, in which only the truths most surely believed among them shall be inculcated, is a treason against liberality; while the attempt to secure our pulpits against downright error, is a mischievous piece of persecution to be resented by all “intellectual” men. The proper course, according to their “broad views,” would be to leave doctrines for the dunces who care for them. Truths there are none, but only opinions; and, therefore, cultivated ministers should be left free to trample on the most cherished beliefs, to insult convictions, no matter how long experience may have matured them, and to teach anything, everything, or nothing, as their own culture, or the current of enlightened thought may direct them. If certain old fogies object to this, let them turn out of the buildings they have erected, or subside into silence under a due sense of their inferiority.*

□ *It appears to be, now-a-days, a doubtful question whether Christian men have a right to be quite sure of anything. The Jesuit argument that some learned doctor or other has taught a certain doctrine, and that, therefore, it has some probability, is now practically prevalent. He who teaches an extravagant error is a fine, generous spirit: and, therefore, to condemn his teaching is perilous, and will certainly produce an outcry against your bigotry. Where the atonement is virtually denied, it is said that a preacher is a very clever man, and exceedingly good; and, therefore, even to whisper that he is unsound is libelous: we are assured that it would be far better to honor him for his courage in scorning to be hampered by conventional expressions. Besides, it is only his way of putting it, and the radical idea is discoverable by cultured minds. As to other doctrines, they are regarded as too trivial to be worthy of controversy, the most of them being*

superseded by the advancement of science and other forms of progressive enlightenment.

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