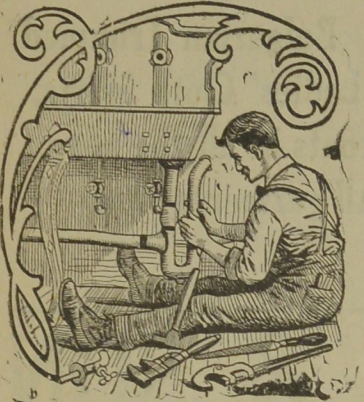


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Dr. Herridge's Address Presbyterian Congress

Following is the full text of the address by Dr. W. T. Herridge of Ottawa, delegate at the Presbyterian Congress now going on at Toronto.

We are here today because we believe humbly and gratefully that we have a message, not given us by others, not evolved from our own consciousness but a message that comes from God a message shadowed forth in many ways but most clearly made known in the Holy Scriptures.

No one, I imagine will question the fact that the Bible has exerted a greater influence than any other book, upon the thought and life of the world. How are we to account for this? No doubt the Bible challenges attention as literature. We have it in biography, history, poetry, philosophy, and any reflecting mind ought to find some measure of delight in the mere intellectual wealth of its pages. The great drama of the book of Job, the exquisite lyrics of the Hebrew Psalms, the lofty idealism of Isaiah, the fascinating narrative of the Evangelists, the fine logic and burning eloquence of Paul are well worth the earnest study of anyone who aspires to have a knowledge of the world's best literary products; and it is a gratifying circumstance that from this point of view the Bible is being more and more appreciated and that many different types of men are drawing inspiration from it.

But will this explain the marvelous influence of the Book upon the fortunes of the world? I think not. The Bible is not simply a masterpiece of literature for the perusal of enthusiastic scholars. It is for everyone. It follows mankind everywhere. It is equally in place in the cottage of the peasant and the palace of the king. It sits by the bedside of pain. It looks into the eyes of sorrow. It takes the cold hand of death. It gives a higher tone to joy; and when we are most chafed and weary most desolate and sad, its message is full of solace and encouragement. While the rest of our companions stand at the outer gates of the temple of life, sympathetic perhaps, but seemingly powerless, it advances with assured confidence into the Holy of Holies, and there chants its strange sweet psalm before the altar of God. Other guides may lead us astray, but it keeps to the road of truth. Other oracles may be ambiguous in their meaning, but it declares with unmistakable clearness the love of the Father and His self-sacrificing passion to make us like Him. Other lights may fade and at last be extinguished altogether; but high above the smoky glare of earth's lamps, it shines like the unsullied stars in heaven's firmament.

Ah yes! the Bible stands apart from all other books, however excellent because it is a vehicle of Divine revelation. There have been other vehicles indeed, but none so luminous and complete as this one. Its very first words strike the high key-note. "In the beginning God!" That is the genesis of evolution. Of course the unfolding of the infinite must needs be gradual. In spite of aptitudes inwrought into the texture of the human race, the highest truths cannot be grasped in a moment. When we recall the circumstances of ancient Israel, and the effect which the superstition and idolatry of other peoples had upon their national character, it seems

clear that only by a slow and tedious process of training, only by the pathetic experiences of oft-repeated mistake and failure can the way be prepared for the fullness of time when God sent forth His Son for the supreme Divine revelation is not in a Book, but in a life.

An so we must expect some crudity in the Old Testament. But we should be dull indeed if this was all we saw in it. The Jews are forever the great religious instructors of the world. Greece gave us law and philosophy. Rome gave us law and social organization. Palestine gave us the belief in one living and true God. Selected for an overwhelming trust as custodians of the Divine oracles, it is at Jewish feet that we have been taught our psalms of praise and our liturgies of penitence; and while their false ideas of the Messiah led to the terrible blunder of rejecting Him when He came, something surely is due them beyond the cowardly persecution which has hounded the Jew everywhere thru the long, sad centuries. What wonder that Christendom having lorded it over them in such cruel ways, they should seem to forget the old, splendid tasks, to lose the vision of the old desire, and reverting to the commercialism which has never been wholly absent from the national temper should try in certain directions to lord it over us? But the fact remains that they come of a race which once had its seers and prophets, that their best literature glows with moral earnestness, and supreme gift of all that from them has sprang the Saviour of the world.

Questions of date and authorship, therefore, while well worth considering, are not as first importance. We ought to be thankful to every competent scholar who seeks to investigate such matters; and it is a great pity that intelligent Christians should ever have been called upon to listen to the cheap sneer of those whose own lack of scholarship disqualifies them from passing an opinion, who lack of charity often assumes some nefarious purpose without taking the trouble to prove it. The Bible is not such a fragile thing that it will break if anyone ventures to touch it. Its authority does not rest on mere verbal preciseness. Some enemies may rejoice, and some friends may tremble over difficulties in regard to the proper reading, or debates on time and place or views of the universe that do not seem in accord with the latest results of science. But the whole question goes far deeper than all this. The Bible is not an encyclopedia of things in general, but a special survey of the religious instincts of mankind, and their gradual enlightenment by the God who gave them; and even then, we may expect some bang of the earthen vessel, in spite of the treasure which it contains. We need telescopic rather than microscopic men to appreciate aright the scriptures of Divine revelation, men who have caught some glimpse of its transcendent purpose, and felt in their own souls the power of its supernatural message. Those who think demolish the Bible by puny blows of textual criticism are not unlike children who should chip off a small fragment of rock from the base of a mountain and then, running away to a safe distance to tumble down this little bit of demolition, mock while, all the time, the towering

mass, its peak hidden among the clouds, and quite unconscious of them in its silent immovable greatness.

For the revelation of the Bible culminates in Jesus Christ. I sometimes wonder how we should feel it with our powers matured, and after more or less experience of the graver problems of life, we read for the first time the New Testament record, the record of the words He spoke, the deeds He did, the pure, courageous, tender spirit that dwelt within Him, the grand obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, the triumphant resurrection and the glorious promise, so amply fulfilled, that He would be with His disciples always, even to the ends of the ages.

It is natural that the church should have tried, from time to time, to put into definite form its conceptions of Christian theology. But Christ Himself is infinitely greater than the greatest things which even the Bible can say about Him. Divine love transcends all theories and baffles all analysis. But if it be true that God indeed loves us and that His love shines forth most clearly in His immortal Son, then there is hope even for the vilest and most disconsolate. He who arrested Saul of Tarsus in his persecuting fury, He who said to the penitent thief on the cross: "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise"; He who bade the shame-faced Magdalen go in peace and sin no more, is still able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. The white robe of the Pure One gleams among the spirits in prison; and if they will but turn to Him with longing eyes, and follow Him with obedient hearts, then, at last, through toil and prayer, they shall come forth into a new realm of pure delights, of noble service, of splendid inspiration and shall know of a truth that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin.

This is the supreme message of the Bible, and amid all our changing fashions its value can never be impaired because it goes to the very roots of the moral and spiritual needs of the world. Sin is a stern fact of human experience, not simply a wallowing in the depths, but a failure to reach the heights of life. Salvation is a thought of the heart of God, guessed at, dreamed of by suffering humanity, but impossible to achieve by mortal power alone. Nor is the thought a narrow one, a mere deliverance from future pains and penalties. It is a present awakening of our true nature, a reval of our noblest energies, a reconstruction of our whole view of things, a fulfilment of our proper destiny as children of the Father in heaven.

I trust we believe this with all our hearts. But there are some who do not believe. The great controversy of this age lies behind any matters of Biblical exegesis. Can there be a Bible at all, a revelation of God to man, assuming that there is a God? Or, if He reveals Himself, is man able to grasp the significance of such an epiphany? Is there a spirit-realm where deep calls unto deep, the deep of our being to the deep of Him who made us, or, whatever doubtful comfort we may find in ancient stories of communion with the unseen, must we drift through life, cursed by our superficial propensities because we are unguided by any Divine light, unbreathed upon by any winds of God.

It seems to me that the world is on trial, in an acute form, in this twentieth century, and it is no foolish fear that makes many earnest minds tremble for the issue of it. For though a materialistic creed has been largely discredited as an adequate explanation of human nature, it still keeps invading and reinvading and sometimes threatens to choke out our very life. Amid the growing complexity of modern affairs we can scarcely preserve a mere lukewarm belief or a lukewarm unbelief. We shall be jostled out of a prim program that keeps within the orbit of conventional respectability and compelled to take a pronounced stand either on the one side or the other. It will not be enough for us to say that we have done no great harm in the world. The real question is, "What have we done, in spite of the mistakes and failures that grow out of an enlarged view of life—what have we done to enrich and purify it, to vindicate the supreme worth of the human soul? The battle is set between truth and falsehood, between flesh and spirit, between degrading self-indulgence and noble self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Shall we drift down the stream of sordid ways or shall we stem the swollen torrent? Shall we listen to the mocking, cowardly voices that bid us eat and drink for tomorrow we die, or shall we by patience win our souls and so prove our immortality? Shall we follow the ever-living Christ who always makes as though He would go farther or by our supine indifference, our Pharisaic pride, our downright viciousness, shall we dare crucify the

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Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame?

These are the great problems of the time and with this blessed Book before us, may God give us grace to solve them for on this depends our individual and national destiny. No doubt as Canadians we have reason to rejoice in our goodly inheritance, and in the splendid traditions bequeathed to us as part of the realm of Britain. But optimism can never afford to be superficial or inconsiderate. Our future is not self-evolved. We must evolve it. Among all our varied forms of industry none will prove so lucrative as the manufacture of men who have wider purposes than mere personal aggrandizement, men who are prepared to live for their country, whether called upon to die for it or not, loyal and brave crusaders against everything that would mar its welfare, or degrade its ambitions, or imperil its good name before the world.

And in order to do this we must accept the message of Divine love, and apply all that is involved in it to the varied needs of modern civilization. So far from such a message being superfluous in this age of boasted progress, without it, true progress would soon be exchanged for disintegration and ruin. We are learning all the while the transcendent power of the Risen Christ to change the whole face of nature, to bring gladness to eyes that now are filled with tears and strength to hearts that now are weak and despairing and infinite forgiveness and exaltation to a weary, sin-cursed world. Like the clear moonlight shining over the troubled current of human affairs is the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

"And forever and forever,
As long as the river flows,
As long as the heart has passions,
As long as life has woes;

"The moan and its broken reflection,
And its shadows shall appear,
As the symbol of love in Heaven,
And its wavering image here."

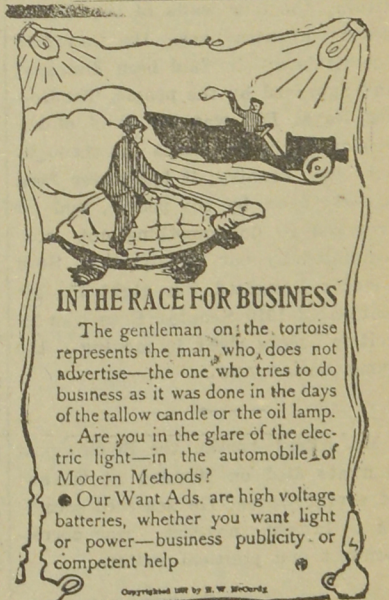
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