

# ADDRESSES

OF

PRINCIPAL DAWSON AND REV. D. H. M'VICAR,

DELIVERED AT THE

**Bible Society Meeting,**

27<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 1864.

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*Montreal:*

PRINTED BY JOHN LOVELL, ST. NICHOLAS STREET.

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Principal Dawson said : Mr. Chairman and Christian friends : the resolution entrusted to me is short, but not unimportant. It refers to a subject on which I could wish to say more than the time allotted to me this evening will permit. It is—

“ That the aspects of our time, and more especially the present state of religious discussion and controversy, render it more than ever the duty of Christians to extend the circulation of the word of God and to promote its study.”

The subject of the resolution may be viewed in two aspects. We may regard it in relation to the controversies of earth or to the promises of Heaven. With respect to the first of these,—the opposition made to the Bible in our day,—we must bear in mind that the Bible provokes opposition. It is an aggressive book ; and we may, in this imperfect state of the world, almost measure the extent of its influence in the world by the strife which it excites. The Bible denounces tyranny, superstition, formalism, hypocrisy, and injustice. It assails vice, infidelity, worldliness, and selfishness. It is still in all these respects far in advance of our age ; and all these influences, however mutually hostile, must combine in enmity to the doctrines of the Bible, wherever these are propagated or practised. These old enemies are active in our day as heretofore, and the principal difference is that they have taken up the new and keener weapon of scientific criticism wherewith to prosecute their assaults.

This accords with the spirit of our time. The present is a critical age. We scrutinize and analyze everything in nature, science, philosophy and theology, and receive only what stands this test. The Bible itself encourages this tendency. It tells us to “ prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.” If the Bible were an obsolete book, of no influence or authority, it might escape this treatment ; but it is a power in the world, gaining in strength every day with the growth of education and intelligence ; and the fact that it excites inquiry and opposition is far more cheering than if it were hidden and neglected.

The assaults on the inspiration and authority of the Bible, which have recently been made in our own language, have excited some apprehension, and may do some harm, but the result is not to be dreaded ; and already much good has been done in producing increased study of the Scriptures, and in bringing more prominently forward the evidence for the inspiration of the book. Still we must not be surprised if more formidable attacks should appear. The English criticism has yet only reached an elementary stage. It is but a clumsy

and bungling imitation of its German models, and has not yet attained to their more ambitious heights. But let us not fear it. From what has already occurred in Germany, we can easily predict the result. It will be the vindication of the integrity of the text, a more full conviction of the value of the Bible history, a more just appreciation of the truth of the Bible to nature and to man, and of the supreme grandeur and beauty of its doctrine. Further, after all the arts of constructive criticism have been exhausted, it will be shown in England as elsewhere, that the only rational hypothesis as to the book is its own assertion of a Divine origin as a revelation from God. I refer here merely to the question of external criticism. The internal evidence of the book, conveyed by the spirit of God to the mind of the Christian, is of course unaffected by these controversies.

In another important respect I believe these attacks will do good to the cause of the Bible. They will strip from it the rags of false and traditional exposition, and leave it in its native purity. Many of us may find that views and practices handed down to us as almost of equal authority with Scripture, will be swept away, but we shall find that nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure. The effect will rather be to cause Christians to cleave more closely to the Bible, to study it more carefully, to be more fully imbued with its spirit and doctrine, and to distinguish more carefully between human and Divine authority in matters of religion.

The opposition to the Bible is one evidence of the importance attached to it by the great enemy of our race. No doubt it was unfortunate for Satan's kingdom when Wycliffe translated the Bible into English, and when Wycliffe's doctrines penetrated into Bohemia. It was a still more damaging blow when Luther studied the Bible in the library of his monastery, and translated it into the vulgar tongue. It is all but ruin to the enemies of God that now the Bible has been translated into nearly two hundred languages, and is scattered broadcast by Bible societies over the earth; for it is still, and in all tongues, the "sword of the Spirit," and mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. In the late Exhibition at London, a corner was assigned to the Bible Society for the display of its versions; and a French politician, who happened to observe them, wrote, on his return, that few things there struck him more forcibly; for these Bibles in one hundred and eighty languages represented to his mind the propagation of English and Protestant influence in nearly all the nations of the world, and this by a means which France and Romanism do not possess, and cannot imitate.

But let us turn from the discussions which surround the Bible, to the claims and promises of the book itself. I shall present these in connection with that aspect in which our Lord reveals himself to us as the "Word of God"—the only true and complete expression of the Divine Mind. This title of our Lord is perhaps less insisted on now than it should be. It was a favourite title with the early Christians, and with the philosophic Greeks, and I believe is to take a more prominent place than ever before, in the time still future.

In this capacity Christ sanctions and authenticates the revelations of the Old Testament as well as those of the New, so that no man can reject Moses and the Prophets, without rejecting Christ also. In like manner he proclaims

the sufficiency of Scripture for the time to come. How much of quiet majesty is there in the declaration with which he concludes that remarkable prediction of the end of the Jewish temple and close of the old dispensation—"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Bold words these if uttered by a mere man—yet there were some who listened to these words, who lived to see in that very generation, as our Lord had predicted, the Son of Man coming in his power, and dissolving that venerable system which had survived so many vicissitudes, but had rejected him in his state of humiliation. Then the struggle for mastery was between the Gospel and heathen Rome; and as centuries rolled away, that grand old empire, the strongest military despotism the world had seen, and its ancient paganism, enshrined in noble temples, supported by a magnificent priesthood, and interwoven with the literature and art of ages, fell before the Word of God—fell as that word had predicted, "rolled away as a scroll" from the darkened heavens. We can hardly, at this distance of time, appreciate the grandeur of that revolution, or the terms in which it is expressed by the prophet of Patmos and by the historians of the time.

But the battle had to be fought over again. In the darkness of the Middle ages, Satan himself assumed the Christian name, and used the very cross of Christ as his banner and watchword, while the word of God seemed for ever buried from men, and the whole earth enshrouded in the gloom of the great apostacy. Again, He whose "words shall not pass away" intervened. The angel of the reformation, so grandly described in the Apocalypse, descended from heaven with the rainbow of promise around his head, and standing with one foot on the earth and one foot on the sea, restored to men the open book of the Holy Scriptures, and uttered that new commission, "Thou must prophesy again before many peoples and nations and tongues and kings," the commission of our Protestant churches, under which it becomes our office to spread the everlasting Gospel to the ends of the earth, winged with all the new speed and force of our modern civilization.

But we must expect opposition in this. The very book which gives us this glorious picture, which we cannot, I think, misunderstand, tells us of the thunders of Antichrist from his seven hills murmuring against the reformation angel, of great tumults and revolutions arising from the conflict of truth and error: and even while the angel of missions flies through mid heaven with the everlasting Gospel, we see on the prophetic page the frog-like unclean spirits of superstition, of infidelity, of rationalism, of false spiritualism overspreading the earth, and preparing for the last great struggle against the Gospel.

We can perceive these agencies at work in the world now, and without speaking too positively on such subjects, I think we learn also from prophecy the results. We see the fall of great Babylon, an event perhaps not now very distant, and following that, not a flood of infidelity overspreading the earth, but the appearance more manifestly than ever of the Divine Word, going forth conquering and to conquer: and how conquering? not with an earthly sword, but with a sword that proceeds out of his mouth, the "sword of the spirit which is the word of God:" and what armies follow him? not those of earth but those of heaven; those armies whose words and lives are in this book,

through which it would seem Christ is, in this latter day, to make the conquest of the world, thus finally vindicating its faithfulness and truth and power. These views of the future, I think, are fairly deducible from Scripture and the aspects of our time; and if true, they clearly point out the present duty of the Church. It is to spread, by the living missionary and the printed page, the word of God throughout the world, that it may be ready for the time when the Lord shall manifest himself again with the power of his Spirit. That this is the present duty of the Church is further shown by the strength with which the universal Christian heart, enlightened by the Spirit, beats in favour of missions and Bible circulation, and by the openings for these daily made in the providence of God. Christ's kingdom has its periods like nature, its winters of cold and deadness, its sowing times of faith and hope, its harvests of spiritual blessing. Ours is a sowing time; and let us sow abundantly and without stint for the harvest of the latter day.

Mr. McVICAR spoke as follows:

MR. PRESIDENT,—I am deeply sensible of the great difficulty, if not impossibility, of presenting what should be said upon this resolution before a popular audience; while having examined with care the subjects embraced within its comprehensive range—one feels at a loss how to exhibit the results of his labour in a form useful and attractive before this vast assembly; yet since the resolution grasps topics undoubtedly engrossing, at the present moment, a large share of public attention, especially in the religious world, it is a proper subject of discussion upon this platform.

The resolution implies that certain opposition is offered to the Bible—that certain parties are arrayed against it in open hostility—that its friends and foes have met in battle, and that this struggle, this fierce conflict, wears an aspect favourable to the lovers and defenders of the Bible. This is a fact, but one not very apparent to some minds, for we frequently hear the timid and thoughtless express an opposite conviction, that the cause of the Bible is declining instead of prospering; that the world is growing worse instead of better. Let us then ask, what is the true state of the case? What progress has the Bible made of late years in the face of the desperate opposition offered? Or, what are its opponents obliged to yield in this respect? The answer to this question will place before you what I conceive to be the real state of religious discussion and controversy at the present time. This reply is not, of course, intended to include any notice of the general opposition offered to Divine truth in Popish, Mohammedan, and heathen countries, nor have I in view those theological disputes carried on between different sections of the Church, but only the position now assumed by those usually known as infidels or sceptics.

For one thing, they are obliged to concede that *the Bible has gained possession of the popular mind of Britain and America*. This is a great and undeniable fact, not overlooked by the enemies of Revelation, realized by them and by all, within the last fifty years, since the Bible Society commenced its truly evangelical work of disseminating the Word. The Book has mainly done this work

itself; being placed in the homes of these nations, from the palace of Royalty down to the humblest cottage, it has found its way to the hearts of the people; they have learned to appeal to it under all circumstances for lessons of wisdom and comfort, of instruction and correction, and the more they have looked into it the better they have loved it; it has taken a firm hold upon the heart of the nation. And if it is true that Britons are proverbially loyal to their Sovereign, it is equally true that they are loyal to the Bible; if Englishmen are found all over the world to pray earnestly, "God save the Queen," with equal fervour they pray, God save the Bible. I speak, of course, of the mass of the British people, and sceptics know and acknowledge in various ways that what I say is true. This appears in their periodical and more voluminous literature—in the Westminster Review, and in recent volumes written in the interests of infidelity. The writers affect pity for the deluded masses who are ruled by the Bible; they express strong reluctance to disturb the old and universal faith of the nation. What is this but to grant that the nation is under the dominion of this book in spite of their efforts? Accordingly, they have ceased to address their arguments and books exclusively to the limited circle of the learned, and seek now to make their appeals to the popular mind. Strauss is engaged upon another edition of his "Leben Jesu," not, as the former one, addressed to the learned, but adapted to the general reading public, containing replies to the objections made to it, designed to free it from the general reprobation with which it was covered. Renan also, in his "Life of Jesus," while unconditionally contradicting his German predecessor, Strauss, enters the same field with him, selecting for his constituency not the learned circles of France, but the general public—those men, and their coadjutors, thus acknowledging the wide sway of the Bible. This is an important confession from their lips,

It is further conceded by them *that no manifestly evil consequences have flown directly from the circulation and influence of the Bible.* There is confessedly a universal influence diffused by the Book through the heart of the nation, and if you ask its opponents, what is the character of this influence, they are bound in honesty, in the light of history and reason, to say *it is not evil.* The most bitter and determined among their ranks feel now unable to argue that conformity to the life and character of Jesus disqualifies a man in any way to be a most happy and useful citizen. They feel unable to furnish proof that the fullest subjection of the human soul to all the laws and principles of the Gospel is found to operate injuriously to the individual, to the community, or to the nation—they feel that none of the evils which afflict society are to be traced logically and legitimately to the direct influence of God's book. They can, indeed, point to the blood-stained page of Ecclesiastical History, to strifes, discords, and persecutions flowing from the perversion of Christian principles, but they have discernment enough to see that these things are traceable to human depravity, and that they are distinct from a correct and consistent imitation of Him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.

We may place this subject in another light, and venture to affirm further, that the opponents of the Word of God are now constrained to confess, *that the morality inculcated by the Bible regarded in a personal, commercial, or national*

declarations of revelations are in this way set aside. This is the sort of thing advocated by Dr. Temple in his sermon before the University of Oxford, during the meeting of the British Association in 1860, in which he affirms "that one idea is now emerging into supremacy in science, a supremacy which it never possessed before, and for which it still has to fight a battle; and that is the idea of law." The same opinion, as is well known, has ruled the minds and greatly aided in moulding the character of the works of Holyoake, Hinton, and Humboldt.

Then on the continent of Europe, especially, appeals have been made to human consciousness; every thing pertaining to truth has been subjected to the test of "*pure reason*." Man's soul has been deified; the same pantheistic tendency which looks to natural laws as deity finds the highest manifestation of Godhead in the human soul. Adopting these assumptions it is easy to see how the whole doctrine of Inspiration falls into discredit; and those views, let us remember, have been slowly propagated, so that in this respect, the present aspect of religious discussion and controversy is not a thing of yesterday; it stands associated with ancient pagan opinions transmitted to us, and advocated by poets and philosophers. Coleridge in England did much to introduce this subjective method of viewing all things—the Lake Poets of England did the same—Newman in his writings, and Carlyle, especially in his life of Sterling, have followed in the same school; and upon this continent they have found disciples in Theodore Parker, Emerson, and others. Along with those two very manifest and potent tendencies just noticed, we may mention the rise of the science of historical criticism, as leading to recent attacks upon the Bible. Under the influence of that science, if it has yet gained the position of a science, men, looking over documents heretofore accepted as historically true, have asked once more Pilate's old question, "What is truth?" Truth there is, and truth there is in the Bible, but what is it? Now the answers, as we have said, have been varied; attacks have been specially made upon the Pentateuch and Old Testament, not because these parts are more vulnerable in themselves than the rest of the word. We think it all divine, and therefore true; but the Church has neglected the study of the Hebrew Scriptures, and this has in part given form to the present controversy. The Greek and the Latin of Oxford have been allowed to set aside the language of the descendants of Abraham and the living oracles of God of which it is the vehicle; and the common people have in like manner learned to neglect those elder Scriptures in the vernacular. It is a singular fact that when a text is announced in some of the books of the Old Testament few persons in a congregation know where to turn for it; and I doubt not that while present assaults are in part occasioned by neglect in our schools and families, they are wisely permitted and will be employed by a holy Providence to rouse us to activity and to impress upon our minds the Saviour's lesson, "Search the Scriptures." And while we glance at causes conspiring to determine the form of present doubt and error we may not overlook those two great fundamental causes by which early apologists were apt to account for all error, and which often formed the gist of their answers, *moral depravity and satanic agency*. These are still active, operative causes of unbelief, and of opposition to the word of God. But instead



of dwelling further upon the aspect of religious controversy and the causes which mould its character, let me ask, as the resolution suggests, is this conflict of opinion, this struggle inside and outside the Church, productive of evil alone, and in no way destined to do good? We answer, it has done good already, and it will do more; it has called forth the talent of the Church, and turned her learning to account, and will continue to expand her learning in departments hitherto neglected. We have not yet seen the worst forms of error, nor the strongest bulwarks of truth. We have still to witness the transplantation to our soil of many European errors of which most of us are now happily ignorant. This we cannot prevent; book-makers and book-venders must have their own way; but upon the heels of their errors come a fuller discovery and wider dissemination of truth than we have ever known. The history of the past leads me to entertain this view. Every student of history knows that scepticism respecting existing opinions has been, if not the cause, at least the occasion, of the greatest advances in science and religion. Astronomers doubted, and so were led to discover new laws, and new planets. Navigators doubted old opinions and foregone conclusions, and thus discovered islands and continents. Theologians doubted, and disbelieved the dogmas of a benighted church, and then the light of the Reformation dawned upon the world. Luther cast the bulls of the Pope into the fire, and so the world was emancipated. And so we may feel confident that the things which are now happening will "fall out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel." Thousands will spring up, and be called out from their silence and repose to pierce the armour of our learned infidels, and to expose the imperfections of their logic. Indeed, those men in spite of themselves help forward the cause of truth. Thus Renan, in his *Life of Jesus*, has marked a multitude of references to the New Testament, sufficient, if turned to and read, to enlighten all Europe.

Since therefore we are able to trace so many favourable indications in the present state of religious controversy, let me ask, what have we to contend for? I answer, for a book, for a revelation from heaven. It is true that the wants of the individual soul are met by presenting a personal Saviour; by telling of guiltless blood shed for the guilty, of a sufficient and perfect atonement made by a Divine Saviour, and a free pardon and complete sanctification through his blood; but these great peculiar and central doctrines of the gospel are only revealed in the word of God—not expressed by the sublime science of astronomy—not uttered by the brooks and rills that adorn our earth—not discovered by *pure reason*—not taught by natural laws—they are only found in the book of God, and therefore we must contend earnestly for the book as containing the faith delivered unto the saints. We must not fail to teach men that natural laws and secondary causes are nothing apart from God; that these laws are only his fixed order of procedure; that in Him and not in them we can see personality and power. We must not fear to teach men that in addition to all the indications of Divine wisdom and power given in these laws, God has distinctly spoken out, "spoken at sundry times and in divers manners." We must fight the battle of Inspiration, for it is the great battle of the present day; we must enter the arena of the evidences, and adapt our arguments to present forms of error; not, indeed, despising the work of our fathers,

or imagining that all wisdom is confined to our generation, but doing the peculiar work of our own age in defending the eternal ramparts of truth. And while we do this, let us circulate the word: the best victories, as we said at first, that have been gained for the Bible have been gained by itself; the Bible is its own witness. We need not tremble for the ark of God. We may feel certain that the God of the Bible does not look upon this strife with indifference. He stands by his own truth, and it must prevail. Then let us commit it to the care of the Holy Ghost—let us circulate it, and allow it to display its gold and diamonds, and tell their value. It will make a path for itself amid moral and intellectual darkness. Its views of government, of human happiness and destiny are such as to command respect and gain dominion. It is the truth of God; then let us send it to the 880,000,000 pagans in our world who still dwell in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death—let us send it to the 135,000,000 Roman Catholics, many of whom are longing to see its emancipating and life-giving light—let us send it to the 120,000,000 Mohammedans who are now reading instead of it their idle and impure Koran—let us scatter it in every language under heaven—let us send it to every island and every shore, to every home and every nation on earth; and it will be found to enlighten men's souls, to bless their lives, and gladden their death-beds, found possessed of power sufficient, being accompanied by the Spirit of God, to raise those nations to the position of truth, and honour, and imperishable glory which we justly claim for Protestant Britain and America.