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GOSPEL TRIUMPHS

Conquest of World for Christ May be Near at Hand.

SOME SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

Great Revival Within and of the Church Are Pointed to It is a Self-Evident Fact That the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the Most Vital and Essential in the World To-day.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1904, by William Duff, of Toronto, at the Dept of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Los Angeles, Cal., Sept. 18.—In the nature and habits of the birds the preacher finds a simile of the entrance into the church of a large accession of converts. The text is Isaiah lx., 8, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"

An axiom is a self evident fact, "It is," the lexicographers say, "a proposition whose truth is so obvious at first sight that no process of reasoning or demonstration can make it plainer." It is a golden truism coined in the "mint house of maxims" with the raised features of the Goddess of Truth stamped upon its side, even as the English shilling bears the profile of King Edward, an American silver dollar the outstretched wings of an eagle, as the Roman penny once bore the superscription and image of Caesar and a Grecian coin the features of Alexander the Great. It is an aphorism, an apothegm. It is as Hippocrates once said, "A succinct saying comprehending a complete statement." It is truth in a nutshell. It is a universe of analyses condensed in an epigram.

Hundreds of men are simply doing the same thing in trying to find the reasons for the phenomenon stated by shallow observers, that the church of Jesus Christ is losing its power over men. Long lists of reasons for this waning influence are cited, whereas the writers have only to open their eyes to discover that the church of Jesus Christ is not losing its power over men. The church of God was never so powerful as it is to-day. More strong men and strong women are bowing before its altars than ever before. More are the church's teachings respected by statesmen and in the homes and daily lives of our citizens than ever before. I have not time to go into argument to prove this assertion. I would not to-day do so if I had the time. Why? Because it is a self evident fact that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the most vital and essential influence in the world to-day. It is a self evident statement. All intelligent people who have looked boldly and impartially at the facts are ready to concede that the assertion is true.

But though the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is growing more and more powerful day by day, yet we believe that still greater triumphs are before it in the future. The victories already won are small compared with those which are yet to be won, when nations shall be born in a day. Josiah Strong recently wrote a book entitled, "The Next Great Awakening." I am not going to find my theme in the latest book of the famous author of "Our Country." I am going to look through the inspired spectacles of a prophet who lived nearly 3,000 years ago. Isaiah took the picture of the doves flying to their home cotes in great clouds as the symbol of the church of the future gathering in its members. So I shall try to show that the "coming awakening of the church" is not only going to be a world-wide evangelistic movement, but also that the conquest of the world for Christ may be near—yes, very near—at hand.

In the first place, let me say that such a movement as this, foreseen by the prophet and prefigured under the symbol of a flight of doves, is in accord with the record of history. Again and again there have been revivals which have brought into the church vast numbers at one time. Since the day of Pentecost, when 5,000 were convected under the preaching of the Apostle Peter, there have been such great movements. How many were won to the truth by the teaching of Luther? What vast multitudes were gathered under the preaching of a Wesley, a Whitefield, a Finney and a Moody and of a Torrey and a Chapman, a Munhall and a Harrison of the present day. We know that Peter the Hermit, clad, like John the Baptist, in untanned skins, walked through Europe, lifting high in his hands the crucifix, until thousands and tens of thousands of devotees were ready, in 1096, to follow this enthusiastic ascetic to Palestine as the advance guard of the crusaders. We know that thousands upon thousands of Cromarty miners used to hang upon the words of John Wesley in the early mornings at 5 o'clock, before their day's work began. We know that no building was large enough to hold the crowds who wanted to hear Moody. Great halls had to be erected in Boston and New York and Chicago to hold the huge audiences. The Philadelphia depot on account of its great size had to be used in place of a church. Thousands upon thousands found Christ in the revivals of the seventeenth century under the preaching of the Puritans. Thousands upon thousands found Christ in the Methodist revivals of the eighteenth century. Thousands upon thousands found Christ in the first part of the nineteenth century, when Charles G. Finney had such power over sinners that a dying blasphemer said, "Don't let Charles G. Finney preach my funeral sermon, or he will preach my soul into heaven in spite of my own desires." But all these gospel triumphs of the past centuries are as nothing in numbers to the multitudes Isaiah saw crowding into the kingdom of Christ. Isaiah saw them coming, not by the hundreds or the thousands, but by the millions. "Who are these," cried he, "that fly as a cloud and as the doves to their windows?"

The selection of the figure of a flight of doves is significant. It is above other things, a suggestion of immense multitude. But few people realize the marvelous numbers and propagating powers of the doves of olden times. Biberg, the ornithologist, estimated that if a common pair of domesticated pigeons hatched nine times a year—which number of hatchings is not extraordinary for an average pair of these birds—and if these pigeons laid two eggs at one time, and all the fledgelings which were hatched should live and hatch in turn, that single pair of pigeons would produce in four years nearly fifteen thousand descendants. The fecundity of the dove is about as great as the reproductive powers of the English sparrow or the Australian rabbit. The most graphic description ever written of the innumerable multitudes of the doves was penned by Alexander Wilson, the naturalist. Statements made by this Scottish-American traveler were indorsed by John Audubon. Among the ornithological authorities there can be no better indorsement than this: "Mr. Wilson wrote that down in Kentucky, in a place which migrating doves used to visit annually, their multitudes were so great that they literally destroyed whole forest regions. In this tract about which he wrote the branches of every tree were filled with dove nests wherever a nest could be built. In many trees over one hundred nests had been constructed. Above the trees the multitudes of the pigeons' wings were so great that their flapping wings sounded like the boomings of a tornado. So great was the noise of their flapping wings that the horses of the farmers in that region often became unmanageable and could not be driven. Near Frankfort, Ky., Alexander Wilson saw a flock of migrating doves. The naturalist estimated that this single flock was two hundred and forty miles long and had an enrollment of at least 2,230,000,272 birds."

Isaiah describing the consecrated worshipers flocking to the millennial church could not have chosen a more expressive figure. "These that fly as a cloud and as doves to their windows." The readers of his time would realize by it what countless throngs of men he saw in prophetic vision hastening into the kingdom of God. The church of God is now great in membership, but, church members, do you not look forward in holy ecstasy to the time when the thousands who are worshiping Christ now shall be changed into the millions? Do you not long for the millennial day when Christ's disciples shall flock through the church's doors in innumerable multitudes "as the doves fly to their windows?"

The figure is expressive not only of numbers, but of spiritual qualities. The church of the future is not to have a padded roll. It is not to be composed of a lot of members who, as the five foolish virgins of Christ's parable, lounged around and slept and had no oil for their spiritual lamps. It is not to be composed of men and women who occupy their church pews only on Sunday and then when the benediction of the sermon is given turn and shut their pew doors and say: "Good-by, religion. I must go home now. You just stay here for a week, and next Sunday morning I will come back and see you and pat you on the back for an hour again while the choir sings and the pastor prays." But in that church which Isaiah saw in prophecy not only shall there be multitudes of worshipers, but all these multitudes shall be consecrated worshipers. These many worshipers shall be men of living faith, to whom the presence of God is an abiding reality, influencing them wherever they go and in every moment of their lives.

But though "black eyed Susans" or the "golden spore" or the "blue eyed violets" on account of their great multitudes may be called a common flower—a weed—the dove, in spite of her multitudes, has never been called a common bird. The dove always has been and always will be the symbol of purity, gentleness and love. This symbol was recognized in heathen times. Because the dove signified purity Venus had this bird as her emblem.

In the beautiful mythological legend Semiramis, the quuen, was said in her youth to have been nurtured by a dove and at death to have been changed into a dove. We find, however, in Christian nomenclature the dove is also the symbol of purity and gentleness and divine love. In the Bible the dove has the most hallowed of associations. It was as a dove that the Holy Spirit appeared at the baptism of Jesus. It was two doves that the blessed virgin presented at the temple as an oblation for her purification after the divine birth. What says the psalmist in reference to the man's redemption from sin and his cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ? "Though ye have lain among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver and the feathers with yellow gold."

This migration of the redeemed and spotless multitudes of human beings to Christ's churches shall not only come with the purity of the dove, but also with the swift velocity of the dove. It will not come with the leadened feet of a man who, having been born in a Christian home, takes ten, fifteen, twenty, perhaps thirty years to make up his mind to be a Christian. It will not come with the slow processes some churches have, whereby their sessions or vestries or boards of deacons place the applicant for church membership on probation. But these new accessions to the churches of Jesus Christ will come to the front rank of Christian service and worship as quickly as the name of a Saul was changed into a Paul. The new members whom Isaiah saw in vision fled to Christ's altar as quickly as the doves fly to their windows.

The swiftness of the dove's flight is one of the greatest inspirations to me of all of Isaiah's vision. Why the swiftness? Because I know that we can come to Christ now. Oh, my brother, it takes a swift wing for you in an instant of time to cross over all that far country of sin which separates you from God's dovecote. The distance from Arizona to New York or from St. Sebastian, Spain, to Venice, where doves have flown, are not as far. Tell me, O man, did you not start forth on your journey of sin ten, twenty, forty years ago? Why, let me recount the years. You have not seen a communion table since your mother died. You have not made one earnest prayer for ten years. If I was to-day to count over the list of your intimate friends I would find them without exception to be men and women who have not been in the past and are not now living Christian lives. Oh, my brother, my poor sin sick brother, you have a long distance to come back to God. But you can come by divine grace. You can come now. You can come as quickly as the new converts of the church which Isaiah saw in vision came to the mercy seat. You can come with a superlative swiftness. You can come with the lightning velocity of a flying dove.

But why talk about Isaiah's church of the future? Why caption this sermon with the title, "The Coming Awakening?" When Isaiah saw this migrating dove and used it as an emblem was he alluding only to a future church? I think not. I think as the Hebrew prophet was standing there on the mountain of inspiration looking off on what was to come he kept saying to himself: "Why is it not possible for this vision of God's church to be materialized now? Is not God willing to bring this beatific condition to present man if the members of the children of God will to-day co-operate with the Holy Spirit? Yes, he can, he will, was the prophet's thought. I know this is the thought to-day running through many a Christian's mind. God can and God will make the prophetic vision of Isaiah come true now if we, the church members, will only truly yield ourselves and consecrate our minds and hearts to Christ's will. O man, O woman, the greatest enemy of Jesus Christ to-day is not the infidel and scoffer outside of the church. It is the man and the woman inside the church who does not co-operate with Jesus in his purpose to save the world for Christ through the agency of his church. If we yield ourselves to his will even the smallest and the most insignificant can be-

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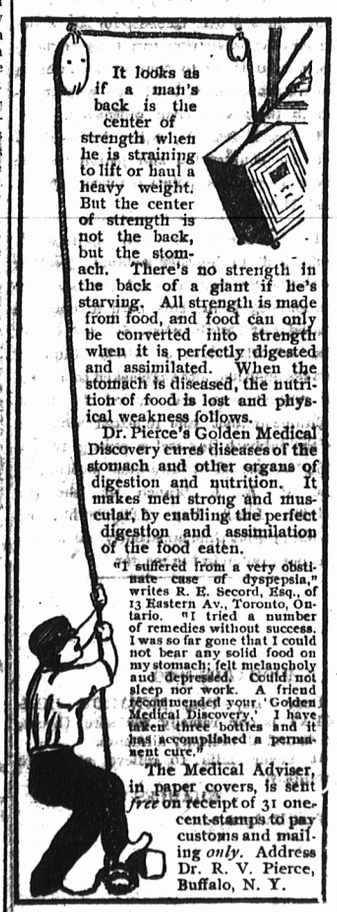

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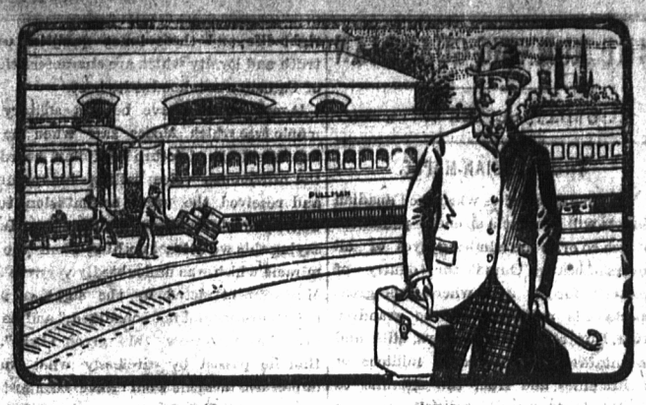

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Dated at Charlottetown this 19th day of August, A. D., 1904.

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