

“The Wonderful Century”

A SERMON

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“ONE DAY AS A THOUSAND YEARS.”—II. PETER III: 8

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“THE WONDERFUL CENTURY”

TEXT—“*One day as a thousand years.*”—II. PETER III: 8.

THE name of Alfred Russell Wallace is sufficient guaranty that the conclusions reached in his book, “The Wonderful Century,” may be taken by the lay-reader with entire confidence. All his early life was devoted to exact studies. For years his sole business was the most laborious and painstaking collection of facts and a precise, scientific deduction of inferences. The man who discovered simultaneously with Darwin the great law of natural selection as the cause of variation in species, may be safely trusted to deal fairly and adequately with whatever facts he chooses to consider. The man, who for years, has faced the searching criticism of his scientific coloborers, and the hostile attacks of unsparing foes, is not likely to come before the world with unattested statements, or with illogical inferences from recognized conditions. We have the satisfaction of dealing with a thoroughly capable and trustworthy author.

His book is divided into two parts. In the first part he considers the “Successes;” in the second part, “The Failures of the Past Century.” By this simple division the author can point out clearly the unsolved problems which remain for this new century to confront. I take it that, after all, is the vital question for this generation, not what have we done, but what lies immediately before us at the beginning of this new century and demands, peremptorily, that it must be done as speedily as possible.

The first chapter is devoted to “Modes of Travelling.” The author emphasizes the remarkable fact that one hundred years ago the world was using precisely the same methods of travel that had been in use from the

beginning of history. The beast of burden and the cart had been the means of travel for thousands of years. It is difficult for us to even imagine conditions in which the time between this city and New York was as great as between here and London at the present time.

The story of labor-saving machinery, in the second chapter, is too familiar to be repeated. The author speaks of the sewing machine, the typewriter and the harvesting machine, as distinctively new in this century. Sewing, writing and harvesting have been done in the same way from the beginning of history till these machines were invented.

The "Communication of Thought" is considered in the third chapter. Up to the year 1837, if a person was beyond the reach of your voice, the only means of communication was by sending a messenger, or a letter, and, as the letter was entirely dependent on the means of travel, Philadelphia was more hopelessly cut off, so far as letter communication, from New York or Washington than to-day it is from San Francisco. With the telegraph and telephone, an entirely new principle of thought-transference has come into use. What is involved in *instantaneous communication* through unlimited distance we have not yet begun to comprehend. A perpetual marvel to me is that we, the people, consent to go tamely on with the age-worn process of letter-carrying, when here we have the means of annihilating space and time, and making ourselves practically omnipresent. Why we suffer corporations to hold such great powers away from the people by practically prohibitive prices, while we meekly keep on with this middle-age business of trundling our letters over the country, I challenge any sane man to explain. At the end of this century some minister will stand, possibly in this pulpit, as I do now, and he will say, "In the year 1901, our fathers were so stupid and so tied up in their absurd patent laws, that they still adhered to the immemorial custom of letter-carrying, when they had in their hands the means of *instantaneous communication*. They would take from six to eight days in getting a letter to and from Denver or the coast, when their message could be sent and answered in an

hour, or, by special arrangement in ten minutes!" However, let us rejoice that the great discoveries have been made; the inventions are here and in operation, and, some fine morning, we, the stupid people, will wake up and take them over into common use.

The fourth chapter is devoted to "Fire and Light." It is difficult to believe that seventy years ago the preservation and transmission of fire was one of the great problems of the world. When you consider that only a small portion of the earth's surface is habitable without fire, and that for only the lowest order of human life, it is readily seen that fire comes next to sunlight itself in order of importance. It is not surprising that the Greeks were in doubt as to whether they should call Prometheus the giver of fire, the *creator* of man, or only his chief benefactor. Yet the world waited till sixty years ago for so insignificant a thing as our common lucifer matches to be made available for practical use in the kindling of fire. "Coming to the use of fire as a light-giver, we find that even greater change has taken place in our time. The modes of obtaining illumination for domestic purposes, viz: torches, small clay lamps for animal fats, rush lights and candles, remained entirely unchanged in principle, and very little improved throughout the whole period of history down to the end of the eighteenth century." Many in this congregation can remember the "early candle lighting," with the inevitable snuffers and trays. The general use of gas for out-of-door purposes is as late as 1813. And now electricity, entirely new in principle, has practically displaced gas. The "new applications of light" in Photography, Spectrum Analysis and the X-rays have opened a new universe to us.

The camera has disclosed myriads of worlds which the older astronomy never dreamed of. Spectrum analysis has shown that the worlds are all of the same common stuff. The X-rays have revolutionized our conceptions of matter. It is neither dead, nor dull, nor dark, but full of open doors. One of the surprises of our spiritual life will doubtless be to find that solid matter is no more of a barrier to our spirits than the atmosphere is to our bodies.

Another remarkable discovery of the past century is the nature and importance of dust. It is the source of beauty, and essential to life. The atmosphere of the earth, being filled with particles of matter of all sizes and materials, catches the rays of light and breaks them up into endless reflections. These same small particles of matter become centers of condensation for the moisture of the air, and so give us rain. As to the sciences of chemistry and geology, it may truthfully be said, they have been re-discovered during the past century.

We have only indicated the method of approach to these important subjects. Our time forbids further statement. The following is the author's summation of the discoveries of the past century.

1. Railways, which have revolutionized land-travel and the distribution of commodities.

2. Steam-navigation, which has done the same thing for ocean travel, and has besides led to the entire reconstruction of the navies of the world.

3. Electric Telegraphs, which have produced an even greater revolution in the communication of thought.

4. The Telephone, which transmits, or rather reproduces, the voice of the speaker at a distance.

5. Friction matches, which have revolutionized the modes of obtaining fire.

6. Gas-lighting, which enormously improved out-door and other illumination.

7. Electric-lighting, another advance, now superceding gas.

8. Photography, which is to the external forms of nature what printing is to thought.

9. The Phonograph, which preserves and reproduces sound as Photography preserves and reproduces forms.

10. The X-rays, which render many opaque objects transparent, and open up a new world to photography.

11. Spectrum Analysis, which so greatly extends our knowledge of the universe that, by its assistance, we are able to ascertain the relative heat and chemical constitution of the stars, and ascertain the existence and measure the rate of motion of stellar bodies which are entirely invisible.

12. The use of Anæsthetics, rendering the most severe surgical operations painless.

13. The use of Antiseptics, in surgical operations, which has still further extended the means of saving life.

The theoretical discoveries of our time are about equal in number.

1. The determination of the mechanical equivalent of heat, leading to the great principle of the conservation of energy.

2. The molecular theory of gases.

3. The mode of direct measurement of the velocity of light, and the experimental proof of the earth's rotation.

4. The discovery of the function of dust in nature.

5. The theory of definite and multiple proportions in chemistry.

6. The nature of meteors and comets, leading to the meteoritic theory of the universe.

7. The proof of the Glacial Epoch, its vast extent and its effects upon the earth's surface.

8. The proof of the great antiquity of man.

9. The establishment of the theory of organic evolution.

10. The cell theory and the recapitulation theory in embryology.

11. The germ theory of the zymotic diseases.

12. The discovery of the nature and function of the white blood-corpuscles.

Over against these twenty-five discoveries of prime importance stand the fifteen similarly important discoveries of all preceding time.

The remarkable thing in this record is that men seem to have put off the study of themselves to the last place on the list. The failures which are now presented all agree in this. They are failures to profoundly understand and intelligently care for human beings.

There is serious doubt with many able thinkers "whether the final result of the work of the century has any balance of good over evil for mankind at large. We have neglected or rejected some important lines of investigation affecting our own intellectual and spiritual nature," to say nothing of the gross neglect to apply

perfectly obvious principles to our social and economic life.

The first failure mentioned is the "neglect of *phrenology*." "Not much of a neglect, that," doubtless many of us are saying. That science was banished from the circles of learned conservatism. Its advocates were relegated to the limbo of the fanatics and cranks and innocuous lunatics. But to-day we are just creeping back on our tracks, and are beginning to use the principles of the despised and rejected science in our studies of the criminal, insane, and imbecile classes. It will probably, before this century closes, be as much in order to have your child's head examined, in order to place him intelligently in the college curriculum, as it is now in order to have a physical examination for West Point or Annapolis, or—a foot-ball team !

A second failure, was the "opposition to hypnotism and psychical research." Again you are doubtless saying, "Not much of a failure." Perhaps not, so far as this particular subject is concerned. The failure lies in a closed mind and dull heart toward all problems of a strictly human character. The past century did not regard man himself as more interesting and valuable than what he has and does. Wallace remarks, "This long period of ignorance, accompanied by the most violent opposition, was extremely discreditable to an age of such general research and freedom of inquiry in all other branches of human knowledge." To-day hypnotism is being employed in many leading hospitals for difficult surgical cases, and many of our leading physicians are using its principles. They are compelled to be very judicious and use the power quietly, and "secretly for fear of the Jews." Even poor, ignorant, blundering, much-abused, persecuted *Christian Science* has a great truth in it. This is God's world, we are his children, at home in it. It is to be presumed that he has adapted the home to his children; therefore all things here are kindly, and mean life and health; therefore, live happily, freely, without fear. Take reasonable precautions for your life, but as Jesus said, "be not anxious about it." The medicine cases are gradually being banished from

intelligent homes. Our doctors give us lectures on hygienic living, instead of pills and powders. The extraordinary powers of the mind over the body are well recognized in the highest medical circles. Where this sort of thing will end who of us will dare to prophesy?

As to the questions raised by psychical research, it has been a standing marvel to me that men are so determined to know nothing about their own souls. One of the astonishing spectacles of Christendom to-day is, to see millions of men and women with this Bible in their hands, declaring, passionately, that they believe every word in it, from Genesis to Revelation, yet calmly ignoring the fact that from beginning to end, the Bible is a psychical book; full of dreams and visions, and spiritual appearances, and signs, and prophecies, and healings, and miracles. If God our Father is a spirit, and we are spirits made in his image, and the vast majority of the race are in the spirit-world, why should it be thought a thing incredible that, some time, there may be communication between these parts of the one family in heaven and on earth? Yet so persistent are we in our ignorance and conservatism that I fear Tesla will open up communication with Mars before we will admit a whisper from those who are soul of our soul.

Another failure which is considered at great length, and with the author's characteristic thoroughness, is "persistence in the delusion respecting the efficacy of vaccination." The author's claim is, that it not only does not prevent small-pox, but that it introduces and complicates other diseases. His answer to the triumphant declaration respecting the sudden decrease in the prevalence of small-pox about the time of the discovery of vaccination is his deadly table of statistics, showing that the great decrease took place *before* vaccination was introduced, and that small-pox holds its own ratio to other zymotic diseases since the compulsory use of vaccination. The practical disappearance of all those plagues which periodically decimated Europe is synchronous with the introduction of sanitary conditions in great centres of population. When we recall that, as late as 1726, St. James' Square, though surrounded by houses of the no-

bility, was a common receptacle for refuse of all kinds, and that it required an Act of Parliament to stop its being so used; and that hogs were kept in St. George's, Hanover Square, and in 1760 many were seized as a common nuisance, we need not wonder that filth diseases abounded. Perhaps before this century closes, when that old specter crawls up out of the slums and touches a few victims on Fifth Avenue, instead of ordering all creation vaccinated, we will order a grand cleaning up of the slums.

The three closing chapters of the book, which I most earnestly commend to your careful study, are devoted to "Militarism, the Curse of Civilization," "The Demon of Greed" and "The Plunder of the Earth."

Our wonderful century that outstripped all preceding time in its discoveries and inventions, has also outstripped all preceding ages in the cost and variety and effectiveness of its means for destroying our fellow-beings. And what is still more astounding is, that the war spirit is so fierce in our Christian nations that all these destructive agencies are used without mercy upon helpless and comparatively defenseless people. You will not find in human history anything more savage and blood-thirsty than the slaughter of the Soudanese by the English, and the recent slaughter of the Chinese by the allied troops. Every shocking and revolting element which we have been accustomed to associate with the wars of the most degraded and blood-thirsty savages, is here in these modern instances of Christian warfare. In France, Austria, Italy and Russia, from five to twelve times as much is spent for military purposes as for the education of the people. Lecky writes: "Europe, in time of peace, has become a gigantic camp, supporting armies which, in their magnitude and their perfection, are unparalleled in the history of the world." Since Lecky's words, England's South African War and our own Spanish and Philippine Wars have carried the war spirit up to a national madness. And now our free, democratic America leads the world in its war bills.

The madness of the Christian nations respecting war at the close of the wonderful century is matched, if not overtopped, by the strange infatuation of those same

nations respecting their social and economic conditions. They go on loudly proclaiming themselves Christians, and civilized, when nearly a third of their population is living in degradation and misery such as the world has never known. Great cities are creatures of the past century, and the great cities of Christendom to-day outstrip all preceding time in wealth and luxury and profligacy and vice and poverty and misery. London is a typical example. The "margin of poverty is placed at five dollars a week for a family." "Less than this sum does not afford sufficient of the absolute necessities of life." 1,300,000 persons live below that margin. "About *one-third* of the population of London are living miserable, poverty-stricken lives; the bulk of them with grinding, hopeless toil, only modified by the still worse condition of want of employment, with its accompaniment of harassing anxiety and partial starvation." All the great cities of England, all the great cities of Europe, are in a similar condition. All the great cities of our own country are rapidly falling into line. Professor Huxley, who is much in evidence just now, makes this statement.

After declaring that in all great industrial centers there is a large and increasing mass of what the French call *la misere*, he says:

"It is a condition in which food, warmth, and clothing, which are necessary for the mere maintenance of the functions of the body in their normal state, cannot be obtained; in which men, women, and children are forced to crowd into dens where decency is abolished, and the most ordinary conditions of healthful existence are impossible of attainment; in which the pleasures within reach are reduced to brutality and drunkenness; in which the pains accumulate at compound interest in the shape of starvation, disease, stunted development, and moral degradation; in which the prospect of even steady and honest industry is a life of unsuccessful battling with hunger, rounded by a pauper's grave. When the organization of society, instead of mitigating this tendency, tends to continue and intensify it; when a given social order plainly make for evil and not for good, men natur-

ally enough begin to think it high time to begin a fresh experiment."

Back of such conditions is what this great scientist calls the "*demon of greed*." We have given it the softer name of "commercialism." The thing is the same. These toiling, suffering, starving millions are exploited for money.

We have simply glanced at the great themes presented in this book. May I now briefly call your attention to two or three obvious inferences? I offer these suggestions most gladly to this particular congregation. Here is a group of liberal people, accustomed to think and act outside of conventional and conservative lines. You are accustomed to championing unpopular truths. My good friends, believe me, your mission is not ended. The "*nunc dimittis*" is not in order. Your theological battle is practically fought out. The multitudes are beginning to face this way. But these great problems of humanity are upon us with crushing weight, and imperative, as we step into the new century. Free, strong, self-forgetful men and women were never so much in demand as this day. This record shows very clearly that every great forward movement in thought and discovery has been stoutly resisted by conservatism and vested interests. God forbid that one of us should hang on the wheels of progress! The doom of the free people is upon us. Accept it gladly, loyally! We must always be ahead yonder, with the minority, the fanatics, the despised and rejected of men, who have always dragged the great blind, blundering, stupid, perverse world onward against its will into broader life and better conditions. We must keep open-doors of mind and heart, lest some son of God and son of man be walking our streets, speaking his heavenly words and doing his heavenly deeds, and we either never hear of him, because so engrossed in our selfish pursuits, or ask, contemptuously, "Have any of the rulers believed on him?" Or, possibly, join in the mad cry of the populace, "Away with him; crucify him, crucify him!"

The great problems left over for this century to solve, are war, intemperance, a new and just principle of dis-

tribution of wealth, the administration of government for the benefit of the people. These problems are not touched—will not be touched—by the government or by the church. Wallace constantly refers to the fact that the governments of the world are not to-day administered for the good of the people. Statesmen do not touch these great problems. The statesmen are doing precisely what the theologians have done for ages—busying themselves on abstract theories or in schemes of special legislation, while the real interests of the people are untouched. Huxley seconds the statement of Wallace, and recently Senator Edmunds has said, “The chief danger to the nation lies in ignorance, greed, centralization of wealth and of social and political power, and the consequent inequality of position and opportunity, without which liberty and justice cannot exist.”

President Hadley of Yale, joins in the same strain: “The threat to public welfare is legislation based on the self-interest of individuals, or classes, instead of on public sentiment and public spirit.” But we need not be told these things by great men. Open your eyes and see. Parliaments, courts, legislatures, congresses the world over are busy with wars, tariffs, legal debates, commercial schemes, land-grabbing and what not, voting away inconceivable sums of the peoples’ money, while nearly a third of the people are living in direst toil and poverty; intemperance, insanity, suicide and crime steadily increasing. It is not *statesmanship* to touch these great human problems. That one terrible word is hung like a sword above the head of every ruler and statesman,—*paternalism*! One would suppose that a government, or statesman, had better commit hari-kari at once than do a *paternal* thing. Paternalism! Is there any higher, holier name? Is not the Heavenly Father’s government paternal? “Not a sparrow falls to the ground without his notice.” That precisely is the curse of all our governments. They are *not* paternal, fatherly. They do not *father* the people. Christian men and women, that is just our problem for this new century, to teach our governments that they must be paternal. That is what they are instituted for, to see that the weaker

classes are cared for against the stronger. To see that justice, not charity, is meted out evenly. You and I, my brethren and sisters, need not expect much help from statesmen and governments. Statesmen and governments are themselves the very things which must be reformed.

Again, we need not look to the church to solve these great human problems. It is not engaged in them to-day; past history shows that it has never engaged in them. The churches do not even protest against war and the war spirit. Francis Walker said that in five years, and from fifty different pulpits, he had not heard a single discourse devoted to the primitive Christian idea of peace, or which contained a perceptible strain of argument or appeal for international good-will. Ministers and religious papers exalt war as "a great agent of human progress." The chaplain in Congress prays that we may "be quick to resent anything like an insult," and closes his blasphemous prayer with the usual formula, "through Christ Jesus our Lord."

The churches are not touching the great problem of intemperance, with its annual waste of twelve hundred millions of dollars and eighty thousand lives. The churches are not touching the awful problem of poverty. Our cities are crowded with magnificent churches which live complacently on, decade after decade, with the most unspeakable slums the world has ever seen under their very eaves. Perhaps, like Trinity Church, in New York, they have stock in those slums, and are working them for all they are worth. All these great human problems are called by the church "outside questions." Ministers are strongly advised to leave them alone, and just "preach the gospel"—"the good old gospel in the good old way."

The church in the past century adhered firmly to the idea of charity as a cure for poverty. Our problem in this new century is to teach the church the more excellent way of *justice*. If, in our neighbor's household, where there is "enough and to spare," we find one child living in rags and misery, eating the crusts and refuse of the kitchen; another just barely comfortable, by dint of hard work and drastic economy keeping himself clothed and fed; another having every comfort and

many luxuries, while the fourth, at the top, is rioting in "more than he knows what to do with," we would not undertake to solve that problem by charity. It will not help matters to give the child at the bottom a Christmas dinner, or a new pair of shoes now and then, or a bowl of "good, nourishing soup" on particularly "raw and gusty days." No. We step into that household, and demand that that system of inequality and injustice shall come to a perpetual end. Here is enough and to spare. What is needed is not charity, but a new and righteous system of distribution. This precisely is the problem confronting the church at the beginning of this new century. In this larger family, the nation, is "enough and to spare." We are the richest nation on the globe. Poverty should be, among us, one of the traditions of past ages. Yet, with nearly a quarter of our people at the "poverty line," the church goes feebly on with its old system of charity. Charity, as a palliative for "the present distress," must be tolerated; charity proposed as a cure is a travesty and blasphemy. But, friends, we need not expect that the church will easily abandon its old method. As long as it can roll a few antiquated proof-texts as "a sweet morsel under its tongue," as long as it is the fad for my lady bountiful to ride around in her carriage and do good, so long this suffering child at the bottom will get his Christmas dinner, his annual shoes, and bowl of soup.

We need not look to the press or to literature to take up these human problems. They are not profitable; they are not popular. Besides, the press of the country is mortgaged by the great political parties, and great business syndicates. No, no. The call at the beginning of this new century, with these transcendent problems left over to us from the last century, is for simple, original pioneer work of reformation and progress. We must be willing to join ourselves to unpopular minorities. We must take serenely all the bad old names,—fanatic, crank, disturbers of the peace, and all the rest. We must insist, and insist, that men everywhere shall say "my brother" as truly and reverently toward men as

they say "my Father" toward God. And let me say again that this body of men and women right here, who have run up their great ensign, "*The Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of men,*" are challenged as no one else by these mighty human problems of the twentieth century.