

Mending the Bible by T DeWitt Talmage

" . . . "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city . . ." Rev. 22:19

You see it is a very risky business, this changing of the Holy Scriptures. A pulpit in New York has recently set forth the idea that the Scriptures ought to be expurgated (strained, distilled, purified), that portions of them are unfit to be read, and the inspiration of much of the Bible has been denied. Among other striking statements are these: 1. The book of Genesis is a tradition of creation, a successive layer of traditions thought out centuries before. 2. Moses' mistakes about creation were the mistakes of his age. 3. That there are many systems of theology in the New Testament. 4. That Paul had all the notions of the rabbinical schools of his time. 5. That Job winds up his epilogue in genuine fairy-tale style. 6. That Revelation is a long array of misshapen progeny in the apocalyptic writings, tracing themselves back to Daniel. 7. That Revelation comes To a madman, or leaves him mad. 8. That what he calls the abominable lewdness of some things in the Old Testament is not fit to be read.

9. That it is an abominable misuse of the Bible to suppose the prophecies really foretell future events. 10. That the book of Daniel is not in the right place. 11. That Solomon's Songs are not in the right place, and he seems to applaud the idea of someone who said that the book of Solomon's Songs ought not to be in anyone's hands under thirty years of age. 14. He intimates that he does not believe that Samson slew a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass. 15. That the whole Bible has been improperly chopped up into chapters and verses. He does not believe the beginning of the Bible, and he does not believe the close of it, nor anything between as fully inspired of God, and he thinks the Book ought to be expurgated, and there are those who re-echo the same sentiment.

THE HYPOCRISY OF MINISTERS ATTACKING THE BIBLE!

Now, I believe in the largest liberty of discussion, and there are halls and opera houses and academies of music where the Bible and Christianity may be assaulted without interruption; but when a minister of the Gospel surrenders the faith of any denomination, his first plain, honest duty is to get out of it. What would you think of the clerk in a dry-goods store or a factory or a baking-house, who should go to criticizing the books of the firm and denouncing the behavior of the firm, still taking the salary of that firm and the support of that firm, and doing all his denunciation of the books of the firm under its cover? Certainly, a minister of the Gospel ought to be as honest with his denomination as a dry-goods clerk is honest with his employers. The heinousness of finding fault with the Bible at this time by a Christian minister is most evident. In our day the Bible is assailed by scurrility, by misrepresentation,

by infidel scientist, by all the vice of earth and all the venom of perdition, and at this particular time ministers of religion fall into line of criticism of the Word of God. Why, it makes me think of a ship in a September equinox, the waves dashing to the top of the smokestack, and the hatches fastened down and many prophesying the foundering of the steamer, and at that time some of the crew with axes and saws go down into the hold of the ship and try to saw off some of the planks and pry out some of the timbers because the timber did not come from the right forest! It does not seem commendable business for the crew to be helping the winds and storms outside with their axes and saws inside. Now this old Gospel ship, (what with the roaring of earth and Hell around the stem and stern, and mutiny on deck,) is having a very rough voyage, but I have noticed that not one of the timbers has started, and the Captain says He will see it through. And I have noticed that keelson and counter-timber knee are built out of Lebanon cedar, and she is going to weather the gale, but no credit to those who make mutiny on deck. When I see ministers of religion in this particular day finding fault with the Scriptures, it makes me think of a fortress terrifically bombarded, and the men on the ramparts, instead of swabbing out and loading the guns and helping fetch up the ammunition from the magazine, are trying with crowbars to pry out from the wall certain blocks of stone, because they did not come from the right quarry. Oh, men of the ramparts, better fight back and fight down the common enemy, instead of trying to make breaches in the wall.

THE GOD OF THE BIBLE COULD DO ANYTHING: A GOD OF MIRACLES

While I oppose this expurgation of the Scriptures, I shall give you my reasons for such opposition. "What!" say some of the theological evolutionists, whose brains have been addled by too long brooding over them by Darwin and Spencer, "you don't now really believe all the story of the Garden of Eden, do you?" Yes, as much as I believe all the roses that were in my garden last summer. "But," say they, "you don't really believe that the sun and moon stood still?" Yes, and if I had strength enough to create a sun and moon, I could make them stand still, or cause the refraction of the sun's rays so it would appear to stand still. "But," they say, "you don't really believe that the whale swallowed Jonah?" Yes, and if I were strong enough to make a whale, I could have made very easy ingress for the refractory tenant. "But," say they, "you don't really believe that the water was turned into wine?" Yes, just as easily as water now is often turned into wine with a mixture of strychnine and logwood! "But," say they, "you don't really believe that Samson slew a thousand with the jawbone of an ass?" Yes, as I think that the man who in this day assults the Bible is wielding the same weapon! There is nothing in the Bible that staggers me. There are many things I do not understand, I do not pretend to understand, never shall in this world understand. But that would be a very poor God who could be fully understood by the human. That would be a very small Infinite that can be measured by the finite. You must not expect to weigh the thunderbolts of Omnipotence in an apothecary's balances. Starting with the idea that God can do anything., and

that He was present at the beginning, and that He is present now, there is nothing in the Holy Scriptures to arouse skepticism in my heart. Here I stand, a fossil of the ages, dug up from the tertiary formation, fallen off the shelf of an antiquarian, a man in the latter part of the glorious nineteenth century, believing in a whole Bible from lid to lid.

THE BIBLE MIRACULOUSLY PRESERVED

I am opposed to the expurgation of the Scriptures in the first place because the Bible in its present shape has been so miraculously preserved. Fifteen hundred years after Herodotus wrote his history, there was only one manuscript copy of it. Twelve hundred years after Plato wrote his book, there was only one manuscript copy of it. God was so careful to have us have the Bible in just the right shape, that we have fifty manuscript copies of the New Testament a thousand years old, and many of them fifteen hundred years old. This Book, handed down from the time of Christ, or just after the time of Christ, by the hand of such men as Origen in the second century, and Tertullian in the third century - men of different ages who died for their principles. The three best copies of the New Testament in manuscript in the possession of three great churches - the Protestant Church of England, the Greek Church of St. Petersburg, and the Romish Church of Italy. It is a plain matter of history that Tischendorf went to a convent in the peninsula of Sinai, and was by ropes lifted over the wall into the convent, that being the only mode of admission and that he saw there in the wastebasket for kindling for the fires a manuscript of the holy Scriptures. That night he copied many of the passages of that Bible, but it was not until fifteen years had passed of earnest entreaty and prayer and coaxing and purchase on his part that that copy of the Holy Scriptures was put into the hands of the Emperor of Russia - that one copy so marvelously protected. Do you not know that the catalog of the books of the Old and New Testaments, as we have it, is the same catalog that has been coming on down through the ages?

Thirty-nine books of the Old Testament thousands of years ago. Thirty-nine now. Twenty-seven books of the New Testament, sixteen hundred years ago. Twenty-seven now. Marcion, for wickedness, was turned out of the Church in the second century, and in his assault on the Bible and Christianity, he incidentally gives a catalog of the Books of the Bible - that catalog corresponds exactly with ours - testimony given by the enemy of the Bible and the enemy of Christianity. The catalog now, just like the catalog then. Assaulted and spit on and torn to pieces and burned, yet adhering. The Book today, in three hundred languages, confronting four-fifths of the human race in their own tongue,. Three hundred million copies of it in existence. Does not that look as if this Book had been divinely protected, as if God had guarded it all through the centuries? Not only have all the attempts to detract from the Book failed, but all the attempts to add to it. Many attempts were made to add the apocryphal books to the Old Testament. The Council of Trent, the Synod of Jerusalem, the bishops of Hippo all decided that the apocryphal books must be added to the Old Testament. "They

must stay in," said those learned men, but they stayed out. There is not an intelligent Christian man that today will put the book of Maccabees or the book of Judith beside the book of Isaiah or Romans. Then a great many said, "We must have books added to the New Testament," and there were epistles and gospels and apocalypses written and added to the New Testament, but they have all fallen out. You cannot add anything. You cannot subtract anything. Divinely protected book in the present shape. Let no man dare to lay his hands on it with the intention of detracting from the Book or casting out any of these holy pages.

ALL THE BEST CHRISTIANS WANT THE BIBLE SACREDLY KEPT: INFIDELS WANT IT CHANGED

I am also opposed to this proposed expurgation of the Scriptures for the fact that in proportion as people become self-sacrificing and good and holy and consecrated, they like the Book as it is. I have yet to find a man or a woman distinguished for self-sacrifice, for consecration to God, for holiness of life, who wants the Bible changed. Many of us have inherited family Bibles. Those Bibles were in use twenty, forty, fifty, perhaps a hundred years in the generations. This afternoon when you go home, take down those family Bibles and find out if there are any chapters which have been erased by lead pencil or pen, and if in any margin you can find the words, "This chapter not fit to read." There has been plenty of opportunity during the last half century privately to expurgate the Bible. Do you know any case of such expurgation? Did not your grandfather give it to your father, and did not your father give it to you? Expurgate the Bible! You might as well go to the old picture galleries in Dresden and in Venice and in Rome and expurgate the old paintings. Perhaps you could find a foot of Michel Angelo's "Last Judgement" that might be improved. Perhaps you could throw more expression into Raphael's "Madonna." Perhaps you could put more pathos into Rubens' "Descent from the Cross." Perhaps you could change the crests of the waves in Turner's "Slave Ship." Perhaps you might go into the old galleries of sculptures and change the forms and postures of the statues of Phidias and Praxiteles. Such an iconclast would very soon find himself in the penitentiary. But it is worse vandalism when a man purposes to refashion these masterpieces of inspiration and to remodel the moral giants of this gallery of God.

Now let us divide off. Let those people who do not believe the Bible and who are critical of this and that part of it, go clear over to the other side. Let them stand behind the Devil's guns. There can be no compromise between infidelity and Christianity. Give us the out-and-out opposition of infidelity rather than the work of these hybrid theologians, these mongrel ecclesiastics, these half-and-half evolved pulpiteers who believe the Bible and don't believe it, who accept the miracles and do not accept them, who believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures and do not believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures - trimming their belief on one side to suit the skepticism of the world, trimming their belief on the other side to suit the pride of their own heart and feeling

that in order to demonstrate their courage they must make the Bible a target, and shoot at God.

There is one thing that encourages me very much and that is that the Lord made out to manage the universe before they were born, and will probably be able to make out to manage the universe a little while after they are dead. While I demand that the antagonists of the Bible and the critics of the Bible go clear over where they belong, on the Devil's side, I ask all the friends of this good Book to come out openly and aboveboard in behalf of it. That Book, which was the best inheritance you ever received from your ancestry, and which will be the best legacy you will leave to your children when you bid them goodby as you cross the ferry to the Golden City.