

# Robert Collier in 1906.

### A CHAT WITH THE OLD BLACKSMITH PREACHER ABOUT HIMSELF, THE NATION AND PUBLIC QUESTIONS.

(Special Correspondence of the Deseret News by Frank G. Carpenter.)

ITHACA, N. Y.—In Cornell University is a horseshoe for which the faculty paid \$1,000. It was made by a blacksmith who preached here last Sunday. One of the bells used at the Sunday school for Mechanical Engineers was a present from that blacksmith, and it was the same bell that called him to work when, as a boy of eight he entered the ranks of labor in an English linen factory. The blacksmith I refer to is the Rev. Dr. Robert Collier, who for the past 50 years has been one of the leading lights of our American churches, and who now, at 83, has a voice as clear, an eye as bright, and a mind as active as any man who pounds the pulpit. His sermon this week is full of vigor. He held his audience from the opening reading until the benediction and showed himself thoroughly abreast of and in sympathy with the world of today. When he had concluded I met him in the college chapel and then made an appointment for an interview. I called upon him in his rooms at Sage college this afternoon, and for an hour, in response to my questions, he talked freely of his life and work.

#### DOCTOR COLLIER ON CHILD LABOR.

During the conversation I referred to the bell above mentioned, and asked the doctor to tell me something of his work as a child. He replied: "I began the hard labor of my life at about the time the average American boy starts to school. My father was a blacksmith, and the wages of that time were such that he could earn only about \$4.00 a week. We had a large family, and the children were put to work in a linen factory near by as soon as they were able. I went in at the age of eight. Our hours were from 6 o'clock in the morning until 8 at night, with an hour off at noon for dinner. At 5 o'clock the great bell of the factory was rung and all the children for miles around were aroused from our beds to prepare for the day. That bell seemed to ring every morning before I had been asleep ten minutes and its sound was an infernal one to my ears. I can hear it still as it rang then. It remained in the factory until a number of years ago, when the buildings were torn down. I happened to be in England at the time and the owner gave me the bell and I shipped it here to Cornell. It will never call another child to work."

"How did those long hours affect your health?" "I don't know as to that, but it seems to me now that I could never get enough sleep in those days and the life seems very hard. We worked 76 hours a week, and when a few years later the factory act was passed reducing the hours of child labor from 13 to 11, we considered it a great thing."

"How long do you think a man ought to work?" "I think eight hours is long enough for any one engaged in physical labor, and as the world grows richer I believe the hours will be cut down to six. As to children, they have no business in factories, and they should be kept from that labor until they have finished their schooling."

#### DOCTOR COLLIER, THE BLACKSMITH.

"When did you begin your work as a blacksmith, doctor?" I asked. "I was kept in the linen factory until I was fourteen and was then taken out to learn a trade. I was apprenticed to a blacksmith at Hixley, and remained with him until I was twenty-one. That completed my apprenticeship, but I

continued to work at the trade much longer. My first work in this country was as a blacksmith. I came to America when I was twenty-seven, taking passage from Liverpool to New York on a sailing ship. From New York I went to Philadelphia in search of work. I saw an advertisement in the Ledger of that city, 'Wanted—A blacksmith to make claw-hammers.' I applied and got the job. I knew nothing about making claw-hammers then, but I soon got the hang of it and kept on at that work for about nine years. I was still there when I was thirty-six."

"Were you a good blacksmith?" "I think I did fairly well," replied Dr. Collier. "During a recent visit to the old country I looked at some gates in a churchyard which I had made about fifty years ago. They were not very beautiful, and as I examined them I felt like buying a new pair and substituting them for the old ones. As I looked closer, however, I found that they were just as sound and strong as when they were made, notwithstanding they had swung back and forth for more than fifty years. The lock which had been put on by another person had broken, but of the gates themselves not a rivet was sprung."

#### HIS THOUSAND-DOLLAR HORSESHOE.

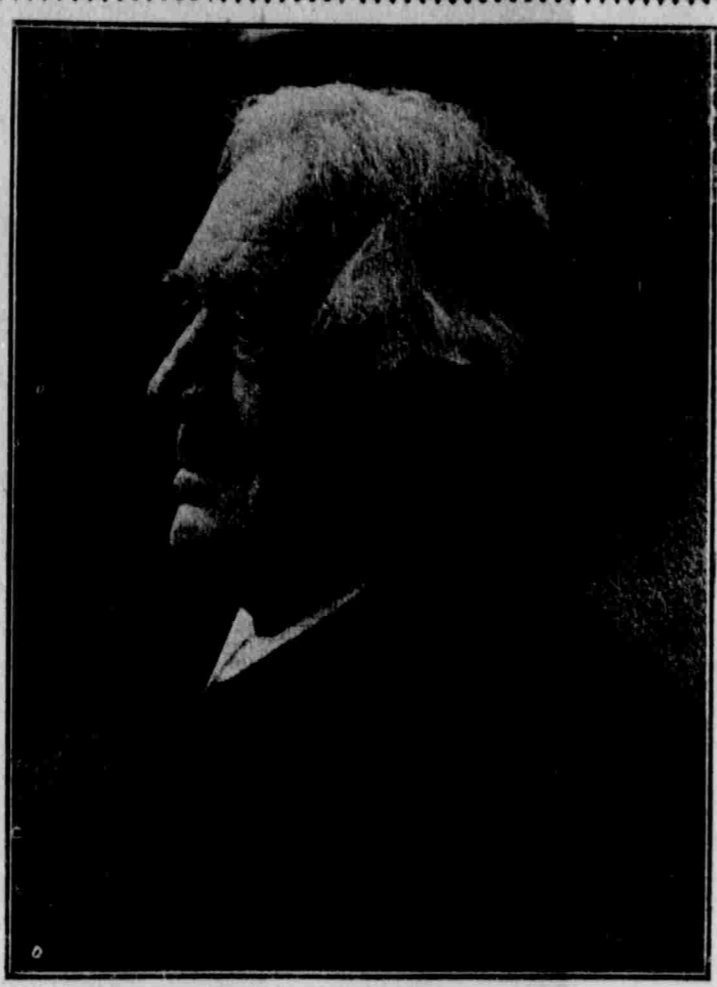
"Could you make a horseshoe today, doctor?" I asked. "Yes. You may have seen one here in Cornell which I made at the time of the Chicago fire. I was a pastor there when the city burned, reducing my church to ashes. I made a speech on the ruins, urging that the city be at once rebuilt, and proclaiming my faith in the future. The sermon was widely quoted, and I received a letter from Cornell college, stating that it knew I was a blacksmith, and that it wanted a horseshoe of my own making. I thereupon went to shop nearby, and got them to lend me a hammer and the use of the forge. In a short time I had made my horseshoe. It was sent on here and the college paid me \$1,000 for it, and that money went into my new church."

#### SAN FRANCISCO VS. CHICAGO.

The conversation here turned to the great fire at San Francisco, and I referred to a statement recently made in a sermon that the city was burned on account of its wickedness. Dr. Collier replied: "The same charges were made when Chicago was burned, but I don't believe that God works that way. The judgments of heaven are not retrospective, but always prospective. God disciplines without destroying, and builds up without pulling down. There was no reason why Chicago should be made an example for the rest of the world, and there was no reason why San Francisco should have been such. San Francisco will rise, as Chicago rose. It has all the geographical advantages which made it a great city in the past. It will always be the great city of the Pacific slope, the Anglo-Saxon metropolis of the orient."

#### THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY.

"Then you look for a great growth out west, doctor?" said I. "Yes. I look for growth everywhere. We are at the beginning of our youth. As a nation we are hardly out of our thousand years before we reach the prime of manhood and begin to go down on the other side. The children of our people have a great destiny. They are the people of the future who are to aid most in doing God's will in the world." "But, doctor, many say that we are going to the dogs. They claim that we are politically and socially corrupt; that we have gotten beyond redemption



DR. ROBERT COLLIER IN 1906

and a good way down on the other side?"

"I don't believe it. We have scandals, it is true, and there are tales and evidences of corruption unnumbered. That is no reason why we should despair or grow pessimistic. Those scandals are only the outward evidences that we are still in the rashness of our youth, and not that we have lost sight of our ideals. The country is all right and the people are all right. We are now having a mud bath, which smells to heaven, but from which the end we shall emerge with our social, political, financial and industrial bodies healed of their present sores and made pure and clean. I am not afraid of the American people."

#### A WORD ABOUT IMMIGRATION.

"Yes, doctor, but how about the foreigners who are coming in such hordes from Europe?" "There is no reason to be alarmed about that. They will be swallowed up in the great sea of Americanism and in time will make good citizens. Those immigration streams may be compared to those which flow down the hills into the ocean. Some of the streams are loaded with filth, some tainted with corruption, but all are swallowed up and the ocean itself is pure. I know that many of our immigrants come from the lower classes of humanity. Some are ignorant and some vicious, but our great national body will absorb them and still maintain its purity and individuality. There is nothing like the recreative influences of America. The immigrant begins to change the moment he resolves to

come to us. When half way across the Atlantic he throws his apron and the word master into the sea and remains free thereafter."

"The conversation here turned to the theory of Dr. Osler that man should be chloroformed at about sixty, as his efficient working life is then over, and I asked Dr. Collier as to the years during which he was at his best. He replied: "I think I did well until after I was 70. I was in continuous work until that time, and I have been preaching more or less ever since. My best years were from the time I entered the Unitarian church until a year or so after the Chicago fire. The strain of that was such that it affected my constitution, and since then I have had to work more slowly and carefully. Still, my work has been steady, and I believe that during the greater part of my life it has been as good work as I could do. If a man can sleep eight hours and eat three full meals every day, there is no reason why he should not continue his work until three score and ten, provided he uses common sense and moderation."

"I heard you preach yesterday, doctor," said I, "and it seemed to me that your voice was as clear and your articulation as distinct as when I first heard you in All Souls' church over 23 years ago. The sermon was equally good and your reading of the Bible was in itself a sermon."

"I am glad you thought that," replied Dr. Collier, "and am glad you told me so. I want to know how I am doing and to avoid the mistake of holding on after I should stop. I now preach only

occasionally and am always looking for signs of decay."

#### WANTS TO REST IN WOODLAWN.

"Still, my health is good," continued the octogenarian preacher, "and I am hoping to go to England, as I want to see the old country once more. There is only one thing that holds me back; I fear I may die there. I don't want to do that. This is my home, my country; and it is here I want to be buried. My real working life has been in the United States and for it. Here my children were born and here my wife died. When I pass away I want to be placed beside her in the beautiful cemetery at Woodlawn."

#### FROM THE ANVIL TO THE PULPIT.

During our conversation Dr. Collier told me how he became a preacher. His father was a Methodist, and he was brought up under the shadow of John Wesley. He was 25 years old when he was converted, and it was shortly after that that he began to speak in meetings. The Methodists thought well of him and licensed him as a local preacher. This was about two years before he came to America. He continued his preaching while working at his trade here, and in time began to act as a supply in the Unitarian church. It was about then he discovered that he did not believe in many Methodist doctrines. He would not preach total depravity nor eternal damnation, and he was also shaky in regard to the trinity. The Methodists learned this, and at one of their quarterly conferences took him to task for his loose doctrinal statements. They asked him if he did not think he was out of place in the Methodist church, and when he said he thought he was they refused to renew his license, and he ceased to be a Methodist preacher.

It was shortly after this that Dr. Collier became a Unitarian. There was need for a preacher of that church in Chicago who could act not only as a temporary supply, but also labor among the poor and teach a night school. The name of this young blacksmith was suggested, and the result was that he went to Chicago.

Dr. Collier says that his blacksmith employer was disgusted at his leaving, and that he told him he would keep his anvil ready for him for one year, for he knew that he would come back. Upon this young Collier replied that he never would, and he never did.

Dr. Collier succeeded at once in Chicago. He began preaching there in 1829, and soon became one of the famous pastors of the city. He remained there 20 years, and then went to New York, where he now lives. While he was preaching in Chicago one of his parishioners took a European tour, during which he visited the blacksmith shop where his pastor was apprenticed. He was shown the very anvil upon which he worked, and was so delighted therewith that he bought it and shipped it to Chicago, where it was placed in the lecture room of the church.

#### HOW ROBERT COLLIER WAS EDUCATED.

As we chatted I asked Dr. Collier to tell me how he got his education. He is one of the best-read men of the time—his English is the purest of Anglo-Saxon; his talk is as clean and clear cut as a copper plate engraving, and his prayers are poetry in prose. He is, I should say, one of the well-educated public men of the day, and that notwithstanding his life was begun in a linen factory and his boyhood and young manhood spent at the anvil. Said Dr. Collier:

"I went to school until I was 3 years old and I had the advantage of two winters' instruction at a night school when I was 14 and 15. I was

born, however, with a bent for studying. My father was an intelligent man. He was a reader and a book lover. He had but few books, but he borrowed others. We owned a Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress,' a Bible and two or three similar volumes. Father borrowed Shakespeare and Burns and other books from time to time. I devoured whatever I could get hold of."

#### DOCTOR COLLIER'S FIRST BOOK.

"Do you remember the first book you ever owned?" "Indeed I do," said the doctor, as his blue eyes lit up. "It was bought with the first money I ever had. I can remember it perfectly. The coin was a penny of the old King George kind. It seemed as big as a cart wheel as I looked at it, and I smacked my lips as I thought of the candy it would buy. I took it with me and

went to a little shop near my home where confectionery and some notions were sold. In the window was a great jar full of candy beside it a book labeled 'The Adventures of Dick Whittington,' price, one penny. I don't know how it was, but I resolutely shut my eyes on that candy and bought the book. And what a book I found it. I can see it now, and no one shall ever persuade me that the story told in it was not true. Dick Whittington and his cat. The boy who came into London with only a cat and rose to be the lord mayor. I have since hunted out the stone on which Dick sat on his way to London. I believe in it all—little Dick, the cat, the rats and the splendor of the lord mayorship. I have now 4,000 volumes in my library, but none of them is as interesting and as true as 'The Adventures of Dick Whittington; price, one penny.'"

FRANK G. CARPENTER.



#### YOUNG MEN TO ENLIVEN CABINET.

Young blood will have a fairly good representation in President Roosevelt's official family when the two newest members, James R. Garfield and Herbert Knox Smith, enter the cabinet upon the retirement of Seely of the Interior Hitchcock and the promotion of Commissioner of Corporations Garfield, who will succeed Mr. Hitchcock. Both Mr. Smith, who is now Mr. Garfield's assistant, and his superior are not only official but also personal friends of the president, both being frequent figures with Mr. Roosevelt on the White House tennis court.

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