

1897

# A plea for perspective

---

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/47750>

*Downloaded from DSpace Repository, DSpace Institution's institutional repository*

A P L E A F O R P E R S P E C T I V E .

-----oOo-----

By F. J. McConnell.

Edgar Allen Poe has described a peculiar puzzle. A map is given a child with instruction to find upon it a certain word. The desired word is printed in the largest possible type across the very face of the page; but almost every person to whom the puzzle is given seeks for the solution among the hundreds of closely printed little words that crowd the paper.

There is much in modern treatment of the Bible which is illustrated by the puzzle in the hand of the child. The word printed across the very face of the page is sought in the microscopic detail. The trifle is hunted as if it were precious with meaning while the truly significant is often among the things not seen. There is need of perspective in the study of revelation.

A sense of perspective might lessen the talk about conflict of science and revelation on the one hand and reconciliation of science and religion upon the other. For with even a meagre sense of perspective both conflict and reconciliation are matters of little importance. From the very nature of the case science that understands itself deals with the seen and temporal rather than with the unseen and eternal. The test tube gets no farther than an order of happening and the finest lens gives not a glimpse of Him who makes things happen. If Revelation shows the God that worketh hitherto, we may well permit the laboratory to search for the methods of that Worker. Suppose Genesis and Geology do not agree; suppose the creation of the world took millions of weeks instead of one; suppose the first man appeared at the summit of a series that reached back and down to the polyp,-- if this be true we are thankful to be enlightened. But why the defender of the faith should look upon these items of information as so transcendently portentous is a mystery. The essential truths of revelation -- God, Christ and Life -- how are these to be learned by facts or guesses about the building of the earth?

A sense of perspective might lead to a more intelligent attitude toward Biblical criticism. The word critic is unfortunate. It suggests the fault finder. But there are critics and critics, and classifying a man as a critic does not make him a Bible-hater. Eyesight enough to see a difference in critics would be immensely helpful. And again, perspective enough to see the secondary importance of the merely critical might be helpful both to critics so-called and defenders so-called. The essential question is not: Who wrote the Pentateuch? but, What does the Pentateuch say? Was Jonah literally swallowed by a literal fish or not? This question is actually the subject of a current debate. But those wrangling thus, completely miss the point of the book of Jonah. Whether the story be drama, or legend or fact its point remains to us

that God was anxious not only for the salvation of Jerusalem of the Jews but for Ninevah of the Gentiles.

But how does all this fit in with inspiration? This suggests the needs of perspective in the discussion of inspiration. Through lack of perspective many a Bible lover sits in sackcloth and ashes at the loss of even a jot or tittle of the literal details of the Book. Through lack of perspective many a dogmatist raves with a mighty vehemence that the surrender of a part is the surrender of the whole. There come emphatic proofs that Genesis and Geology do or do not agree and underlying statistics about the size of the whale's throat. But the man of perspective is moved by none of these things. For him such capital facts as the superiority of the Christian scriptures over any other scriptures, the transcendent personality of Jesus Christ, the dynamic effectiveness of Christianity are all-in-all. These facts are for him more of a basis for belief in the essential trustworthiness of Revelation than are any number of ingeniously devised "correspondences", or cunningly devised formulas of inspiration.

A lack of perspective in the teaching of Revealed Truth may result in the lack of perspective in the practical activity of the church. If the pulpit over-emphasizes the letter the pew will under-emphasize the spirit. Anything from the pulpit that gives the high place to the little will be matched by something from the pew that gives the low place to the big. If the whole burden of the preacher's theme is that there were or were not two Isaiahs, the whole burden of the layman's activity may be away from the personal and civic righteousness taught by the book called Isaiah. If a minister's preaching implies that the Mosaic authorship is the essential thing, the layman may forget the Ten Commandments.

Whence is perspective to come? From a better acquaintance with Jesus Christ: Jesus saw things in their true proportions. He knew what to emphasize. The perfect balance of his life is as much of a miracle as the Resurrection. As men strive to build that life into multitudinous incarnations, let us hope that the keenness of the Nazarene's sense of perspective may not be overlooked. It should at least be remembered that His hardest word was for those who tithe mint and anise and cummin and omit the weightier matters of the law-- judgment and mercy and faith.