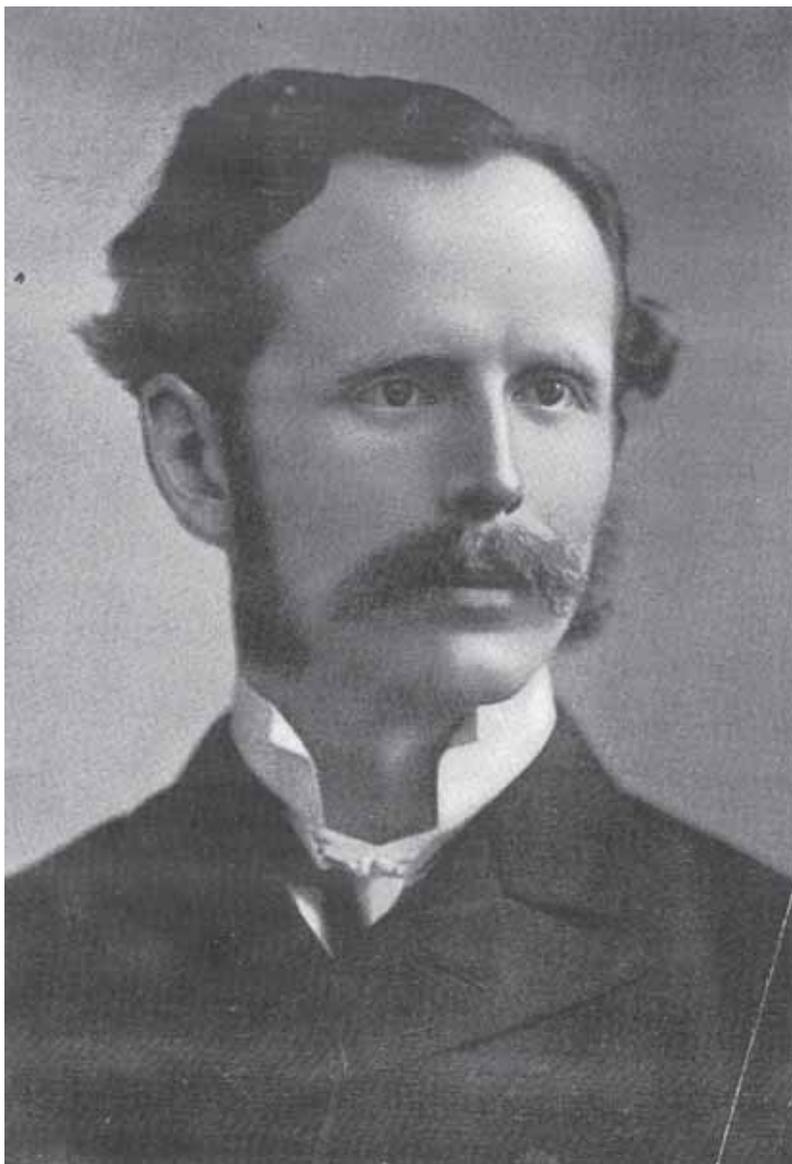


Another Scot, **Professor Henry Drummond**,⁶⁸ was a phenomenon. WRN described him: “No one we have ever listened to impressed us quite in the same way. His words were the effortless utterance of a man with a message ... perhaps his main characteristic both as speaker and writer was his brilliant and untiring freshness. You might agree with him, or you might not, but you could not choose but hear and remember”.⁶⁹ WRN was not a close friend to Drummond, but he was important and WRN used him to good effect in initiating his own editorial reign with both the *Expositor* and the *British Weekly*.⁷⁰ In 1882, Hodder & Stoughton had published *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, and within five years of publication it had sold a sensational 70,000 copies. Drummond was at the height of his popularity and WRN made use of his name in his journals, in spite of his finding Drummond one of the few that he was antipathetic towards.

Drummond was an enigmatic figure who sought to reconcile his Christian faith with the theory of evolution. He was also a supporter of, and worker on, D.L. Moody’s campaigns in Scotland. WRN used him extensively, though, according to D.W. Bebbington, Drummond, “composed no systematic exposition of the Scriptures⁷¹ and accepted biblical criticism without reserve.... It seems that Drummond, though living through the critical reappraisal of the Scriptures ... emerged with a renewed zest for the Bible ... he had come to believe in progressive revelation, an understanding which, he held, made the Bible as impregnable as nature”.⁷² Needless to say, many of the conservative orthodox mistrusted Drummond, but he proved to be an effective evangelist. WRN even defended⁷³ Drummond from the censure of his Kelso predecessor, Horatius Bonar, who had denounced Drummond “as an atheist, pantheist and we know not what, and had called his teaching ‘poison’”.⁷⁴ WRN strongly resented this use of ‘poison’ for Drummond’s teaching, by noting the acceptance made of Drummond by D.L. Moody. Professional and theological sympathies aside, truthfully WRN was not really a fan of Drummond. However, WRN always noted that Drummond was an effective evangelist and his books and papers sold well, as people wanted to read him.

WRN was not the only one with a use for the controversial but effective Drummond – Moody employed him to counsel the young men⁷⁵ who responded at his evangelistic meetings. He had a great power and influence over individuals. Drummond kept up “a constant confessional ... [and] the success of his work was obviously dependent upon his presence, ministers and leading laymen ... look[ed] to him as their chief, the sense (right or wrong) that the Christianity of the next



Henry Drummond

generation in these places might largely be determined by the work he had charge of'.⁷⁶ David Fountain, in his biography of E.J. Poole-Connor, regarded Drummond's influence upon the next generation as pushing them towards a full acceptance of higher-critical views of the Scriptures,

and thereby weakening their grip on Evangelical Christianity.⁷⁷ Others thought Drummond had something to say to the Evangelical Church as it sought to handle the challenge from Darwinism, and the (perceived) hostile world of science. “Drummond was known as a practitioner of science who enjoyed the confidence of the competent authorities. Although in most disciplines except geology he was no more than a ‘gentleman amateur’, he could be said to possess a certain reputation in scientific matters”.⁷⁸ So many Evangelicals saw Drummond as one they could trust confidently on scientific matters.

Given these quite controversial credentials, WRN took a calculated risk in using Drummond’s writing to the extent that he did, but he viewed the direction of the Church as becoming progressively liberal, and therefore needing to move away from the conservatism represented by the Highland Free Churches in Scotland and Spurgeon amongst the English Nonconformists. Drummond was neither frightened to advance his own beliefs, nor so frenzied in his protest as to turn his tongue and pen upon unnecessary targets – as WRN wrote, “Criticism did not in the least trouble him. He was not affected by any dogma on inspiration. Large parts of the Bible he was content to leave alone.”⁷⁹ Taken in that light, not employing Drummond’s influence to further his goals or popularity and circulation figures would have been to forego an eminently useful tool.

Amongst the preachers of London, WRN was a well-known figure. Only a small number of them, however, would claim to have been a friend of his. **Joseph Parker** was one of them. He was prized by WRN, whose character, style of preaching and personality fascinated him. Parker remained fundamentally a conservative in his theology, but in light of the growing furore of the day, he proved quite open to the progressive ideas that were coming into the church. He did not accept the new views of Scripture, but he supported the need for continued scholastic studies and research. Parker was a leading London Congregational preacher and ‘reigned’ at his church, the City Temple on London’s Holborn Viaduct.⁸⁰ He became a master of dramatic, dynamic preaching and ejaculated unexpected statements, which was admired by many as a fresh and vigorous style of ministry. His career saw him begin as a radical and republican, then as he came more into contact with rich and influential people he developed into a defender of the social and economic establishment. “He seems to have been intent on creating a united Nonconformist Church that would eventually embrace all denominations and be able to compete

for social and religious pre-eminence with the Church of England. In his development, he embodies the ambition to transform dissent into a powerful movement that would be socially respectable, morally influential, spiritually prophetic, and politically powerful. It was to be an unfulfilled hope".⁸¹ Parker admired WRN and valued 'his genius and his friendship'.⁸² The relationship was, however, hardly one-sided: WRN used Parker as a writer, and reported regularly on Parker's conferences, visits and tours,⁸³ effectively speeding the preacher's growing status as a celebrity. Darlow summed up their mutual respect: "For Dr Parker, in spite of his idiosyncrasies, Nicoll felt unbounded admiration as a unique pulpit genius. The two men became drawn into common friendship, which grew more intimate when the great preacher had to mourn over his wife's death."⁸⁴

Parker was a complex figure, simultaneously conservative and open, innovative and appreciative of tradition and as a personality appearing in public as an egoistic 'drama queen', but in himself rather shy and sensitive. WRN came to understand Parker better following the death of his wife in 1899, remaining close to the man until his death. This closeness meant WRN was able to reveal something about the private and unknown side of Parker. He saw that although Parker was friendly, he did not have many close friends. WRN regarded Parker as essentially a loner who enjoyed the close support of his wife and her relatives.⁸⁵ This public sense of Parker as a private man uninterested in society seemed contrary to whatever many people thought of him as an extroverted and sensationalistic preacher. Parker was, according to WRN, extremely sensitive,

"He greatly lacked self-confidence, and lived in a constant need of encouragement. The occasional brusqueness and egotism of his manner was in reality a mask for shyness ... he was often taken for an enormous egoist, and in a sense that was true ... no one was more vulnerable to unkindness, no one was more easily shaken by a breath of adverse criticism".⁸⁶

That he was able to penetrate the façade of a man so formidable in public, yet so self-consciously fragile in private life is a testament to WRN's unique skill and sensitivity in appreciating the inner lives of his complex acquaintances.

Private difficulties aside, Parker was a significant force in the church during his day. WRN assessed him as a leading figure amongst the Nonconformists:

“Dr. Parker, through his entire career, was firmly and consistently evangelical and Nonconformist ... With works of systematic theology he had little acquaintance, but he was mighty in the Scriptures, and never was the Bible read more earnestly and believingly than by him. By his own study and thought he had worked out independently all the main conclusions of evangelicalism, and he never moved away from them. In the same way, he was a convinced and consistent Nonconformist ... On the great questions that have divided Liberalism in the last twenty years he wavered, changed his views from time to time, and latterly he shrunk wisely from committing himself. He would take up a cause and grow weary of it, and turn to something else. On all but the great subjects his mind was restless, and he would seek for premature and impossible reconciliations”.⁸⁷

In perceiving this blend of forcefulness and indecisive wavering, WRN managed to capture Parker’s deeper patterns of motivation, which were hidden to most people. That Parker never emerged as a true figurehead of any particular Nonconformist faction was likely a mystery to many, but if one turns to this brief summary, the sheer impossibility of his doing so emerges in clear tones.

It was as preacher that Parker truly made his mark, and in that role, he cast a tremendous shadow.⁸⁸ He was a giant of the pulpit in an age of great and formidable ‘pulpiteers’, one of a small group whose public displays of skill drew broad crowds. In Parker’s case, however, artistry trumped content – people came to experience the phenomenon of his ministry, and could thereby grow to think of their religion as an experience primarily received rather than performed, consequently failing to mature and progress in the Christian life for themselves. Parker’s rival ‘over the river’, Spurgeon, was just as mighty in the pulpit, but Spurgeon was concerned that Christians worked out their faith in displaying it in the world at large. Spurgeon encouraged every kind of work that displayed the reality of the faith and thrust his people out in building churches, preaching, teaching, colportage work, missions and orphanages. Ironically, Parker’s world was much narrower than Spurgeon’s, though Parker would never have believed it and was to write his infamous ‘Open Letter’ telling Spurgeon to widen his view! WRN admired both men, and though his relationship and personal preference put him closer to Parker, he knew that Spurgeon’s contribution to Christianity in the nineteenth century would outlast that of Parker’s.