

Letters to A. T. Robertson

Editor's note: At this point we depart from our topic of Genesis in order to include the following two pieces of correspondence written to A. T. Robertson. Dr. Robertson taught at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1890 to 1934. His legacy remains to this day in his grammar, *The Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, and in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. We think these letters might be of interest to our readers. One of the letters is from Dr. Bruce Metzger, the renowned NT scholar from Princeton Theological Seminary. Dr. Metzger has written numerous books and articles. Dr. Charles W. Draper, Associate Professor of New Testament at Boyce College, discovered these letters and provides the commentary.

Charles Darwin, Lady Hope, and A. T. Robertson

In 1915 quite a stir was set off when a British woman, one Lady Hope, while at the famous Moody Northfield Conference, told of a visit she made to Charles Darwin, father of evolution, late in his life, during which he recanted much of his scientific work and professed Christian conversion. Lady Hope wrote the story for the *Watchman Examiner* (New York, August 19, 1915), which also ran other stories on the matter.

All of this is well known. A book, *The Darwin Fraud*, has been written about the episode. The matter has resurfaced from time to time up until the present, and seems to be a story that will not die. What is not commonly known is how A. T. Robertson figured in the matter.

Robertson repeated the story from the platform at Northfield soon after the original telling and was drawn into the controversy, which soon spread north to Canada and across the Atlantic to Britain. He too was mentioned in the *Watchman Examiner*. Unfortunately, correspondence from Robertson on the matter is unavailable, but the correspondence he received is preserved in the Robertson archives at

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he studied and then taught for forty-six years prior to his death in 1934.

A British acquaintance living in Toronto, Canada, wrote Robertson on Nov 2, 1915, that he had been asked about the Lady Hope story and Robertson's apparent corroboration of it. This correspondent, whose name is lost (the last page of the letter is missing), wrote that he told inquirers that he doubted the truthfulness of the story, as some known details in the story about Charles Darwin were inaccurate. He further confided to Robertson, however, that he personally knew Lady Hope in London and trusted neither "her judgment or her imagination." Beyond this, he added, "I could a tale unfold, if it were necessary." This letter reveals that it was the writer's contact with Professor Poulton of Oxford that brought Darwin's son, Sir Francis Darwin, into the fray. Robertson's correspondent wrote, "From another son of Charles Darwin, I have received testimony to the absolute and almost entire inaccuracy. I may mention also, that I have from two other quarters, one of them, if I named it would be well known to you, I am

assured that the story is 'a fake, and a very shameful fake.'"

This friend wrote Robertson so he could be well informed for the furor to follow.

Shortly later Robertson received a letter from England, dated Nov 8, 1915:

Dear Sir

I have today written the *Watchman Examiner* of New York denying the authenticity of Lady Hope's account of a visit to my Father at Down, and I think it due to you and your position that I should at the same time communicate with you (sic)

Neither I nor other members of my family have any knowledge of Lady Hope, and there are almost ludicrous points in her statement which make it impossible to believe that she ever visited my father at Down. I think you will agree that he could not have become openly Christian without our knowledge. It is quite certain that no such change occurred (sic)

I regret that you should have been misled into believing Lady Hope, but under the circumstances it was quite natural that you should have done so.

Yours Very Truly,
Francis Darwin

Robertson apparently dealt with the matter and put it behind him. But years later, in October, 1930, he received a long letter from J. A. Derome, a newspaper columnist for *The Daily Argus-Leader*, of Sioux Falls, S. D., who was publishing a series of articles on the theme, "Was Charles Darwin an Atheist?" After outlining for Robertson all the data he had found in the course of his research about Darwin's spirituality, he described a single page from a pamphlet he had been given. Apparently it was about the Lady Hope affair and had Robertson's name in it. Having established to his own satisfaction that the story was a hoax, Derome

wanted Robertson's permission to say that Robertson had repeated the story "without sponsoring its accuracy." He added, "I want to say the fair thing all around." A note in Robertson's handwriting at the bottom of the letter indicates that he dealt with it, although he did not keep a copy of his reply to Derome.

Robertson's presence at Northfield indicates his extreme popularity as a Bible preacher and teacher. Robertson once said that he thought of himself first as a preacher. The interest in Robertson's connection to the story in America, Canada, and Britain and its longevity (fifteen years) indicates the grand stature that he achieved as a scholar. In fact, the famous New Testament Greek scholar, James Hope Moulton, told G. Campbell Morgan that no one on earth knew more about the Greek New Testament than A. T. Robertson.

A. T. Robertson's name is still known, mostly because of his magisterial and still useful, large Greek grammar and his *Word Pictures*. But his shadow is much longer than most realize. The current generation would benefit greatly by rediscovering the more than forty books he wrote on the New Testament and on the study of Greek.

A Serendipity at the Library

Recently while searching the correspondence of A. T. Robertson for material on a matter I am researching, I went through the folder for 1933 and found a postcard between two letters. I started to ignore it, but then decided to glance at it. The front of this penny postcard had no return address, and was simply addressed to "Prof. A. T. Robertson, Louisville, Kentucky." On the reverse was written:

July 29, 1933
Middletown, Pa.
Dear Professor Robertson:

I appreciate your taking time to write again sending me information as to where I might get the works of E. Jacquier. Thank you. Perhaps you may be interested to know that I am 19; a junior at Lebanon Valley College, Annville, Pa.; and that I like Greek immensely—hope to be a N. T. Greek Prof.

Respectfully,
Bruce M. Metzger

Bruce Metzger obviously knew the stature of A. T. Robertson, but Robertson, who to the end of his days was as helpful as he could be to students and others, could little know that his act of kindness was performed for one who would later achieve Robertsonian stature, and who also would be kind and helpful to others at every opportunity.

In a gracious reply after being sent a copy of the postcard, Dr. Metzger wrote that he had planned to study under Robertson after graduating from college, but Robertson died in the fall of his senior year.