

# Eulogy Delivered at Funeral of Judge T. D. Bryson

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By: Dr. H. E. Spence

My Good Friends: I dare not trust myself to speak extemporaneously the things which I wish to say at this hour, for I have a strong blending of emotions which could easily cause my feelings to overcome my thoughts. I, today, have to perform one of the hardest tasks which it has ever been my lot to perform. For I have to keep my promise to speak at the funeral of one of my best friends. Sadness and gladness are blended here. The sadness comes from the loss of this our good friend, the breaking of cherished ties, the loss of one of the State's most honored citizens. The gladness arises from the fact that his pain and suffering are over and he is at peace. The old Saint has gone to give an account of his stewardship. The old warrior has laid his armor down after a long and courageous fight. The old Lawyer has finished his last brief and has gone to be judged himself before a higher court than he ever presided over.

As I come to speak these words of tribute my eyes are filled with tears as I am flooded with memories. Many are the happy experiences I have had with him. We were constant companions at golf and frequently hunted and fished together. Our work often brought us pleasant associations as we worked gardens, pruned apple trees and grape vines, played with our dogs or petted our cats. Above all, we had great experiences together as we discussed Bible problems, or other religious matters. At times the deep mysteries of life and death would engage our interest. I was his constant companion in health and sickness. I was honored by being invited to perform the ceremony in the marriage of his daughter. I shall never forget the strong straight figure which marched up the aisle of the great University Cathedral, proudly escorting his lovely daughter to the altar.

I heard his complaints, which were few. I rejoiced in his gladness, which was great. I listened to his every thought and examined his every emotion as closely and as carefully as his skillful brother, Doctor Dan, ever listened to the heartbeat of a patient with a stethoscope. And I found his heart and soul good and true.

In one sense the task is easy. There is no puzzling over life's mysteries here. There is no questioning of providence; no eternal, Why? When the young are cut off and life snatched away in the early morning of its existence, one always feels a sense of frustration, the disposition to protest against the injustice of the event or to lament over the sense of waste. Or if an older life goes out in its prime, we sometimes wonder why it could not have been spared to see the fruition of its efforts in the satisfaction of a long life well spent. Even when the life is far-spent and reaches the proportion of old age,

unless it has been well-spent, we look with regrets upon its failures and throw the mantle of charity over the dead as we lay them away with secret doubts and misgivings. In the case of the one we lay away today, there is no room or occasion for any of these perplexities. For his life has been lived to the full, both as to the number of years which crowned his head, and also as to the quality of the busy way in which he has spent that life. Nor can there be any doubts or misgivings as to the pronouncement of heaven upon these services. If any person ever deserved the plaudit: "Well done, good and faithful servant," he did.

In another sense the task is very difficult. For no one could possibly do justice to his great character and career. It would be a task even to enumerate the simple facts of his long and busy life. But so many things which mark his greatness are inexpressible. To undertake to depict his real greatness would be "to paint the lily;" add to the melody of a great symphony, or as difficult as editing the Parables of Jesus.

You may turn to the newspapers for the simple facts of his life: the date of his birth, his ancestry, his career, his death. The papers will tell about his family, the positions he held, the work which he did, and the like. But printer's ink cannot give the quality of his life, his influence for good, the encouragement which he gave to others, the inspiration which he furnished, his fortitude, his courage, his splendid character.

The newspapers can give the facts concerning the various members of his family, their names, positions, occupations, and some idea of their prominence and usefulness. But printer's ink cannot reveal the relationship which existed between him and his family - his tender love, his patient efforts, his justifiable pride, his provident care, his unbelievable foresight.

A formal statement has been made of his training, but the reporter cannot adequately picture the energy which he spent in attaining his education; - his industry, his indefatigable application, his determination, the long hours of gruelling work which accompanied the acquisition of it.

Some account may be given of his career. The records show that he was a careful and tireless lawyer, a great judge, a wise teacher, a model citizen. His colleagues said of him: "His broad and profound knowledge of the law, gained not only from years of careful study but also from a long successful career at the bar, culminating in a term of service on the bench of North Carolina equipped him as the effective educator he early became. His uniform courtesy, his sympathetic dealing with students who sat under him, his wise counsel, and his generous spirit have endeared him to all his associates and made him a beloved and respected figure in the Duke Law School." But even this could not completely picture the spirit of the inner man. This did not quite reveal his passion for justice, his determination to do the right, his

high efforts in raising the standards of the legal profession above all reproach, his attempt to reveal the law as a calling rather than a profession, his evincing of a high ideal to make the law a means of service and not of self-enrichment or selfish promotion.

His was a stern sense of justice, tempered by Christian mercy. He looked upon himself as a trusted agent of society and he felt that he needs must protect its rights. No Christian devotee ever sang: "A charge to keep I have," with a stronger sense of obligation than this man exemplified in his jealous guardianship of his calling. To him, his profession was a God-endowed commission.

As a teacher, he made an inestimable contribution to Duke University. It will bear his imprint in an indelible fashion for many years. But even in that field it is hard to estimate accurately his influence, the encouragement he offered the disheartened, his kind reproof of the indifferent or slothful, the sense of sacredness which he inculcated into his students as they regarded their relation to their profession.

As a friend he was genial, gracious, loyal, unswerving in his devotion. No task was too menial for him to perform it gladly for his friends. No burden was too heavy for him to help them carry it. He bound men to him "as with hoops of steel." He was strong in his likes and dislikes. I know no man I would rather have for a friend, or would have dreaded worse as a foe.

His religious life is even harder to represent in its true worth. The facts again are simple although manifold. It is easy enough to relate that he was a member of the Presbyterian church and that as a member he had filled the various offices of the laity of that great denomination. It is a simple statement of fact that for many years he was a teacher in its Bible school. It is true that he was a popular speaker for religious gatherings and could always be called upon to discharge faithfully the functions of a Christian layman.

But again we have not told adequately the story. Religion and common life were so intermingled in his thoughts and feelings that they were almost one and the same thing. To him there was a sanctity about the whole of living. All life was to him an endowment, a sacred trust over which he had stewardship. All tasks were a divine commission. Life was an apprenticeship where one might learn by experience here to serve God well throughout eternity. It was an arena where one grappled with foes in order to gain that strength of character which fitted one for association with God. His whole life was sacred. His family was a gift from God and no ancient patriarch ever assumed an attitude and responsibility toward this sacred trust more than did he. His work was a sacred calling also, received with that same solemn obligation which characterized the ancient prophets as they justified their behaviour with a "thus saith the Lord."

His religion was intensely personal. Again a great hymn verse, "As in thy sight to live" would have expressed fitly his attitudes. His was a simple, yet a sublime faith. He mingled the profundity of a philosopher with the credulity of a child. His God was the same God



as that revealed by the Hebrew Prophets. His Christ was the same great personality attested to by Peter at Caesarea Philippi: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." His was the faith displayed by Thomas in the first glimpse of his risen Lord: "My Lord and my God."

He was one of the greatest Bible teachers I have ever known. He had an amazingly thorough knowledge of the sacred work. He took his Bible straight without critical study or speculation. His rule for interpretation was faith and common sense. But it was also a sacred, inspired, divine word. The church to him was the Bride of Christ, established from the foundation of the world, whose corner-stone was Jesus Christ.

In character, Judge Bryson was to a great extent the summation and exemplification of the gifts and graces described in the New Testament. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are of good report" might well describe the content of his mind and thought. Like Paul's exhortation, he was encased in the armor of God, his "loins girt about with truth wearing the breastplate of righteousness, his feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, bearing the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation, and using the sword of the spirit as a weapon in his religious warfare." He possessed those virtues outlined by the Apostle Peter when he encouraged the early church to give diligence and "add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness."

He was the living conjugation of the verb "to know." His were the great Christian certainties. With Paul he could say: "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Like Paul he was ever conscious of the presence of the living Christ and felt that he could do all things through Christ who gave him strength. Like John he believed that the Christ is alive forevermore.

His staunch Presbyterian faith made him accept fully Paul's statement: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." This was for him the hardest test of his faith. He could not understand why he should have been afflicted, handicapped, made almost completely an invalid, but he trusted God, believing in the biblical statement: "He hath done all things well."

A third great certainty to which he fully subscribed was Paul's statement: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." A trusting faith like his gives us a renewed hope that when "the fever called living is over at last," there is a land "beyond the smiling and the weeping" where life's unfinished hopes and unrealized dreams are consummated amid all that is beautiful and fair and good.

The strong characteristics of many great religious worthies of

fact and fiction were blended in him. Like Abraham, he believed in God and followed his leadership implicitly. Like Moses, he "endured as seeing him who is invisible." Like Paul, he "fought a good fight and finished his course." Like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress he waded in the Slough of Despond, but he also passed the lions without the dread which Christian showed. He did not worry whether they were chained or not. Like Greatheart he could stay in the Castle of Despair and his own inner strength made him abide the depth of its gloom without fear. Like Pilgrim his eyes of faith saw in the distance the Delectable Mountains, and caught a far-off glimpse of the Eternal City of God.

His one great disappointment was that he had to come down to his old age dependent upon others. He who had been so strong and independent, now became weak and helpless. He who had cared so thoughtfully for others, now had to rely upon others. His great heart ached that he should be a burden upon his loved ones. He would gladly have died and set them free. His sacrificial heart more than once turned to the thought that it would be a kindness to them to make an end of it all.

In such hours of stress and temptation men may take different attitudes. Facing calamity as he did, there are men who are too cowardly to live, and slip out of life by its back door. Under such a strain there are others who are too cowardly to die, preferring to stay and face these ills rather than go to meet those which are unknown. Others, still, are too brave to live since their living entails suffering and weariness upon those whom they loved. But this man was too brave to die. He knew that for him to sneak out of life by his own act would undermine the teaching of trust and patience and long suffering which he had recommended to his fellowmen through out the years. He preferred to suffer this prolonged agony rather than give the lie to the teachings of religion which he has so long espoused. But, even more, he trusted implicitly in his God and was unwilling to do any deed which might show his lack of confidence in the all-wise and eternal providence of his Maker.

We have no misgivings as to his future. We can never be sure about the mysteries of life and death. It may be that the future may be like that which is described or suggested in the grand old hymns of Christianity, The Sweet Bye and Bye, the Christian's Home in Glory, My Heavenly Home is Bright and Fair, and those others of like mood and meaning. It may be that the vision so wondrously portrayed in the Revelation of that city where dwelleth no night, where God shall wipe away all tears and where no sorrow shall come may be literally fulfilled. Or it may be that eye hath not seen nor the human mind dreamed of the glory that awaiteth the children of God. Of one thing I am sure: Such unlimited trust, such unfaltering faith and such unshakable integrity as his cannot perish. He will become a part of that unfading beauty, that indescribable loveliness, that imperishable goodness which we call God.

He is not dead. Such lives can never die. His influence will live throughout the ages. The hundreds of boys who received their high ideals

of virtue, integrity and honor from him will pass on the torch to lighten the jurisprudence of the nation. In memory, he will live as long as the hearts of men respond to the high personal ideals which he manifested and react in tender appreciation of what he was and did. We bring him to the scenes of his childhood and lay him to rest "under these hills" where he wanted to lie, in sight of the home of his childhood and amid those whom he had "loved and lost awhile." The great jurist has finished his earthly court and gone home to the Heavenly Judge. I have a fanciful feeling that when the Court Crier of Death announced to the Court of Heaven that Thaddeus D. Bryson was entering the room, the angels stood until the great Judge assigned him the place which he so rightly deserved in the eternal Court of Justice and Goodness which we call heaven.

Hersey Everett Spence received an undergraduate degree in 1907 and a Master of Arts degree in 1908 from Trinity College in Durham, forerunner of Duke University. He did graduate work at Columbia University and at the University of Chicago. He was an ordained deacon and elder of the Methodist Church and pastored churches in Raleigh, Durham and Sanford, all the while teaching English at Trinity.

[NCPedia.org](http://NCPedia.org) summarizes his life's work.