

Acres of Diamonds

Russell H. Conwell, 1900 (speech given 6,000 times between 1882 and 1925)

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LADIES and gentlemen, the title of this lecture originated away back in 1869. When going down the Tigris River, we hired a guide from Bagdad to show us down to the Arabian Gulf. ... He thought it was not only his duty to guide us down the river, but also to entertain us with stories; curious and weird, ancient and modern, strange and familiar; many of them I have forgotten, and I am glad I have. But there was one which I recall tonight.

He told me that there once lived near the shore of the River Indus ... an ancient Persian by the name of Al Hafed. He said that Al Hafed owned a large farm, with orchards, grain fields and gardens; that he had money at interest, a beautiful wife and lovely children, and was a wealthy and contented man. Contented because he was wealthy, and wealthy because he was contented.

One day there visited an ancient Buddhist priest, ... [who] told the old farmer ... that this world was once a great bank of fog, and that the Almighty thrust His finger into this bank of fog, and began slowly to move his finger around, and then increased the speed of his finger until he whirled this bank of fog into a solid ball of fire; and as it went rolling through the universe, burning its way through other banks of fog, it condensed the moisture, until it fell in floods of rain upon the heated surface of the world, and cooled the outward crust; then the internal fires, bursting the cooling crust, threw up the mountains, and the hills, and the valleys of this wonderful world of ours.

“And” said the old priest, “if this internal melted mass burst forth and cooled very quickly it became granite, if it cooled more slowly, it became copper; if it cooled less quickly, silver; less quickly, gold; and after gold, diamonds were made.” ...

The old priest told Al Hafed that if he had a diamond the size of his thumb, he could purchase a dozen farms like his. “And,” said the priest, “if you had a handful of diamonds, you could purchase the county, and if you had a mine of diamonds you could purchase kingdoms, and place your children upon thrones, through the influence of your great wealth.”

Al Hafed heard all about the diamonds that night, and went to bed a poor man. He wanted a whole mine of diamonds. Early in the morning he sought the priest and awoke him ... : “Will you tell me where I can find diamonds?”

“Well,” said the priest, “if you want diamonds, all you have to do is to go and find them, and then you will have them.”

“But,” said Al Hafed, “I don't know where to go.”

“If you will find a river that runs over white sands, between high mountains, in those white sands you will always find diamonds,” answered the priest. ...

“Well,” said Al Hafed, “I will go.”

So he sold his farm; collected his money that was at interest; left his family in charge of a neighbor, and away he went in search of diamonds.

He began his search, very properly to my mind, at the [African] Mountains of the Moon. Afterwards he came around into Palestine, and then wandered on into Europe. At last, when his money was all gone and he was in rags, poverty and wretchedness, he stood on the shore at Barcelona, in Spain, when a great tidal wave swept through the pillars of Hercules; and the poor, starving, afflicted stranger could not resist the awful temptation to cast himself into that incoming tide; and he sank beneath its foaming crest, never to rise in this life again. ...

[Meanwhile] the man who [had] purchased Al Hafed's farm led his camel out into the garden to drink, and as the animal put his nose into the shallow waters of the garden brook, Al Hafed's successor noticed a curious flash of light from the white sands of the stream. Reaching in he pulled out a black stone containing a strange eye of light. He took it into the house as a curious pebble and putting it on the mantel ... went his way and forgot all about it.

“But not long after that, the same old priest came to visit Al Hafed's successor. The moment he opened the door he noticed the flash of light. He rushed to the mantel and said, “Here is a diamond! Here is a diamond! Has Al Hafed returned?”

“Oh no, Al Hafed has not returned and we have not heard from him since he went away, and that is not a diamond. It is nothing but a stone we found out in our garden.”

“But,” said the priest, “I know a diamond when I see it. I tell you that is a diamond.”

Then together they rushed out into the garden. They stirred up the white sands with their fingers, and there came up other more beautiful, more valuable gems than the first.

“Thus,” said the guide, and friends it is historically true, was discovered the diamond mines of Golconda[, India], the most valuable diamond mines in the history of the ancient world. ...

[The guide] said to me: “Had Al Hafed remained at home, and dug in his own cellar, or underneath his own wheat field, instead of wretchedness, starvation, poverty and death in a strange land, he would have had acres of diamonds.”

Acres of Diamonds! For every acre of that old farm, yes, every shovelful, afterwards revealed the gems which since have decorated the crowns of monarchs. ...

[H]is story reminded me of one. it. I told him that a man in California, in 1847, owned a ranch there. He heard that they had discovered gold in Southern California, though they had not. And he sold his farm to Colonel Sutter, who put a mill on the little stream below the house. One day his little girl gathered some of the sand in her hands from the raceway, and brought it into the house. And while she was sifting it through her fingers, a visitor there noticed the first shining scales of real gold that were ever discovered in California. Acres and acres of gold. I was introduced, a few years ago, while in California, to the one-third owner of the farm, and he was then receiving \$120 in gold for every fifteen minutes of his life, sleeping or waking.

[speech continues with several similar stories and examples from the late 1800s]

... I don't know of anything I would better enjoy ... than telling of the blunders like this which I have heard that [others] have made.

I say that I would enjoy it. But after all there is another side to the question. ... Because you and I have [blundered too]! Yet nearly every person here will say: “Oh no, I never had any acres of diamonds or any gold mines or any silver mines.” But I say to you that you did have silver mines, and gold mines, and acres of diamonds, and you have them now.

Now let me speak with the greatest care lest my eccentricity of manner should mislead my listeners, and make you think I am here to entertain more than to help. I want to hold your attention ... with sufficient interest to leave my lesson with you.

You had an opportunity to be rich; and to some of you it has been a hardship to purchase a ticket for this lecture. Yet you have no right to be poor. It is all wrong. You have no right to be poor. It is your duty to be rich. Oh, I know well that there are some things higher, sublimer than money! Ah, yes, there are some things sweeter, holier than gold! Yet I also know that there is not one of those things but is greatly enhanced by the use of money.

“Oh,” you will say, “Mr. Conwell, can you, as a Christian teacher, tell the young people to spend their lives making money?”

Yes, I do. Three times I say, I do, I do, I do. You ought to make money. Money is power. Think how much good you could do if you had money now. Money is power and it ought to be in the hands of good men, would be in the hands of good men if we comply with the Scripture teachings, where God promises prosperity to the righteous man. ... You should be a righteous man, and if you were, you would be rich.

I need to guard myself right here. Because one of my theological students came to me once to [argue] with me, for heresy, inasmuch as I had said that money was power. He said: "Mr. Conwell, I feel it my duty to tell you that the Scriptures say that money is the root of all evil." ...

I said "I would like to have you find that for me. I have never seen it."

He triumphantly brought a Bible, and with all the bigoted pride of a narrow sectarian ... threw it down before me and said: "There it is! You can read it for yourself!"

I said to him: "... Please read it yourself, and remember that emphasis is exegesis."

So he read: "The love of money is the root of all evil." The love of the money, rather than the love of the good it secures, is a dangerous evil in the community. The desire to get hold of money, and to hold on to it, "hugging the dollar until the eagle squeals," is the root of all evil. But it is a grand ambition for men to have the desire to gain money, that they may use it for the benefit of their fellow men. ...

I say then to you, that you ought to be rich. "Well," you say, "I would like to be rich, but I have never had an opportunity. I never had any diamonds about me!"

My friends you did have an opportunity. And let us see where your mistake was.

What business have you been in? "Oh," some man or woman will say, "I keep a store upon one of these side streets, and I am so far from the great commercial center that I cannot make any money."

"Are you poor? How long have you kept that store?"

"Twenty years."

"Twenty years, and not worth \$500,000 now? There is something the matter with you. Nothing the matter with the side street. It is with you."

"Oh now," you will say, "any person knows that you must be in the center of trade if you are going to make money."

The man of common sense will not admit that that is necessarily true at all. If you are keeping that store and you are not making money, it would have been better for the community if they had kicked you out of that store, 19 years ago.

No man has a right to go into business and not make money. It is a crime to go into business and lose money, because it is a curse to the rest of the community. No man has a moral right to transact business unless he makes something out of it. He has also no right to transact business unless the man he deals with has an opportunity also to make something. Unless he lives and lets live, he is not an honest man in business. There are no exceptions to this great rule. You ought to have been rich. You have no right to keep a store for 20 years and still be poor.

You will say to me, "Now Mr. Conwell, I know the mercantile business better than you do."

My friend, let us consider it a minute. When I was young, my father kept a country store, and once in a while he left me in charge of that store. Fortunately for him it was not often. When I had it in my charge a man came in the store door and said:

"Do you keep jack-knives?"

"No we don't keep jack-knives." I went off and whistled a tune, and what did I care for that man? Then another man would come in and say:

"Do you keep jack-knives?" "No, we don't keep jack-knives." Then I went off and whistled another tune, and what did I care for that man?

Then another man would come in the same door and say: "Do you keep jack-knives?"

"No, we don't keep jack-knives. Do you suppose we are keeping this store just for the purpose of supplying the whole neighborhood with jack-knives?"

Do you carry on your business like that? Do you ask what was the difficulty with it? The difficulty was that I had not then learned that the foundation principles of business success and the foundation principles of Christianity itself are both the same. It is the whole of every man's life to be doing for his fellow men. And he who can do the most to help his fellow men, is entitled to the greatest reward himself. Not only so saith God's holy book, but also saith every man's business common sense. If I had been carrying on my father's store on a Christian plan, or on a plan that leads to success, I would have had a jack-knife for the third man when he called for it." ...

Some young man will say to me:

"I cannot go into that mercantile business.

“Why not?”

“Because I have no capital.”

Capital! Capital! Capital! Capital! is the cry of a dudish generation which cannot see over its collar. Who are the rich men now? The poor boys of fifty years ago. You know it. The rich men of your town, in whatever profession or calling they are, as a rule were the poor boys of forty or fifty years ago. If they had not been poor then they wouldn't be rich now. ...

I pity the rich man's son. He is not to be praised for his magnificent, palatial home, not to be congratulated on having plenty of money, or his yachts, carriages, and diamonds. Oh no, but rather to be commiserated. It is often a misfortune to be born the son of a rich man. There are many things a rich man's son cannot know, because he is not passing through the school of actual experience. ...

It is said that the elder [business tycoon] Vanderbilt, when a boy, went to his father and said, “Father, did you earn all your money?” And the old Commodore said: “I did, I earned every penny of it.”

And he did. It is cruel to slander the rich because they have been successful. It is a shame to “look down” upon the rich the way we do. They are not scoundrels because they have gotten money. They have blessed the world. They have gone into great enterprises that have enriched the nation and the nation has enriched them. It is all wrong for us to accuse a rich man of dishonesty simply because he secured money. Go through this city and your very best people are among your richest people. Owners of property are always the best citizens. ...

And when the Commodore said that he [earned all his money], the boy said: “Then I will earn mine.” And he insisted on going to work for \$3 a week. If a rich man's son will go to work like that he will be able to take care of his father's money when the father is gone. If he has the bravery to fight the battle of poverty like the poor boy, then of course he has a double advantage. ...

But we teach our young people to believe that all the great people are away off. ... It is a lie! Never in the history of God's government of mankind was there a nation stepping upward more certainly toward all that is grand and beautiful and true than is the Nation of America today!