

The Big Man

Recollections on William Aberhart

by close associate Cyril Hutchinson, Principal of
Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute & Berean Bible College @1964

It was almost by accident that I found myself in the town of Seaforth, Ontario, and there was reminded that this was the home-town of William Aberhart. At once my visit took on almost the nature of a pilgrimage. Memories of a warm personal acquaintance with this man grew brighter as I set off to find the Aberhart home, the Presbyterian Church where the family attended, and the High School where the children of the family went for that part of their education.

The house is an old one, of course, with floors of wide boards, and a delightful winding staircase leading to the upper rooms. Between it and the old spacious barn, there are three fine maple trees., said to have been planted by the three Aberhart boys.

And here I stopped to think about the life of one who stirred Western Canada and to some measure, the western world, by his influence and unflagging zeal in the cause of that which he believed would most benefit his fellow-man. Here, in Seaforth, he was born, on December 30th, 1878 , and named after his father, who came to Canada at the age of seven.

I thought about his life (William Jr.) as a teacher of high repute in Ontario, and then in Alberta from the year 1910. I thought about his ardent concern for the needy people about him, a concern that finally put him into the office of Premier of Alberta, in 1935. I thought about his eight years in that office, giving this Province an admirable administration, and demonstrating his unimpeachable integrity.

And at last I thought of that sad day in Vancouver, B.C., when he was called away from us. on May 23rd, 1943. I listened to the funeral text from II Samuel 3:38, "Know ye not that there is a Prince, and a great man fallen this day in Israel." Perhaps no more fitting tribute could have been paid to the memory of this man, and, even in our sorrow, we were a proud people, thankful to have known this one, and to have known the influence of his life.

Why should all this flood the memory in the little town of Seaforth? Because to me, William Aberhart was always THE BIG MAN.

A. He was BIG physically. He often used to speak jovially of himself as "weighing an eighth of a ton." He had a massive head, matching his strong and robust frame. His voice was big, powerful, compelling and vibrant. His powerful, muscular body was almost untiring.

His vitality amazed everyone who knew him. At one time he was carrying on his vocation as Principal of Crescent Heights High School in Calgary, heading up all the work of the Bible Institute he founded in this same city, and also conducting a whirlwind, indefatigable political campaign to every remote corner of the Province of Alberta.

B. He was also the BIG MAN mentally. He had a phenomenal memory, and an intellect that was capable of keen and instant analysis of most problems. He was a chess player of note, and loved to face a new problem in almost any realm.

One of my first memories of him was during a meeting held every Sunday afternoon in the Grand Theatre in Calgary. There I learned of his amazing knowledge of the Bible. The chairman would call for any Bible question the audience wished to ask, and, as they were voiced, Mr. Aberhart jotted down the questions on a piece of paper. Then, during the singing of one hymn, he thumbed expertly through his Bible, jotted down a note or two, and then stood up to give the Bible answer to the questions just asked.

His mind was always keen to learn. During the last train journey I took with him, I found he was studying Spanish, just as a mental refreshment along the way! Little wonder that the proposals of Social Credit appealed to this man, as he saw a solution for the chronic problem of too many goods, and too little money to buy them.

C. He was a BIG MAN spiritually. He lived a life given to the needs of others. He laboured mightily where he need not have laboured at all. He did it for the love of God, and for the love of his fellowman. It was from his lips that I first heard the Gospel presented in such a way that I could understand it.

And under his ministry, I began to understand the great teachings of the Word of God. He pointed me to Jesus Christ, as my Saviour, and then showed me this One as Lord of my life. For this I shall ever be profoundly grateful. This was the BIG MAN that I knew.

What made William Aberhart the BIG MAN? I think it was because of the vital motive of his life. He had a burning desire to help his fellow-man, and particularly the young people of his day. In the mental realm, he loved to teach them, to help them develop the mind, that they might be fitted to face life aright. This was embodied in all his school work. But it did not end there. He became increasingly concerned with the dismal prospects facing his High School graduates during the depression days, those times sometimes called "the dirty thirties."

They were days of deep depression that seem almost unbelievable to people today. And this stirred the BIG MAN to activity in the economic realm, seeking to find out what was basically wrong. Something was wrong, when stores were filled with goods: when wheat was actually being burned, while families lacked bread, and clothing, and the necessities of life.

The problem of want in the midst of plenty challenged this man. He did not intend to become a politician, or to ever run for political office. He offered his plans, the results of his investigations, his knowledge, to the existing government, freely. He met their committees, and suggested that they put these plans to work for the benefit of the people.

***They laughed at him !* With no solution of their own, they scoffed at this man who was giving of himself to seek a way for people to be lifted out of their misery. An so he rallied men around him in a mighty crusade, that became known as the Social Credit Movement. This he did for the young people particularly.**

In the spiritual realm, already mentioned, this same motive prevailed. He preached Christ as the Saviour of man, that the spiritual needs of his fellowmen might be met. He pioneered Christian broadcasting here in the West, with a two hour broadcast every Sunday afternoon. He built a Bible Institute to train young people for the Christian ministry. This work, the teaching of the Bible, and the winning of men to the Saviour, was his great love.

What stirred him to do all this? *First of all*, he believed the Bible, from cover to cover, to be the infallible Word of God, God's one revealed message to mankind. That message was to be passed on, proclaimed everywhere, propounded, taught, expounded by every means available. His life text was "Holding Forth The Word Of Life."

***Secondly*, he believed in and on the Saviour, Jesus Christ, and the efficacy of His shed blood to cleanse all men from sin. He believed men without Christ were lost, and that he had an obligation to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.**

So the BIG MAN. with all his physical and mental and spiritual powers, became a humble follower of our Lord, and , because of this, a mighty leader among men. Now his course is run, and his task on earth finished. He, like Paul, kept the faith, and entered into the great Henceforth that God has prepared for His own, into heaven itself. I shall see him again.
