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'THE GREATNESS OF SCRIPTURE'*

DR F. W. BOREHAM

When Theseus set out on that brave adventure in the course of which he hoped to climb the rainbow, stride along the Milky Way and scale the heights of Pleiades, he came upon a mountain, all of solid gold.

Obviously, it had not always been of that valuable substance. The tall trees and daintier saplings had evidently grown normally and been magically transmuted. Logs and boulders lay around that had clearly been of wood and stone, although their corrugations and sharp edges now glittered in the sunlight. Searching for the cause of this strange transformation, Theseus at length found the Chaplet of Ariadne, lying under the shadow of an immense cliff. Visiting the ranges, the goddess must inadvertently have dropped her treasure, and its potent influence, as it lay there, had turned the summit into shining gold.

I have seen the same thing happen three times over *not* in the realm of *Mythology*, but of *History*; and, since it is thus to be seen in the actual records of real men and real things, it is, for us, the richer in practical significance.

The wonder was wrought, not by the Chaplet of Ariadne, but by something infinitely more potent and more precious, '*the most valuable thing this world affords*', as the Queen was assured in the course of the Coronation Service. The BIBLE touched three periods of human history which might, but for it, have been little more than commonplace; and it turned each of those three periods into a Golden Age.

The greatness of Scripture is not only impressive; it is infectious; it imparts stateliness and splendour to everything it touches. The

* This interesting and instructive article—somewhat different to our usual subjects—is a chapter ('The Chaplet of Ariadne') from Dr Boreham's most recent book, *Dreams At Sunset* (Epworth Press). He here rehearses, in his own entertaining style, the story of 'the three most momentous eras that our little world has known and with which the BIBLE stands most intimately associated'. The story is too demonstrably the ordering of Divine Providence to be overlooked by the keen Bible Student.—By arrangement with the Epworth Press, London (copyright).

greatness of Caesar dwarfed men. In the words of Cassius, he bestrode this narrow world like a colossus, and, as a consequence, ordinary mortals crept under his hugh legs and peeped about to find themselves dishonourable graves. The greatness of the Bible, on the contrary, makes men feel great; it invests life with a sense of infinite possibility and dignity and majesty.

The three periods of human history with which the Bible stands most intimately associated have come to be recognised as the three most mementous eras that our little world has known. They represent:

1. The Rise of Greek Culture ;
2. The Renaissance in Europe; and
3. The Evangelical Revival—

of the Eighteenth Century. One may search the archives of mankind from the dawn of creation to this very hour without unearthing records that can put these three classical periods to shame. And each of the three finds its explanation and its monument in the sacred volume that is today being issued by the British and Foreign Bible Society in more than a thousand languages.

1. The Rise of Greek Culture

Dean Alford, perhaps the outstanding authority on the subject, declares that one of the most arresting coincidences of all time is the evolution of the Greek tongue during the years immediately preceding the Christian era. In the fairest portion of the south of Europe, amidst the indented coasts and rocky valleys and snow-clad ranges of Greece, there grew to perfection, Alford says, the most beautiful, most fluent and most powerful language that ever flowed from the tongue of man. Among the brilliant intellectuals of Athens it received its edge and polish. In it, as in no other tongue known to men, the most minute turns of human thought found expression. Truths requiring almost microscopic mental discernment were accurately and exquisitely conveyed by it. It was a precision instrument of the finest possible quality. And, to add to its charms, it was an attractive and melodious language, charming the ear with its liquid music as well as gratifying

the mind by its philological subtlety. Spread across the world by the conquests of Alexander the Great, himself a pupil of Aristotle and a writer of renown, humanity found itself in possession of an ideal vehicle for its thought at the very moment at which the most startling revelation of all time was about to be made. H. V. Morton declares that the student who would trace the birth of Christianity must go back to a time, three centuries before Bethlehem, when a young man, Alexander by name, tore down the barriers that had divided East from West and launched upon the world that superb culture in which the new faith could become lyrically articulate. Homer and Hesiod and Sophocles did not sing, Alford insists, for the sake of singing; Herodotus and Thucydides and Xenophon did not write for the sake of writing; Demosthenes and his rivals did not produce their masterpieces of oratory as a proud exhibition of consummate artistry; they were divinely-chosen, though unconscious, craftsmen, sharpening and brightening and perfecting the instrument which was destined to transfigure the life of mankind.

2. The European Renaissance

The second of these Summits of Gold was the European Renaissance. It transfigured the lives of all nations, including our own. In those days, as Sir Sidney Lee avers, Englishmen breathed a new atmosphere. They came, he says, under a fresh stimulus, compounded of many elements, each of them inspiring, almost intoxicating. New continents were springing up like mushrooms on a misty morning; new oceans were everywhere being sighted. The entire atlas was recast; the world assumed a startlingly novel shape. It was an age of thrills! One day Bartholomew Diaz gave Africa to the world; the next, Columbus presented it with America; and then Vasco da Gama unveiled India! And whilst Cabot and Balboa and Magellan and Cortes and Pizarro were achieving their triumphs, Copernicus was discovering a new universe in the skies; astronomy was being born again. New inventions revolutionized commerce and industry. It was a regeneration of the human intellect. Men felt a passion for extending the limits of knowledge. In the realms of philosophy,

music, art and science, illustrious adventurers, whose names will live for ever, appeared like bright stars that twinkle suddenly out of the age-long dark. An infinite horizon was opened to the simplest minds. Men fell in love with the universe. People who had lived in an age became citizens of all the ages. Those who dwelt in hamlets and villages enjoyed the rapture of the continental.

Moreover, with that revived interest in ancient culture and in distant lands, there awoke in the minds of the people an insatiable desire to possess the Scriptures in their own tongue. And, at that psychological moment, two men arose. The first, William Tyndale. A private tutor in Gloucestershire, he conceived the daring idea of making the simplest ploughboy as familiar with the inspired writings as the most erudite scholars then were. As a result, he completed his monumental translation in such a masterly way that, except in matters of detail, no subsequent revisers have been able to improve on his majestic production.

The second of these two men was William Caxton. His printing presses surprised the world at the very moment at which the world had something supremely worth printing. The innovation captured the imagination of the populace. Learned men, fashionable women and great nobles thronged the little printing house at Westminster to see how the miracle was performed. Thus the Bible, as we know it, sprang into being; the immensity of the volume became a national reflection of the immensity of the age; and, by contact with it, the immensity of the age became even more imposing.

Just as the Greek language reached perfection just in time to express, by its elegance and exactitude, the most sublime revelation ever given to men, so Caxton's introduction of printing synchronized with Tyndale's historic translation. Both achievements seemed to represent the complementary sections of a master plan. He who is not impressed by the sheer wonder of such coincidences will never, in this world or in any other, be profoundly impressed by anything. He has eyes, but he sees not.

3. The Evangelical Revival

The third of these Summits of Gold, these efflorescences of history, was the great Evangelical Revival that, in the eighteenth century, exercised an influence so overwhelming, so dynamic and so irresistible that it transformed, fundamentally and permanently, every phase of our national life. In days when ancient thrones were tottering and hoary institutions were crumbling, it preserved for us, as Lecky has shown, our national integrity and respect. Men saw the affairs of this world, and of every other, in a new perspective.

The country was regenerated. Apart from the direct spiritual fruitage of the revival, the by-products of that transfiguring movement were literally legion. Social reforms were effected: slavery was abolished: industrial wrongs were righted: the plague—the spectre of the centuries—was banished by purer standards of living and saner sanitation: whilst philanthropic and benevolent institutions arose everywhere. In the sweep of this mountainous and memorable movement, all our great missionary societies sprang into being and a desire was created to give every man living, regardless of colour, race or clime, a copy of the Scriptures in his own tongue.

Thus, by the BIBLE, history was reconstituted and reconditioned. No single factor has had more to do with the creation of our literature, with the moulding of our legislation and with the determination of our way of life. The minstrelsy of all the world's poets is rooted in the work of these ancient seers and singers; the statutes of all civilized peoples are based on the inflexible mandates of the Mosaic code; whilst all the chivalries and courtesies of life are the natural expression in human conduct of these immemorial ethics and ideals. Under its spell, earth's peaks all glitter.