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## A STRANGE EXPERIENCE

SUCH A queer experience. Perhaps it was the result of thinking about Bishop Barnes's book on *The Rise of Christianity*, following a talk some of us ministers and clergy had had with him about it. These had reawakened some doubts on arguments about which I had become uncertain.

"Of course this is a doublet," he said about the two stories of the Feeding of Thousands. The historian Freeman had cast a suspicion upon "of course" in connection with doublets. These were his words:

Let us suppose that the reigns of Henry the First and Henry the Second were known to us only in the same meagre way that we know the reigns of some of the ancient potentates of the East. In short and dry annals they might easily be told so as to look like the same story. Each king bears the same name; each reigns the same number of years; each comes to the crown in a way other than succession from father to son; each restores order after a time of confusion; each improves his political position by his marriage; each is hailed as a restorer of the old native kingship; each loses his eldest son; each gives his daughter Matilda to a Henry in Germany; each has a controversy with his archbishop; each wages war with France; each dies in his continental dominions; each, if our supposed meagre annals can be supposed to tell us of such points, shows himself a great lawgiver and administrator and each, to some extent, displays the same personal qualities, good and bad.

Then I recalled an argument about the date of Deuteronomy, and the laws therein which could not have been known earlier or they would not have been broken so frequently! It didn't seem so convincing when I applied it to American Prohibition, which could never have been an actual law since drinking was so common in the very years it was supposed to be in force. Thus I was musing within myself as I lay meditating not as an earlier Baptist minister did, having lighted upon a certain place where was a Den, but just resting on a sofa in our lounge. As I lay the door opened and a strange man, young and athletic, beckoned me to follow him, and an inner urge, as strange as the man, made me follow without demur into the street. The weirdest-looking machine stood waiting, and when he said, "Get in, or we shall be late for the lecture", I simply had to obey.

The machine moved, then lifted, then flew, before I could express my astonishment. "Don't be nervous," said my companion as he played with the controls, "it's a '48 model, 2948

model." "Did you say two th——?" "Yes, the very latest. But I'm late too. I am due at a lecture the day before yesterday, at the university, at 10.30." "The day before——" "Yes, but it's all right. This is the new faster-than-light model, and I am driving due east. If we keep on at this rate we shall manage it. Indeed it's yesterday already. Keep calm, we shall be there all right." And so he kept ticking off the seconds while I wondered what my wife would say when she found the lounge empty at our 11 a.m. coffee-time. But my powers of speech were mysteriously inhibited.

Presently he said: "Here we are, and ten minutes to spare," and he handed me out and led me across a spacious lawn toward a magnificent building in concrete, steel and glass. At last I found my speech. "What university is this, pray?" I said. "Well, it's an International, but this particular department is in Honolulu, as you see. Follow the fellows."

In a few minutes I found myself in a crowded lecture theatre, in front of a silver screen, on which was a moving picture of a Japanese, who said: "Good morning, gentlemen. I greet you to-day from my study in the centre of the Gobi desert, to which I have come for a few days' rest. Now let me begin my new course on the Victorian Era."

What followed I can make more vivid to my readers if I report what he said as best I can, in the first person, though I can only give a digest of his speech.

"You will note," he began, "that I speak of the Victorian era, and not as my conservative predecessors have done, of the reign of Victoria; for my researches have convinced me, and I hope to convince you, that there was no actual Queen Victoria. She was an eponymous hero, or shall I say 'Eponyma heroine', of the English race, before the remnants of that race trekked to Australia and left to the northern cold and mists those relics of buildings which doubtless once looked noble enough, but are now in their fragments only objects of interest to a few archaeological visitors.

"The name Victoria is, of course, a Latin word, and would hardly be adopted as a girl's name by that proud Teutonic race. But it meant victory in battle, and in the era of the greatest extent of the British Empire many statues inscribed 'Victoria' were erected all over Britain and they (or the fragments of them) can be seen to this day. Children would doubtless ask their parents

who 'the lady' was and would be answered 'Victoria', and in a short time she was spoken of as a person and stories that mirrored feminine charm and virtues were attributed to her in such numbers that *Lives of Victoria* were actually written and published. Some of them survive to this day.

"Did some priggish child say 'I will be good', it was fitted into an incident in the *Life*. If on another day an equally priggish woman snubbed a too frank raconteur with 'I am not amused', it was immediately dubbed as 'worthy of Victoria', and it was not long before it was attributed to this mythical being.

"When once you accept this explanation, many difficulties vanish. The English race in the 'Victorian' era did not allow women a vote in the elections, did not allow them to practise in the professions, and their parliament went so far as to assert that in their laws the phrase 'any person' did not include women. Is it reasonable to believe that such a half-civilised race, however brave in warfare, would allow themselves to be governed by a woman, have their parliaments summoned and prorogued at her whim, and even appoint for them their own high priests?

"But the era was nevertheless an important one, and worthy of more research than it has yet had given it. There are many monuments still standing, old documents are extant and some so-called histories, and I have in my own study fragments (some whole pages) of a chronicle called *The Times* which apparently was 'printed' regularly. Letters, too, written by some prominent citizens, have been preserved, and diaries. They are worthy of your attention, ladies and gentlemen. Study them, and write theses on them for your degrees.

"It was from such sources that I have been able to build up a biography of a Princess Elizabeth, undoubtedly an historical person, who was actually married in a big church whose foundations you may see on the north bank of the river Isis, or Tame-isis, contracted by the ignorant populace into Thames.

"But you must be careful in reading about her not to confuse her with a mythical heroine of the same name. The confusion is easy to a beginner because of some obvious 'doublets'. In the early life of the real (twentieth-century) Elizabeth there was a scholar of sorts, by name and style Sir Walter Raleigh. So there was in the reign of the mythical Queen Elizabeth. Both are said

to have been travellers, and historians, and both had interest in tobacco. It was a story in a *Times* that helped me with my English researches. It says that Sir Walter set out from Oxford (a city whose fame evidently depended on the motor cars which were made there), to go to America to lecture. An American citizen went to meet him, but he did not know what he was like, though at that time the process of photography was certainly known, probably only to few. It would be unknown in a dirty little manufacturing town such as Oxford must have been. Seeing a gentleman coming off the ship who looked like what the English called 'a learned clerk', he addressed him: 'Are you Sir Walter Raleigh?' The man thus addressed replied, 'My goodness, sir, no. I'm Christopher Columbus.' Obviously if he really was Columbus, the story is much earlier than even the earliest childhood of the real Elizabeth, and two stories have thus been telescoped into one.

"Do not mistake me. I am not suggesting that Christopher Columbus is a myth. There were in fact three men of that name, for in America and Europe there are three tombs of men thus described.

"But to return to 'Victoria', the mythical ancestress of the *historical* Elizabeth. Our story is a mass of contradictions. She became during her reign 'Empress of India', though we know well that India was not one country but a congeries of princedoms and races. The conquest of this 'Empire' was attributed to a man sometimes called Clive, sometimes Lord Beaconsfield, sometimes Disraeli. My own belief is that the great soldier was really Clive Beaconsfield, but that some Jewish writers, anxious to get glory for their own race, borrowed the name Israel and added it to his real name to make it read Clive Beaconsfield of (*de*) Israel.

"The same man is also credited with having suggested a 'Crystal Palace' for 'Victoria' to live in—an enormous structure of glass. There is no trace left of such a building, nor would it be in that cold climate a comfortable dwelling. But of course royal palaces often had a glass room heated and called a 'Conservatory' and out of that the story grew. Those of you who know how other Jewish writers 'made the Temple portable' and then described the 'Tabernacle in the Wilderness', will have no difficulty with the Victorian 'Crystal Palace'. The Victorian Era was no time for new royal palaces, for one of the senators,

from a Midland district called Brummagem, and himself spoken of as Mr. Chamberlain (actually the name in England not of a person but of an officer of state), proposed to abolish royalty and make England a republic. For this we may be sure he was beheaded, though there is no reference to this in any *Times* that I possess, though one torn page is headed 'Fall of the Chamberla . . . ' which we may be reasonably certain finished 'ins'.

"How did the Victoria Indian Empire end? The story is a strange one. No one dared to suggest that it ended in the Victoria era. No contemporary historian of that period even hints that it did end. But we may be sure that it did not end without a great war. Yet of that epoch-making upheaval not a single record remains, though there certainly was a series of battles extending over many years. The Indian Ocean must have literally been red with British blood before the British forces had to quit India. Did ever a great imperial power give up a vast part of its dominions without a terrific struggle? The question answers itself.

"But while we know nothing of the final campaigns, we do know, strangely enough, the name of the general who won the last battle, for he was carried to his funeral pyre while countless thousands shouted 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai', which means 'Victory (Victoria again) to Mahatma Gandhi'. Note the recurrence of the idea Victory, but referring there not to the queen, but to the overcomer of 'Victoria'. 'Mahatma' is obviously a corruption of the title 'Marshal', the highest rank in ancient European armies.

"The British historians, forbidden doubtless by the Chamberlains of their time, made no reference to the battles, imitating in this the ancient Egyptians who never recorded their defeats, but under the influence, obviously, of a story in their Scriptures (often referred to mysteriously as O.T.) do relate a story of the death of Gandhi. Certainly he must have died on the field of battle, but the British historians describe him as having been shot at a religious festival, and that by an Indian. The absurdity is obvious. It may be true, however, that a broken-hearted English general, in the disgrace of his defeat, disguised himself as an Indian and shot the triumphant warrior as he was about to offer up a thank-offering to his idols 'for the destruction of the British Army'."

I wish I could have stayed for the other lectures of the series, but my stranger-guide beckoned me away to his helpful 2948 model, which had hardly reached the Atlantic Ocean, with Britain within a few minutes' ride, when the wretched machine took a sudden dive. I remember no more till I saw my wife leaning over me as I lay on the lounge floor beside the sofa, and saying, "However did you manage that?" I had neither the strength nor the courage to explain.

ERNEST PRICE.

*Birmingham.*