

SOME REFLECTIONS ON HOW EMPIRE CAME TO US, AND CAN ALONE BE CONSERVED.¹

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AN Institute bearing the honoured name of "Victoria" may well enter upon such an inquiry as this. It was during that very Victorian Era that Dr. Vaughan once said: "It pleases the self-importance of a good many folk to think of themselves as perpetually passing through a crisis." It is no affectation to apply the word to things as they are to-day! When Mr. Joseph Chamberlain came to the Colonial Office in the same great reign he exhorted us as a people to "think Imperially." It was a call, as he meant it, not to enter upon a Crusade of Empire, but to wake up to existing world-responsibilities, and not to be too self-centred.

You will not find in this paper a story of great wars and their legacies. Nor will you be invited into the political arena. Other movements, quite outside these, will be examined, and such lessons as they may suggest will be noted. Nor will you find here any claim to scholarship or special research, but only plain thoughts and findings of a plain man for the plain man in the street or elsewhere to digest.

Perhaps it may be made clearer to you what sort of Empire it is that forms the subject of this paper, if I quote from the Prime Minister's recent speech at the Mansion House on the occasion of the City's welcome home to the Prince of Wales. He said: "It is the most remarkable Empire the world has ever seen—mighty, powerful, but loosely knit—no Dominion, but Dominions—no centre from which Dominion is exercised, from which you control and from which you direct, but a combination in partnership of free nations controlling themselves, free to choose their own path, free to choose their own population, free to make their own history." These are the conditions I have in mind as I enter upon some reflections as to how we became the cradle and centre of such a family of peoples.

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It will make for clearness if I select three dates from which to make excursions both before and behind, in seeking to account for the conditions which the Prime Minister has so eloquently and vividly described.

I.

I take first of all the year 1611. I invite you to stand in imagination on the steps of Hampton Court Palace and watch that historic Conference break up on completing a seven years' task which resulted in the possession by the English people, for the first time, of the Bible in their own language—not only enriching that language, but fixing it for all time as the language of the English people. First of all, look back from 1611. How has this position been reached? There is a passage in the Book of Samuel which reads thus: "The word of God was rare in those days: there was no open vision." That describes sufficiently many centuries of our English history. The loss to the Nation was great. The loss to the Church was greater. There was some foreign enterprise—notably the Crusades, but the zeal was misdirected. For the most part we were a quarrelsome people amongst ourselves, nor did we work any real deliverance abroad. But all the time, some light was on its way. We do not forget the translational work of the Venerable Bede, nor of our Great King Alfred. But we had to wait till the fourteenth century for the man who gave us the whole Bible in our own language, and who took steps to make it generally known. From the time of John Wycliffe—whose Bible was translated into English only half a century before the introduction of the printing press—the English people began to wake up!

A hundred years of Bible reading, under difficult conditions, brought in the greatest event in all our history—the English Reformation. I do not stay to speak of men, whether Kings, Prelates or Commoners. God can use, has used, all sorts of men for the working out of His purposes. It is enough to point out that when the Word of God was no longer rare, open vision began—vision of God, vision of what the Church was intended to be (and was not); vision, too, through an opening door, of a bigger world than the Englishman had ever known before. For these scholars, now emerging from Hampton Court, had produced from several versions what our Coronation Service now describes as "the most valuable thing this world affords!"

Let us now look a little in front of 1611. It is one of the romances of history that the open door waited upon and speedily followed the open book. No man thought of building up Empire when the voyage of *The Mayflower* was planned for 1620. And yet, in God's Providence, it happened only nine years after the authorized version of the Holy Scriptures was issued. But few things have done more to extend the Anglo-Saxon language and civilization than the fact that those Scriptures went forth in the hearts and lives and effects of those 1620 voyagers!

Take another illustration, which happens to come from a bit of Greater Britain that I know very well: On the first of August, 1920 (which happened to be a Sunday), an interesting celebration took place in the Island of Bermuda, which is within some 600 miles of Virginia in the North Atlantic—the last port at which the Prince of Wales touched in his late tour. The whole Island—Governor, Parliament, and people—went to church at, or gathered round the very spot where, in 1620 (and on that day), King James I had granted and established the first Parliament (outside London) of the English people! The Governor (Sir James Wilcocks) had a great story to tell, and the sermon preached on the occasion threw such light upon the spirit in which our brave but unconscious pioneers went through the newly opened door, that I must briefly quote. The Governor said: "Over 400 years ago, one Juan Bermudez, a Spaniard, had the good fortune to sight these Islands. I can imagine his surprise, but I cannot understand his want of taste in merely charting and then leaving them. Could he have foreseen that the day would come when Shakespeare would lay one of his immortal plays in these very Islands, and Thomas More would sing from its shores, surely he would have planted the flag of his most Catholic Majesty of Spain somewhere on the hills which surround this beautiful town. But so it happened as, in the history of the Anglo-Saxon race, has so often happened, is happening to-day, and will continue to do so—that instead of the standard of another power, the Union Jack was planted and still proudly floats over these enchanted islands.

"It was in 1609 (just two years before the Hampton Court Conference had completed its work) that Sir George Somers was wrecked here, and that era of progress began for which we thank God to-day." Here follow a few reminders (from the preacher) of

the spirit that animated these brave pioneers. Here, for example, is a collect then in use on arrival at a port among infidels: "Watch Thou over us, O Lord, and give us grace so to watch over ourselves that we may not anyways so misbehave ourselves that the Gospel which we profess may by our means be evil spoken of by them. Let us strive by all means to draw these heathen to faith in Thy Name."

Here is a prayer then in use in Virginia: "O Lord of mercies, look upon the Gentiles which know Thee not. Be merciful to us; and not to us alone, but let Thy way be known upon Earth, Thy saving health among all nations." Again, "May the heathen never say to us: 'Where is now thy God?' May they rather say: 'Blessed be the King and Prince of England, and blessed be the English Nation, and blessed be the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that sent them among us!'"

You will find in all the Charters under which our earliest colonies were established, a uniform acknowledgment of God, and the responsibility of His people to deal, on these high and noble lines, with England's Colonies and those who, in them, knew not God.

II.

Let us next look out backward and forward from the year 1807.

William Wilberforce was writing up his diary on March 25th, in that year, and he says this: "The King has given his assent this day to the Abolition of the Slave Trade. God will now bless this country. The first authentic news of the defeat of the French has come to-day." It had taken Wilberforce and his friends twenty long years to right thus a terrible wrong, and purge English merchandise of a dark stain. In order to understand and rightly appraise this great moral triumph it is necessary to look farther back still.

The one bright feature of the otherwise dreary eighteenth century was the Evangelical Revival, dating from 1734. That awakening in many parts of England is judged to have saved the Nation from revolution. It produced and inspired great philanthropic and missionary enterprise. And all such movements had more to do with Trafalgar and Waterloo than England has ever cared to guess.

If Quakers and Puritans were concerned with the overflow to America, no less were they foremost in this matter. The story is not as widely known as it deserves to be, of how Mr. Thomas

Clarkson (a Quaker) happened to see on his college notice-board at Cambridge, somewhere about 1782, that a prize essay in Latin would be competed for at a given time on the rights or wrongs of slavery, and was led to decide to enter his name. He tells us that long before he sat for the prize he was far more interested in the study than anything he might derive from it. He got the prize, and when riding up to London a day or two later, he thought much and deeply, and said to himself: "If half the things I have written down are really happening in the world, the sooner some one sees them to their end the better. But what can I do?" The answer came: "You can at least translate your essay into English, publish it, and send a copy to all your friends." (The place where this decision was reached on the road to London is still shown.)

Among the friends who received a copy was this same William Wilberforce, Member of Parliament for York, a churchman who came more and more under evangelical influence. And this essay had much to do with Mr. Wilberforce's resolve to dedicate his life to this abolition movement. Nor may it be generally known that one of the earliest results of the rising tide of discussion on this subject was a rush to London from the West Indies of English slave-owners with their slaves to protest against abolition. They thought that their slaves would be an object-lesson of the beneficence of slavery. But, unfortunately for their theory, the slaves became restive, and running away from their masters, the matter got into the law courts, and a long period of litigation went on, which terminated at length in the decision of Lord Justice Mansfield that slaves ceased to be slaves on landing on British soil.

It was this decision that determined Wilberforce's friends to found the Asylum in Africa to which I shall presently allude; and Lieut. Clarkson, R.N., was commissioned to go first to Nova Scotia, collect the Africans assembled there who had fought on our side in the American War of Independence, and (if they agreed) repatriate them in their own land. It was a big thing to do, but Clarkson successfully accomplished it, and did more to extend the Empire than he knew.

Take only this instance of unconscious empire-building connected with Wilberforce's twenty years' struggle in the House of Commons. The scene is laid in Western Africa. The time is about 1792. The Clapham Sect (as Wilberforce's friends were generally styled) had

decided on the purchase of a piece of land which might become an asylum for these hunted people. For the whole coast was a slave-market from which Europeans of all sorts were pushing the unholy traffic. They bought the hill country of Sierra Leone with honest money from the Temme people. They hoisted the Union Jack, and for twenty years it was the scene (under tremendous difficulties) of a magnificent philanthropy.

Again I have to call your attention to a diary. Lieut. John Clarkson, R.N., became the first Governor of this settlement. On a certain Sunday evening he writes thus on his ship in Sierra Leone Harbour: "I have been preaching on shore to-day, and I have said this to the people: 'I do not know five words of an African language; nor am I acquainted with five miles of the African interior, but I am certain that this small beginning now being made here means the turn of the tide in the fortunes of your race and is big with untold results to this land.'" If to-day God seems to be saying to us there, in Nigeria, in Uganda, in South Africa, and other parts, "Arise, go through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it," it is because men like Clarkson and many others on the West, because honoured C.M.S. Missionaries on the East, because Moffat and Livingstone on the South, stood for a moral and spiritual contact with African races, which, all unconsciously to them, has actually extended empire. And thus far, thank God, the British flag has been to all these races a symbol and guarantee of justice, fairness, freedom and progress.

Look again, this time forward, from 1807.

We come to 1834. The story is too familiar to be related in full, but it is not too much to say that the emancipation of the African in British Dominions (with liberal compensation), which came about as a necessary sequel to "abolition" through Fowell Buxton, in the teeth of mighty vested interests, was perhaps the finest bit of history we have ever made. It purged our good name. It righted a great wrong. And probably it had much more to do with the expansion of the Victorian Era than has been usually thought.

There are other and most interesting stories about the spread of our race in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. But I will only name here one further bit of expansion which came, in the early years of Queen Victoria's reign. It was in 1842 that China,

having ceded to us an island off its coast by the Treaty of Nanking, exchanged it and gave us Hong-Kong instead. I gathered the following facts on my visit to this now flourishing colony in 1909. The earliest traders on the spot were Scotch people (you will not be surprised to hear *that*). For two decades it was a most hopeless possession. The harbour was infested by pirates. Signal Hill on the Peak was the spot whence the pirates signalled the unhappy ships that were doomed to fall into their hands. At the best Hong-Kong was for long years a cave of Adullam for those who had made the mainland too hot for them. The foreshore, now so impressive, was a tow-path. The Chinese Government, with that remarkable acuteness that characterizes them in some ways, made the cession of Hong-Kong a dead letter by putting forth a Proclamation forbidding any Chinese to go and live there. It was the Tai-Ping Rebellion that made Hong-Kong. Cantonese merchants discovered the fairness, justice and freedom of the British Raj, and they flocked into Hong-Kong for safety. They soon made Hong-Kong and Hong-Kong made them. This was about 1861. It has only been during the last few years that Hong-Kong has assumed its present striking appearance. Its harbour registers the biggest tonnage of any city in the world. It is the gateway to the Far East, and from thence it is the doorway to the West.

It was very interesting to be there at that moment. Chinese merchants had been observing the beneficent influence on their sons of our C.M.S. St. Stephen's College. Archdeacon Barnett was turning out some excellent results. And these Chinese merchants (their fathers) went to the Governor (Sir Frederick Lugard of African fame) and said: "Why should we have to send our sons to Western Universities at tremendous risks in many ways? Why should not we have a Western University here?" The Governor told them that there was much to be said for it, but that it would mean a lot of money. They said: "We will subscribe the money." And they did! Thousands of pounds poured in. King Edward took much interest in the arrangements. And the result is that on these beautiful slopes stands to-day University buildings of which any country may be proud.

This University receives young men from all over the Province, and by the Governor's enlightened arrangement, Missionary Societies are allowed to have their hostels alongside!

The British Government has not always been so enlightened and so wise. Stories could be told about Khartoum and the Gordon Memorial College, about Nigeria, and several other parts of the world where the tendency has been all the other way, and the policy has been rather to patronize other faiths than to support the Religion that has made us what we are to-day.

III.

I come lastly to November 11th, 1918. General Bernhardt (and Germany with him) had completely misunderstood the sort of Empire which our Prime Minister sketched for us so vividly the other day. He had, in his book, *Germany and the Next War*, asked with contempt how we dared pretend to hold India with such a miserably small military establishment. Never were the ideals that have from the first inspired our scattered race and family more splendidly defended! Never was it more clearly demonstrated that there is something mightier than mere physical force! Mr. Lloyd George has said: "It is for the Churches now to build into the Nation the ideals for which we fought in the Great War." Looking ahead from 1918 there is no question more pressing than the consideration of how this Empire can be conserved. I will not touch upon the League of Nations. It is a step in the direction of the peace of the world for which we must be thankful, but it lies outside this inquiry. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." It is equally true of Nation and Empire.

There are clouds on the horizon! We have seen the great share which the Holy Scriptures had in the movements, reforms and revivals of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. We are seeing to-day many parts of those same Scriptures largely discredited by higher critics. The great majority of the Nation is standing aloof from Institutional Christianity, and trade disputes are threatening us with national bankruptcy!

Now *everything depends on what we are*, and on the use we make in the coming time of the wide roads that go out to all lands. They were given us, not for selfish uses, but to extend the Kingdom of our Lord. A small part of the Nation only has any real faith in this propaganda!

But there are some good signs. The Prince of Wales's personal

visits to the Empire have well won for him the title of "Our Greatest Ambassador." There is little doubt that our British Throne has remained secure in the midst of a period of wreckage of Thrones through the gracious personalities of the reigning house! It happened to the writer of this paper to hear, from the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Lords, a remarkable speech when the Prince of Wales was born. Lord Rosebery was seconding an address of congratulation to Queen Victoria on the event. He took occasion to trace the decline of monarchical power in this country through successive reigning houses. "But," he said, "what has been lost in power has been more than regained in royal influence. And that influence has been won through the manifold ways in which the Sovereign moves amongst and makes himself one with the people." I once had the opportunity of telling the Prince about this great speech, of which he said he had never heard, and which appeared to interest him. It has already been prophetic! He has come back from Australia just now bidding us "Pull together and pull through!"

Perhaps, as one who belongs by birth to one of those parts of the Empire that grew up when the Homeland was absent-minded, you will allow me, after fifty years now in the Mother Country, to point out that, while thankful for our Prince, we must not be *satisfied* with anything short of a national awakening to our unprecedented responsibilities.

The time when to be a colonist was regarded as belonging to a "lesser breed," has probably passed away. But in days like these, when strong racial instincts and national ideals are newly asserting themselves in many quarters, it behoves Englishmen who move amongst these peoples to be sympathetic, tactful, wise—wiser than some of them often are!

We are called to a great work, and we must let our thoughts expand to its greatness. "A great empire and little thoughts," as Burke asserted, "go ill together!"

An Indian gentleman said to the writer, when passing through his country ten years ago: "Concession will not cure the present unrest in India. The first Englishman who is overbearing and high-handed with the people will undo all the effect of the concessions made! The fact is—my people will almost worship the Englishman for his justice, fairness and impartiality, but when he

begins to call us 'niggers,' we hate him! There are great and noble exceptions to this latter, and we are not slow to recognize them." Many things have happened since these remarks were made in the spring of 1910. And a situation has since grown up in India that is full of menace to the British Raj. Never was the *Suaviter in modo* more necessary to link up with the *fortiter in re* than now. Never was it more necessary for the rulers to *understand* the ruled. Never was it more fatal to speak contemptuously and slightly of the various races that go to make up our Indian Empire. This will require considerable watchfulness and self-control. Even missionaries in India have confessed to the writer how hard it is for them always to be free from the consciousness that they belong to the ruling class!

Time was, too, a few years back, when African peoples were in the imitative stage of childhood. That stage is rapidly passing away. Race instincts are growing stronger, and demands are being made that it will be difficult to refuse. Let any one consider the racial problems of South Africa, the Negro problem in the United States of America, and the quite new problems (largely arising out of the recent war) in relation to the Jew, the Arab and the Moslem, and he will be compelled to agree that something more than a League of Nations is needed to keep the world at peace and our Empire undisturbed.

Nothing less than a fresh conversion to the ancient Law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . ." and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," will do it!

If we, as a people, charged with such vast responsibilities, will thus govern ourselves, we shall not only "pull together," but we shall "pull through."

There is something after all, however, bigger than the British Empire! If we, as a people, can serve our day and generation, and work for world-righteousness and world-peace, it will be well. But there are some serious facts that look in another direction, but which it is popular to-day to ignore. There is the fact of sin! There is the fact of the fall of man! There is the fact that mankind largely lost the power to govern when he ceased to obey! And here are signs that developments are going on in the direction of lawlessness and deterioration.

! Then, lastly and most mercifully, there is the fact of the Kingdom

of God—a Kingdom coming not with outward demonstration! Its foundations have been well and truly laid. The Spirit of its King is already at work amongst us. The time may not be far off when “He shall have put down all rule, all authority and power, for He *must* reign.”

Let this goal be kept well in view. It will correct all wrong tendencies in the matter of race feeling and race pride—a sin that may most easily beset us! Nothing will humble us, nothing will quicken high resolve, nothing more surely increase our influence for good, than a return to the primary duty of world-witness! What will this mean? It will mean that we are not out to get the world converted in a given time, not out even to make heathen nations into Christian nations, but to give out a clear-cut witness to Jesus Christ and to see that in all our world-travels, world-trade and Imperial administration this witness is not blurred by our own shortcomings and inconsistency. The Lord said, “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth.” He also said, “Ye shall receive power.” No nation has ever been granted such influence, such prestige, such a base of operations before! If we will “think imperially” in this higher and more catholic sense, we shall surely see, gathered out from all these peoples and races, a Kingdom that shall not pass away, and our own Empire, which we have seen grow and expand in so unexampled a manner, will have served its day of opportunity according to the Will of God.

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