

THIS MIGHTY HOUR

nations sail the seas no longer, and every estuary is lined with gaunt reminders of a past glory and prosperity. "And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea" bewail the ruin that has befallen them. [Revelation 18:11,17]

And from the heart of poor, suffering humanity rises a cry for help and deliverance. Its hopes have been shattered. Its precious trinkets, so eagerly grasped in the days of prosperity, have dissolved in its hands. The pleasant things that do so much to make life worth living have been taken away. Forces beyond its control have spoiled all its beautiful dreams and trampled ruthlessly upon its fair ambitions.

The situation is full of tremendous possibilities. Will the multitudes who have been crushed so overwhelmingly in the depression remain passive in silent despair? Will they seek to drown their sorrow in riotous debauchery? Will the old restraints break under the terrific strain? Will the primeval instinct of self-preservation stir men's hearts into a flame of bitter hatred against the world order that has permitted, if not brought about, their ruin?

ONLY ONE HOPE

In all the uncertainty that exists, there is one consoling fact. The cry of the poor and the broken-hearted has at least one attentive ear. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue fails for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." [Isaiah 41:17]

The sorrows of the world are not hidden from God. He who "heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds" [Psalm 147:3] is not unmindful of the widespread misery that engulfs the creatures of His hand today. Indeed, the very extent of the tragedy, the hopelessness of it all, the utter inability of man to find a way out, is the surest guarantee that the hour for divine intervention has arrived.

"Behold," says the prophet Isaiah, "a King shall reign in righteousness and a Man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." [Isaiah 32:1,2.]

When God would take His people over Jordan He waited until the river overflowed its banks. Then, when thick mud and deep water covered the valley, and the prospects of taking an army through it could not have been worse, He bade the priests of Israel step into the flood. The waters rolled back and the people passed over.

Today we face a flood far worse than Jordan. We have reached the supreme crisis. And in this mighty hour we need the help of God. There is no hope apart from Him. There is no way out but His way.

But He has a way. The path through this, Jordan is known to Him. The world cry for deliverance will not go unheard nor unanswered. His plans are ready; and the time for their execution draws near.

"Every problem confronts us at once and in its most acute form. And no country or continent is exempt. An economic depression deepened by a financial crisis has spread impoverishment over both hemispheres. Revolutions arrested once are now again threatened. The dispatches of our daily papers announce new strokes of late in unending succession, like the messengers of Job, each heralding disaster. 'And while he yet spoke, there came another.'" Sir Arthur Salter, K.C.B

3. DIVISIONS AND DISSENSIONS

COMPLICATING the economic situation and adding to the misery of mankind is the intense rivalry and competition between the scores of national groups into which the world's population is divided. Truly the scattering at Babel was well and thoroughly done. And the sins of those pioneer builders have certainly been visited upon their children unto many generations.

Nothing would so help to change the present outlook as a spontaneous movement towards co-operation on the part of every nation. A genuine offer from all to give the utmost possible help in the work of reconstruction would work wonders in a week. Imagine what would happen if on a sudden every nation willingly removed its tariff barriers and destroyed all its armaments beyond police requisites! Suppose there were a general surrendering of "rights" in one great unselfish gesture! What a mighty trade revival there would be!

But it is too good to be true. Such an eventuality is as remote as the Pleiades. Men have dreamed such dreams before. Through the centuries visionaries have talked and written of "the brotherhood of man" and the possibility of a world federation of states. Not long before his death that great statesman and peacemaker M. Briand dared to advocate a "United States of Europe." But the frigid reception of his plan

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soon dashed his hopes. Many paid lip service to his “lofty idealism,” but none was willing to make any sacrificial contribution to secure its success.

DISINTEGRATION

Never was international co-operation so sorely needed, and never did it seem less likely to happen. Drifting apart seems more in fashion than pulling together. The singing of national songs and the waving of national flags is much more popular than any blending of interests for the common good. Even language areas that for centuries have been more or less contented provinces of larger countries are growing restive and demanding recognition of their “historic rights.”

The Irish Free State breaks away from Britain and revives a practically dead language for the use of its three million inhabitants. Wales agitates for the right to fly its “Red Dragon” beside the Union jack. Scotland develops a national party with hopes of breaking the Union some day.

On the Continent similar tendencies manifest themselves. Before Hitler seized power it was generally expected that the whole German Union was on the point of breaking up into its original sections. As for the new-born states created out of the remnants of the Austrian empire, their artificial composition, embracing large antagonistic groups that never desired amalgamation, makes them a constant source of anxiety.

The process of disintegration and separation has been carried to the utmost limits of folly. The immense tariff barriers raised by every nation amount to a virtual refusal to trade. Forgetting the Pauline maxim that no man can either live or die unto himself, each and all are saying, “We must protect ourselves, we must keep all available work for our own people, we must keep out the foreigner and his goods.” Thus each little group thinks that it can dwell more securely alone under its own vine and fig-tree, failing to remember the ancient proverb: “There is that scattered, and yet increased; and there is that withhold more than is meet, but it tends to poverty.” [Proverbs 11:24].

ROPES OF SAND

Meanwhile the world has not lacked men - and women, too-with vision and courage enough to attempt to break the evil spell which seems to have bewitched the nations. All sorts of societies and organizations have been created with the object of bringing about a better understanding between the various peoples. Leagues to promote international peace and good will abound. Advantage has been taken of the idealism of unspoiled youth, the common hopes of women, and the friendliness and faith of little children. No efforts have been spared in the noble endeavor to bind the nations together in the bonds of a new and better friendship, and millions of pounds have been gladly poured out as an oblation to this glorious vision.

But the bonds, alas, are only ropes of sand. The masses listen to the apostles of brotherhood as Israel once listened to Ezekiel. They grant that these idealists have “a pleasant voice” and sing “a very lovely song,” but after they bear their words “they do them not.” [Ezekiel 33:32] The pleading for fellowship and co-operation falls upon deaf ears. The radiant picture of a new world where nations bear each others’ burdens and move on towards a common goal, fades away almost before it is uttered. Hard facts of life, old, bitter memories, cruel human greed, combine to blot it out. Immediate needs, the avenging of wrongs, the attaining of some selfish ambition, seem more important, and to these the foolish, misguided peoples return “as dogs to their vomit”.

FORMER ATTEMPTS AT FUSION

Glancing back over the centuries one sees that this desire to blend the nations into one harmonious whole is no new ambition. Many kings and queens have entertained it, only their methods of bringing about the desired fusion have differed rather widely from their modern counterparts.

It is said that even the ex-Kaiser once dreamed dreams of world dominion. And who shall say that Queen Victoria never considered the creation of a great sister hood of nations as she beheld her sons and daughters, nephews and nieces, marrying into all the royal families of Europe until there was scarcely one royal house unrelated to herself, while in the ends of the earth her merchant princes and adventurers

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founded many a mighty state?

Napoleon certainly made a bold attempt at world sovereignty, as did also Charles the Fifth and Charlemagne. But somehow all such plans failed. Details went wrong. Just when success seemed imminent, a battle was lost or a revolution broke out. Sometimes from the most unexpected quarter opposition sprang up. As the molten metal of a conquered world seemed to be setting into one consolidated mass, cracks appeared. The iron was always mixed with clay.

Bestriding “the narrow world like a colossus,” the Emperor Napoleon, with consummate audacity, placed his relatives and friends on the thrones of Europe. French ascendancy over the whole Continent seemed well nigh complete. But ambition for yet wider dominion led him to Moscow. Success seemed again within his grasp. Then the unexpected happened. Fire and snow fought against him. And in that tragic retreat across the blizzard-swept plains of Russia the flower of his army perished.

FAILURE OF ALLIANCES

In like manner alliances which bound certain European states together in the nineteenth century perished in the holocaust of 1914. Solemn treaties of peace and concord turned as it were to ashes in the flames of war. Wood relationships availed nothing. Ties of friendship and family straightway dissolved. All the intricate system of royal intermarriage, so carefully developed through half a century, collapsed in ruins. The kings themselves lost their thrones. Emperors fled, or were massacred. Scores of minor potentates surrendered their coronets. Abdication became for a time almost a daily occurrence. Europe resounded to the fall of the mighty. There was a cataract of crowns.

When it was all over, and the noise of battle had died away, the world was seen to be more divided than ever. Through severely chastened, its old hatreds and suspicions remained. National groups, long crushed by stronger powers, demanded their freedom and independence. New boundaries had to be drawn, and when peace at last was signed there were more divisions and longer frontiers than there had been for generations. The fires even of such an inferno had brought no fusion.

FOUR WORLD EMPIRES

To find a time when one great power achieved universal rule one must needs trace history back to the days of the Caesars. True, before Rome ruled, other empires had enjoyed dominion over the then-known world. In direct succession Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Grecia had held, for their allotted span, undisputed sway. In those early times one supreme ruler was the order of the day. There was no change of government unless the whole dynasty was swept away by some invading host.

It was the decline and fall of the Roman empire which completely altered the course of history. Upon the ruins of that once all-powerful and all-prevailing empire, whose iron rule had brought civilized Europe and parts of Asia and Africa under its dominion, there arose ten separate kingdoms. Its vast territories were divided. Seizing the opportunity created by Rome’s decay, the so-called “barbarian” tribes, that had for years been gathering along her distant frontiers, gazing covetously at the fair fields and cities of her wide domain, poured in like an overwhelming flood. Each group seized the section it desired and set up its own primitive form of government. A new era began with the overthrow of Romulus Augustus in AD 476. Western Rome was then broken up into the ten kingdoms predicted in the prophecy of Daniel. Though unperceived at the time, the history of modern Europe had commenced.

Ever since then the divisions have remained. Every attempt to cement them together again has failed. Always something has stood in the way. Language difficulties; old grievances, unrighted wrongs, unalleviated hardships, divergencies of outlook, religious animosities, differing standards and valuation of life—all have contributed to keep the peoples apart. Though the strongest and wisest men have set themselves to overcome the obstacles, they have invariably suffered defeat. Always, against every device of man to the contrary, world forces have proved the truth of the divine forecast, “They shall not cleave together.”

“THEY SHALL NOT CLEAVE”

The ancient prediction in which these Words occur is of particular interest in this connection.

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Incredible as it may seem to some, the very situation described above was outlined in prophecy twenty-five centuries ago. While Rome was an unknown village, before MedoPersia or Greece had tasted world dominion, the pen of inspiration had already drawn the picture of modern Europe that we see today.

The channel used by God for this amazing revelation was a young Jewish nobleman, named Daniel, a captive in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. His sterling character and exceptional wisdom had so impressed the monarch that he had invited him to join the official staff of counselors to the court.

One night Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a dream that greatly troubled him. In the morning he found that the dream had gone from his mind, though its vivid impression remained. Convinced that he had been given a revelation of unusual importance, he sent for his wise men and demanded that they tell him forthwith both the dream and its interpretation.

Such a task was beyond them, and they were forced to admit it. Whereupon the king, with the impetuosity characteristic of eastern potentates, commanded that they all be slain. Daniel, of course, was involved, but with great courage he sought audience of Nebuchadnezzar and took upon himself the responsibility of meeting the king's requirements and so saving the lives of his associates.

The interview over, and time being granted him, he sought his immediate friends and set the position before them. Together they knelt in prayer. Doubtless the imminent peril made their prayers more earnest than they had ever been before. Certainly God heard them.

A KING'S DREAM

That night Daniel saw in vision the very dream that had appeared the previous night to the king, and in addition the meaning of it all was made plain to him. Early in the morning he arose, his heart full of thanksgiving. His beautiful prayer on this occasion is one of the choicest passages of Scripture:-

"Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: and He changes the times and the seasons: He removes kings, and sets up kings. He gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. He reveals the deep and secret things. He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him. I thank Thee, and praise Thee, O Thou God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and might, and has made known unto me now what we desired of Thee: for Thou has now made known unto us the king's matter." [Daniel 2: 20-23.]

Exultingly, yet with most commendable humility, he returned to the palace. The king was expecting him, skeptical no doubt as to the result of the interview, and perhaps regretting that his decree made it necessary that this fine young man should be put to death.

"The secret which the king hath demanded," began Daniel, "cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that reveals secrets, and makes known to the King Nebuchadnezzar what shall be lit the latter days."

The conviction in the young man's voice, born of certain knowledge, stirred the king to the depths. One can almost see him leaning forward with eagerness to catch the next sentences.

"As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and He that reveals secrets makes known to thee what shall come to pass." Then followed the recounting of the dream.

"Thou, O king, saw, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou saw till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors. And the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." [Daniel 31-35]

It was the very dream the king had seen and forgotten! . Every detail was perfectly drawn. Nothing was missing. His very inmost thoughts had been read by another. This was miraculous. Breathlessly he waited for the promised interpretation.

"This is the dream," went on the youthful prophet, and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king."

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THE INTERPRETATION

"Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And where so ever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath He given into your hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold."

A smile of satisfaction passed over the king's countenance, turning almost immediately, however, into a frown of puzzled anxiety as the young man continued:

"And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things: and as iron that breaks all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

"And whereas thou saw the feet and toes, part of potter's clay, and part of iron, THE KINGDOM SHALL BE DIVIDED but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou saw the iron mixed with miry clay".

"And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.

"And whereas thou saw iron mixed with miry clay, THEY SHALL MINGLE THEMSELVES WITH THE SEED OF MEN: BUT THEY SHALL NOT CLEAVE ONE TO ANOTHER, EVEN AS IRON IS NOT MIXED WITH CLAY."

THE FUTURE UNVEILED

Like a flash the veil of the future dropped and both prophet and king found themselves gazing enraptured across the vast, enthralling landscape of history-to-be. In the foreground rose the golden domes of Babylon; not far distant the silvered heights of the coming Medo-Persian kingdom lifted themselves towards the skies. Farther on rose the brazen pinnacles of Greece, and beyond, the dark outline of the peaks of the Roman kingdom were clearly visible. Beyond these still, their eyes witnessed a time of confusion and chaos, division and dissension, with Rome partitioned, and each separate nation fighting desperately for its own existence. They beheld mighty plans on foot to fuse the broken iron into one great whole again, and the constant failures through the presence of the ineradicable clay. They looked upon events even of our own time and saw the main outlines of modern European politics.

And then? Suddenly through the blue mist on the far horizon a majestic, stupendous scene arrested their attention.

"And in the days of these kings," said the prophet, "shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed. And the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

"Forasmuch as thou saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold. The great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." [Daniel 2:44,45]

Like a mighty beacon this amazing prophecy shines down the centuries, illuminating the great events of time. Glittering on the gold of Babylon, shimmering on the silver of Medo-Persia, glinting on the brass of Grecia, shining on the iron of Rome, lighting up the struggles and conflicts of the modern world, it glows at last upon the face of the King of kings as He comes back to the earth in His glory.

The very existence of this prophecy gives added significance to the events discussed in this chapter. The fact that so much of the vision has come true already is powerful, convincing evidence that the unfulfilled balance will yet take place. Indeed, there is nothing left now but the final consummation and the setting up of God's eternal kingdom. Can it be that even the national dissensions and rivalries of our time are but the shadows cast before by this coming event? Are they indeed but further indications that we are approaching the supreme crisis of this mighty hour?

"Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: and He changes the times and the seasons. He removes kings, and sets up kings. He gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. He reveals the deep and secret things: He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him." Daniel 2:20-22.