

ETHIOPIA

Its Mystery and Significance
as Portrayed in Holy Writ

By

REVEREND ALFRED COOK, M.A.

Kinosota, Manitoba



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WAS it not the novelist Rider Haggard who wrote "*En Africo aliquid novum semper venit*, Out of Africa something new always comes". Whether this was so or not, the advent of Ethiopia into the limelight of history would seem to be an example in point, but altogether without those fictitious features which may have added a certain type of interest to Haggard's stories. And yet there are certain features in relation to the present Ethiopian trouble which, though accepted as only too true, would even in those days have been regarded as fictitious. And what may be stranger yet, Ethiopia figures in a brief story which antedates by many centuries the day of fiction. Yet some particulars of this story may be regarded by many as of doubtful credit. But which, if accepted as such, would seriously impair the faith of our common Christianity, as well as belief in Divine Supremacy, and cast reflection upon the Divine plan of redemption for the whole human race.

A story, that might work such disastrous results, is well worthy of a few moments' consideration.

Such may be found like a precious gem in a setting of gold in relation to Christianity, and composed by an Author of more than humanitarian instinct and erudition, in the Book of the "Acts of the Apostles". (Ch. VIII vv. 26-40).

The story is that of the Ethiopian ambassador of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, who was baptized by Philip, the Greek, a citizen of the Latin Roman Empire. It is narrated in so plain and simple terms, without any attempt at exaggeration and so familiar to everybody that it is quite unnecessary to repeat it.

There are, however, so many suggestions that could be read between the lines that would add interest to the story that it might be a matter for regret to omit them.

For example; Queen Candace is introduced simply by her title, not even by a complete sentence. Yet how her character does seem to become more interesting as we think of her living in an age of nearly two thousand years ago. So far away from the centres of business and learning, and yet rich and religiously

inclined as her ambassador seems to have been. And he, a man of great authority, possessing the confidence of his queen, as well as having the care of all her treasures. How is it that he comes so great a distance with such a following of servants, to fulfill his religious obligations. He certainly would command our respect and we would be pleased to learn more about the people, their habits and customs, as well as their way of living from day to day. How did the Bible come among them even if it was only a small part of it, and how were they able to read it, and to know what it contained. We can be quite sure too that they thought about other things than those just around them, perhaps of other countries, other worlds, and very likely of another higher and better life.

Such thoughts would lead us to put away superstition or idolatry, or any such like form of religion from their lives. But at the same time we would be captivated by the thought that they believed that Sovereigns and their people were in existence for some higher purpose than to waste life on the temporary things of this life and world.

So too we are caught by the thought that this short and abrupt story seems to hinge upon the mode of entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven or of God. And therefore we can read it again, to learn how this feature is brought about, and what deductions we may make from it.

When Philip, the disciple, met the Ethiopian he found him reading a prophecy of Isaiah about the Atonement of the Messiah which he could not understand. So then Philip explained the whole matter up to the Crucifixion. The Ethiopian then expressed his desire to be baptized by Philip, which the disciple did on the statement of his confession,—“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”.

This confession reminds us of that made by Peter: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God”. (Matt. XVI, 16). Which confession the Master considered of such significance, that He declared that upon it He would build His “Ecclesia”, *i.e.*, His “Elect” or His “Chosen”. Thus Philip decided that the Ethiopian, on this conviction of his soul was capable to become one of these “Elect”, so he baptized him.

This incident now also reminds us of that conversation which the Master had with Nicodemus when it turned upon the feature of entrance into the Kingdom of God. The Master described it as a New, or Second, Birth. And when Nicodemus could not

understand what the Master meant, He advised Nicodemus not to be surprised when He said: "Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

There is a peculiar fitness to this story of the Ethiopian to that part of the expression which states: "Canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth". Let us draw the comparison: "Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians"—comes like a meteor flashing through the limitless expanse of human history and with such speed that she is gone, before we can even raise a finger to draw any one's attention,—but whence she comes or whither goes, we cannot tell.

Her ambassador like a beam of light suddenly filtering through the threatening clouds appears in the heavenly or spiritual world just sufficiently long to intimate what blessings there may be in the world's greatest tragedies when considered under the light that the Holy Spirit affords. His all too brief biography is noted—but whence it comes or whither goes, we cannot tell.

Philip, better known than the others, comes at the prompting of the Messenger of the Unknown and is taken away by a method that may not be explained; how he comes and how he goes we cannot tell. And if it should happen that the moral of the story is in danger of being overlooked this provision seems to have been made that we may note the supernatural character of it even though we may not be able to tell—whence it comes or whither it goes.

The story comes in to the sacred page without introduction and without comment as to its purpose—of its coming and going we cannot tell.

As a page of, or in, Holy Writ we turn the page and it appears; again we turn the page, it disappears with no relation to preceding or following context. It is lost as if it never had been.

The whole story in all its detail breathes and spells the nature of every one that is born of the Spirit, and yet the consequence and inspiration is always in evidence. We believe it in spite of these features of uncertainty.

One more glance ere we take leave of it and quicker than the speed of sight we perceive that Divine Supremacy has so

declared Itself that we are not satisfied until we so believe. So is he that is born of the Spirit.

We fain would ask, is this the province of the subconscious mind or soul? Whether or not, these two incidents relating to Nicodemus and the Ethiopian are not to be considered ends in themselves but as stepping stones to higher truth and active service. They constitute the core of the Gospel message to home and foreign field. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The body or flesh is akin to the water. The spirit is akin to the inspiration, or coming up out of the water. For this seems to be the moment when by Matthew and Mark—the Master, and by the Book of the Acts—the Ethiopian, were inspired to proceed immediately to their life's ministry.

Reference to a conversation of the Master has thrown such light upon this incident as to immortalize it as a shining and practical example of the Spiritual, or Second, Birth of the Holy Spirit.

If now we would view it in the light of the Messianic Ministry we must do so in a corporate sense. This is possible in the example before us, and may have been intended as a lesson we should learn from it.

Philip, the Christian disciple, practically incorporated into one Body the Roman, the Greek, and the Ethiopian in the Spirit or Ministry of Jesus Christ. Had this process continued uninterrupted there seems to be no reason why all nations should not have been incorporated into the same Body by a similar process. But from actual facts and circumstances such has not been the case. It is also quite true, however, that by missionary enterprise nearly, if not all, nations are now possessed of that Spirit, or Ministry, in more or less degree, but not of sufficient strength to constitute them as one uniform whole. The arm of political rule yet holds the balance of power, and is capable of ruling for good or evil the nation which it controls. But again the Ministry of the Master may also be said to possess citizens to constitute His Kingdom as the most Universal on earth.

It is to the citizens of this Kingdom that the angel of the Lord would speak— Go, direct your attention to the nations of the world. And what is the vision, that, amid the confusion of voices, would press itself to the forefront to secure our attention? Lo, the Ethiopian and Roman nations, not the individual so much as the nation. Is it a baptism? It is, but one of blood.

Call it physical death if you will, but into the warp and woof of the tragedy you will find inseparably woven spiritual death, with all the attendant horrors of physical suffering, destruction, disease, and death.

We stand breathless with amazement and awe at the vision, and would be much more so if we could witness specific tragedies. And, no doubt, the first thought that would press in upon us on the standard of corporate judgment would be— Is this just a side issue, or the climax, of our boasted civilization, or our attitude in religious expression? It may be the Roman, the Ethiopian, and the Christian disciple. But may we resolve them now into a similar relation, grown to maturity, as we view them on the page of Holy Writ? It is impossible. The cry of the Ethiopian is the challenge to the Christian on the meaning and efficiency of Pure Christianity.

Where is the Spirit that united in one the Roman and Ethiopian in the days of their greater dominion and independence? Has He disappeared with the Christian disciple? Or where is His power to inspire, and the concomitant merits of the Atonement to purify? Had they been present as in the first century this tragedy never would have been.

Where then is the Christian disciple? Has he been ignored? The centuries of time hath wrought changes, and we must look among those changes to find the missing link. He has been referred to above as being well nigh ubiquitous. How then may we account for his absence from this political tragedy in our presence.

Perhaps it was just for such a similar reason that the disciple found the Ethiopian reading the record of prophecy which he failed to understand, *viz.*, that he may discover the object of his search.

WE ALSO have a Book of Prophecy which was evidently written for our time. Why may we not turn to it, if perchance we may find what our histories of humanity have failed to set forth.

It is scarcely necessary to state that this Book is that of the Revelation of Saint John the Divine, the last in our Biblical text book, a very suggestive relation for the last message of God to man. Present space will permit of only one statement and its subsequent references, and all in a manner as briefly as possible. That statement is found in Chap. VIII: 13, as follows:

“And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst

of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of three angels, which are yet to sound."

The first feature to rivet our attention is the comparative similarity to the former in the angel, or messenger speaking to the inhabitants of the earth, as he did to Philip. And here again we note the corporate Body addressed instead of the individual. These "inhabiters" according to the usual interpretation of the expression means the citizens of the Latin Roman empire, or territory when the empire disintegrated.

These woes intimate disasters to these people. The first hovered around the decimation, and after, of the empire and was completed about the eighth century. The second was not completed until the sixteenth century, and the third continued on from then to the present and passes on into the future.

The prophecy over which the Ethiopian was puzzled was composed about the eighth century B.C. and referred to the trial and crucifixion of the Messiah. The eighth century B.C. marked the beginning of the history of Rome. So that from that time to the end of the first woe, marked the whole régime of that which has been one of the most wonderful of world empires the world has ever witnessed.

From the end of the first woe to that of the second, history is quite conversant with the régime of a politico-ecclesiastical organization known as the Church of the Middle Ages. This organization was recognized as built upon the ruins of the defunct empire, and appeared as the image or likeness of the former, but in ecclesiastical dress.

She attained her politico-ecclesiastical expansion to bounds far beyond expectation, when suddenly by the end of the second woe she was cleft in two, and with the beginning of the third woe the spirit of Reform began; and her power and authority began to ebb and contract under the influence of Non-conformity. Until finally through the principles of Reformation and what may be termed disciplined Free-thought she was reduced to the abject condition of a captive in her own state. So the present condition seems to be that the Mother Church is the captive of her own political Child.

Whether as a compensation to this or not, she was, about the year of her incarceration, by a solemn decree, declared "Infallible" when speaking "ex cathedra". But what reliance

may be placed upon the Mother's infallibility, when any declaration may be vetoed by the Child?

Has the world ever been in such need of an "Infallible" pronouncement? The prospect is hopeless in view of the circumstances that attend it. Where then may we look for a solution? Before we attempt to reply to this question let us look a little further into prophecy.

It is during the régime of the third woe that the seven vials are outpoured. Space again permits of only a brief reference to the seventh. Chap. XVI, v. 17. "And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air, and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done."

These vials are described as "the wrath of God" (v. 1). This casts a reflection upon our impression of the Deity. They are intended to be regarded rather as retributive judgments. Primarily they are warnings against the abuse of Divine blessings which, if ignored, result in retributive judgment upon man.

This prophecy closes with a tone of finality in the words, "It is done". Nor may its Author be questioned. But by way of emphasis rather than contradiction, it may be said that the word (gegonen) translated as "It is done" may also convey the sense of "It has become", which seems to suit the context more fittingly.

Now "Air" here is symbolic of a medium by which prophecy is fulfilled in the greater exercise of its laws and conditions.

As a warning, or blessing, we (in Canada) are immediately made conscious of its virtues in the use of radio and aeroplane. How, when other conditions (employed for years) fail, messages are sent over the air simultaneously to all parts of our broad Dominion, and to all parts of the world. Acts of mercy during the season of a rigorous winter in conveying the sick to hospitals, and food and clothing to lost and marooned far from help, by the aid of aeroplane. Blessings almost unbelievable, though they happen before our very eyes. And these are only the beginning of what may yet be.

Contrast these with the one factor employed in the present war, of bombing by aeroplane, tearing human beings to pieces, and destroying homes, hospitals, etc., etc. We require not one more illustration of man's inhumanity to man as well as the inconceivable abuse, and conversion of blessings into curses, which must at some future time bring retributive judgment

upon those responsible for such, just as though it were God's wrath upon the wicked. Nor is it forgotten that this was made evident during the World War.

"In this sense "Air", which so appropriately symbolizes the medium between earth and heaven, or between heathenism and Christianity, "has become" polluted with the sins of semi-paganism, or semi-Christianity. It is quite unnecessary to follow this horrible example any further. Suffice it to say that we seem to have come to the end of one feature of the prediction of Prophecy. And worse far than ever, without proclaiming the fact, it has complicated and has become a terrible reflection upon the silence of the "Captive Mother" and the deeds of the "Political Child".

Such a conclusion literally forces the world to search and re-search the pages of our inimitable Book of Prophecy, and learn whether it is not to the Child of Reform and divinely disciplined Free-thought that we must turn for a solution. That Child too has now grown to years of discretion, and may speak for himself.

He has already been described as well nigh ubiquitous and as a silent Messenger he takes his stand at the crossroads of Christianity and paganism. He requires not so much the erudite education of a walking encyclopedia in things pertaining to government, ritual, and order as a practical and trusting faith in the prompting of the Holy Spirit and merits of the Atonement. So that when he meets the wayside traveller he may be prepared to preach unto him Jesus, with that power of conviction that when he perceives water, *i.e.*, the water of affliction, depression, or war or any such like he may also perceive that his very experience in these things affords him the opportunity to perceive the merits of the Atonement to cleanse all these imperfections, and so requests Baptism. The assurance comes to him: If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. Conquering Christianity will suggest the plea "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God", for this is the Watchword that opens the door of the Ecclesia to all believers. Such a confession as this is capable of halting the world's chariot that its occupant may be born of the Spirit and baptized with the Baptism of repentance for the Remission of sins. Then, and then only, will that occupant be able to continue his long journey to his better home. Thus will the challenge of the Ethiopian be met and the victory of Christianity over paganism in every form and degree be assured.

