

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

One of the greatest obstacles to the acceptance of the teachings of the Church is the insistence on the part of some theologians of all denominations upon the unquestioning belief in the literal accuracy of every statement contained in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis. Nowhere does the writer of these chapters make any claim whatever for the infallibility of his statements. He, or they, for there may have been more than one person concerned in the composition of these chapters, relates what is therein told as one might write today, if he endeavored to deal with the history of the Roman Empire in the space of a magazine article. Just when it was written in the first place and how many transcriptions of it were made until these versions were reached from which modern translations have been made is surely conjectural. The history of the English language shows the meaning attached to words changes in the process of time. It is necessary even in reading the King James translation of the Bible to explain occasionally that some English words used therein are not employed in the same sense now as they were when that translation was made. Therefore to insist that the words used by translators now are to be understood as a literal and absolutely accurate representation of the meaning, which an unknown writer, in an unknown language, at an unknown period, and under unknown circumstances, intended to convey, seems to demand a degree of credulity which an intelligent man is justified in declining to concede. No difficulties need ever have arisen out of the chapters referred to, if ecclesiastical authority had not insisted that they possess a character which is not claimed for them by the authors or authors.

The story of the Tower of Babel is one of those narratives upon which nothing of any importance depends. It is introduced in the midst of a genealogical table, having no necessary connection with what preceded it and none whatever with what follows. It is apparently intended to show how it came about that the descendants of Noah spoke different languages. The divergence between the speech of the several nations of mankind must always have been a fruitful topic of speculation, and especially when it was a part of the Hebrew tradition that at a comparatively recent period in point of time all people were sprung from a single family, it seemed necessary to suggest some explanation of the varieties among the languages of the surrounding tribes. There was an actual Tower of Babel. It was a prodigious edifice, supposed to have been 600 feet high. On its summit was a silver shrine devoted to the worship of Bel, the Sun-god. The tower was built by Nimrod, king of Assyria, and was of various colors, and it must have been an object of marvelous beauty. The imagination can hardly conceive anything more imposing than the appearance that would be presented by this structure, when its silver summit caught the rays of the rising sun. The people called it Babel, or the Gate of God. The Hebrews, misled by a similarity of sound to that of their own word "babble," purposely desiring to draw a lesson from the destruction of the great edifice, called it the Tower of Confusion. Dean Stanley thus describes what the view from the top of the tower must have been like: "The white marble balustrade of the balcony over the natural color of the bricks was left, must have been strikingly contrasted with the rainbow hues with which most of them were painted, according to the fancies of their owners, whilst all the intervening spaces were filled with the variety of gigantic palms in the gardens or the thick jungles or luxuriant groves by the side of the silver canal, or in the early spring, the carpet of brilliant flowers that cover the hillside plain within the walls, and the sea of waving corn both within and without, which burst from the teeming soil with a prodigious and plentiful that the Grecian traveler dared not risk his credit by stating its enormous magnitude."

Such was the Tower of Babel of which the Bible knows historically, and it is not surprising that traditions of it preserved by the descendants of Abraham represented it as a structure built so that the top thereof would reach to Heaven, and they with their customary practice of thinking of Jehovah as not very unlike themselves, should attribute to him a belief that a people, who could erect such a tower, could accomplish anything that they set out to do. St. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the Christian Fathers, did not hesitate to characterize the story of Babel as "Jewish babble." Two ancient writers say that the tower was overthrown by the winds. The most recent description of the structure has been culled from the legend of Chobolus, one of the British Museum. From this it is inferred that it was erected before 2000 B.C., and its builder was said to be a demi-god named Etanna.

The Hebrew tradition of the tower finds a counterpart in the legend of Chobolus, one of the seven giants, who survived a deluge, who is the reputed builder of the great pyramid of Chobolus in Central America, which was erected to enable men to invade the city of Chobolus, which was not very unlike itself by fire and confused the language of its builders so that they were unable to restore it. A somewhat similar story is preserved in the Mongolian legends, and Dr. Livingstone found traces of another like it among one of the African tribes. The resemblance between the Central American legend and that of the Babylonians has been cited as a reason for believing that at a very remote period there was close intercourse between the peoples of these widely separated countries. The peculiarity about the Hebrew version of the story is that the confounding of the tongues of the tower builders is attributed to fear on the part of Jehovah as to what mankind might accomplish if left to their own devices.

It seems very clear that the story of the Tower of Babel must be classed among the myths, which are a part of the human heritage, and of no importance one way or the other, and to lay stress upon it, as some religious teachers yet do, is to run the risk of casting discredit upon the essential teachings of the Christian religion.

Dr. Warren, the author of "Paradise Found," a work containing a great number of myths and traditions bearing upon the pre-historic era, advances the theory that in pre-classical times mankind had reached a very high state of civilization and inhabited the regions around the North Pole. At the Pole itself was a great mountain, the summit of which was swathed in clouds, and upon its sides the city wherein the sovereign of the whole world resided. This mountain, which disappeared at the beginning of the Ice Age, is the Mount Meru of Asiatic mythology, and the efforts of the tower builders of the period when Babel was erected were inspired by the traditions handed down to them from a very distant past. Dr. Warren sought to prove by com-

parative mythology that mankind migrated from the north over the eastern and western hemispheres simultaneously. He cites a good deal of scientific proof of the claim that vegetation was diffused throughout the world from the north, and from this and the similarity of myths at points widely distant from each other, argues that the north was peopled in the same way from the common centre around the Pole. In the Tower of Babel and other great structures erected at various points in Asia, in the Great Pyramid of Egypt and in the pyramids and pyramidal mounds of Central America he thought he discovered evidence of the similarity of origin of a very large part of mankind, and he found further proof of it in the remarkable resemblance of certain words of languages apparently having no relation to each other. The last word as to the divergences between the forms of speech used by the several peoples of the earth is far from having been spoken. It is possible to detect resemblances where none on casual examination would appear probable.

## PHARSALIA

So connected are the various links in the chain of human events that it is not possible to say where they are the most potent in their influence upon the affairs of mankind. As we all know, occurrences, which at the time seem unimportant, carry with them a train of consequences of the gravest possible character, so that it has been well said that there are no such things as trifles, for what may appear insignificant might be found on examination more than ordinarily momentous. Yet as the searching out of the minor influences, which may have determined the careers of individuals and nations, is impossible, we must content ourselves in the study of history with the greater occurrences, and regarded thus, the battle of Pharsalia, fought near the town now known as Farsala in Thessaly, on August 9, B.C. 48, between Julius Caesar and Pompey, must be regarded as one of the pivotal events in the history of the human race. The number of men engaged in it was not large, as armies went in these days, Pompey had under him more than 60,000 men, and Caesar less than half that number. Of these by far the greater part were Romans, although Caesar had some cavalry from Gaul and Germany, and Pompey had a contingent of light-armed troops raised in the Asiatic provinces of Rome. It was, however, distinctly a battle of Romans against Romans. One of the best descriptions of the battle is that of Marcus Annaeus Lucanus, usually known as Lucan, who flourished about a century later. He tells us that "the fiery darts and rocky fragments," discharged by the Arabs, Medes and Ethiopians, did little injury, but

"Roman hands, unerring mischief send, And certain death on every pile extend." Lucan tells us that Caesar concentrated his first attack upon Pompey's light-armed auxiliaries, which he speedily put to flight. The poet was an ardent republican, and the establishment of a dictatorship was to him the greatest of all calamities. He blamed Pompey for permitting his auxiliary troops to meet the shock of Caesar's first onslaught. To quote from his poem: "When soon, alas! the loose barbarians yield, And certain death on every pile extend, And show, too late, that slaves attempt in vain The sacred cause of freedom to maintain." (The translation used is by Nicholas Rowe, and was made about the year 1700). When Caesar's troops came into contact with Pompey's Roman legions, the fate of the day was for some time in suspense. To quote again: "There the last force of laws and freedom lay, And Roman patriots struggled for the day. While patriotic pride upon the gallant's face, And brothers rush on mutual swords! These every sacred bond of nature bleed: Then met the war's worst rage, and Caesar's blackest deeds."

During this part of the fight Caesar was everywhere conspicuous, encouraging those who fought, comforting those who fell wounded. "Now with his voice, his gestures now, he strives, Now with his lance the lagging soldier drives: The weak he strengthens and confirms his strokes, And hounds the straggling soldier along." The slaughter was terrible. Pompey, who had viewed the battle from a distance, for being now 54 years of age he was hardly fit for the hand-to-hand fighting of these days, hastened to the thick of the conflict, hoping by his example to encourage his troops, but all in vain. Lucan said that Pompey tried to find death upon the battlefield, but was persuaded to fly. When defeat was certain, rather than remain and suffer the ignominy of more Roman blood, he escaped safely and took refuge in Egypt, where he was assassinated not long after, by a miscreant, who took that means of ingratiating himself with Caesar, who showed himself to be above any such narrow revenge, for he caused the murderer to be executed.

After the victory of Pharsalia, Caesar went to Egypt, where he remained for some time, a victim to the charms of Cleopatra. Thence he marched into Asia, and subdued Mithridates, one of the most formidable enemies with whom Rome ever contended. Then he returned to Rome. He was now the master of the republic, the only opposition to his power being that of being from Pompey, who collected a large army in Spain. They were overthrown and Caesar returned once more to Rome, to find the nation at his feet. The principal events of this remarkable man's career have already been dealt in one of the articles on the Makers of History series, and the brief reference just made is to show how complete the victory of Pharsalia was from a political point of view. Under Brutus and Cassius the democratic spirit struggled awhile until it was crushed at Philippi; but the Roman republic perished at Pharsalia.

There is perhaps no history better worthy of study than that of Rome, not solely or even primarily in order that we may familiarize ourselves with the chief events in the progress of one of the greatest of the nations of antiquity, but because our institutions and principles of jurisprudence and political organization are to a large extent founded upon those of Rome, and because no people of whom we have any record tried so many experiments in the way of government as the Romans did. Monarchy, a broad democracy, oligarchy, representative government, military dictatorship, military despotism, absolute government in its extreme form, all were tried by the people whose capital was that wonderful city on the Tiber. Socialism, communism, paternalism, and almost every conceivable form of social organization had their day, and failure attended upon each of them. The final collapse of the republic was undoubtedly due to the amassing of great wealth by a few, and the dependence of the masses upon their bounty, to the pernicious influence of a servile class, to the prevalence of luxury and to the absence of any true religious sentiment among the people. The Romans, whom Caesar ruled with a paternal hand, were used for freedom, and therefore the Goddess of Liberty led them to their own devices, seeking a refuge in the wild wastes of Central Europe, where the yellow-haired Teutons were already preparing for the overthrow of the empire of civilization and democracy, which had been built up through many centuries of endeavor and at the expenditure of rivers of blood.

## The Birth of the Nations

VIII.

(N. de Bertrand Lagrange.)

## THE PERUVIANS

Let us look back along the procession of years, and pause in fancy at that picturesque time when the romantic history of Spanish America was in the making, and was being enacted amid scenes of splendor and magnificence; when under the wise and tolerant rule of the Incas, the Peruvians lived happily, contented lives, undisturbed for the most part, until the day came when a Christian foe under the pretence of friendship, accepted their gracious hospitality, and their eyes dazzled by the unlimited riches of the country, did what all civilized people have learned to do for the sake of gold—forgot all honor, friendship, and fair promises, and turning upon the trusting Indians, robbed them of all they loved. The Incas passed. The fields in the valley are sown with maize, the woods are brilliant with the varied hues of millions of flowers. On the hillsides, green with verdure, the silken-haired llama gleams, and above the foothills the mountain peaks gleam in the rays of the sun. Midway between mountain top and valley winds the road leading from Quito to Cuzco, the road that passes over the grand plateau, over pathless mountains, eternally snow-covered, through narrow and galleries hewn out of the solid rock, across wonderful swinging bridges suspended over bottomless abysses, a magnificent road truly, built of great blocks of freestone covered with cement, a road that in its wonderful length of eighteen hundred miles winds through fair farmlands, countless villages, and cities fair with palaces and wonderful gardens. Today from every hamlet along the way the people run out to greet the king, and to sing songs of welcome. The king passes.

Here is a village from which the people flock to line the road. As the litter of the great, all-powerful Incas draws near, those who have come to greet him bow to the ground, and while the royal escort passes, the men who carry the sedan advance and set their burden down. The golden draperies entrusted with jewels are parted, and the king steps out and smiles upon his people. His is a royal step, and he is greeted with a shout of joy. He is a man of aquiline and cleanly cut; his eyes are of great depth and brilliancy and his smile at once gentle and proud. His dress is of finest llama wool, richly dyed, and about his head is a broad turban, from which hangs a scarlet fringe, and within the turban's folds are the two feathers of the coraguanco, that rare and curious bird whose home is in a desert coast where the wind howls, and the penalty for shooting which is death, as it is reserved solely to supply the royal head-dress. With gracious and kindly air the king bids his people rectify to him their grievances, and he listens to their complaints and answers them with a kindly and redress. Their most thankful acknowledgments he once more steps into his litter. The grateful people commemorate his step among them, and at the roadside hear the spot where his feet have passed, and the king is greeted with a shout of joy. He is a man of aquiline and cleanly cut; his eyes are of great depth and brilliancy and his smile at once gentle and proud. His dress is of finest llama wool, richly dyed, and about his head is a broad turban, from which hangs a scarlet fringe, and within the turban's folds are the two feathers of the coraguanco, that rare and curious bird whose home is in a desert coast where the wind howls, and the penalty for shooting which is death, as it is reserved solely to supply the royal head-dress. 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