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The Bible, 1943.



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THE BIBLE

The Wonder and Glory of It

WRHS

By  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver



At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, December 19, 1943



Two things suggested to me that I speak on the subject which I have indicated this week -- The Bible - The Wonder and Glory of it. One was a letter sent by a soldier, one of our Temple boys to his home. Among other things, this soldier boy writes: "Until I joined the armed forces, I never before appreciated the Bible as much as I do now. I think it's the greatest book in the world. It's full of wisdom, a complete understanding of life, living, people; beautifully written and the greatest literary compilation since man came into being. If the outcome of this war will preserve the Bible, its ethics, teachings and wonderful philosophy, it's well worth every man, ounce of material, and dollars and cents."

Other soldiers have written in the same vein about the Bible. One wonders why. What is it in their experience that has suddenly made them aware of this book which they never before appreciated?

The other think was the appearance of a book which has become a best seller called "David", written by an Englishman, Duff Cooper, a member of the British Cabinet, a great leader of the political life in Great Britain. Duff Cooper goes to the Bible for his theme, to the story of King David. It is interesting also to note the dedication of the Book. You find these words on the fly-leaf: "This book is dedicated to the Jewish people to whom the world owes the Old and the New Testaments and much else in the realms of beauty and knowledge; a debt that has been ill repaid".

One wonders why this Englishman, this statesman goes to the Bible for the subject matter of his book, in 1943. You recall the foremost German author, Thomas Mann, who completed a remarkable four volume work on the story of Joseph and his Brethren, built on a saga. This is also <sup>a</sup> modern and most sophisticated novel. He goes to the Bible for the theme of what has become a magna opus of this amazing writer. Again and again authors seeking subject matter have gone to the Bible for their material. The Bible has served as a perennial,



never-failing source for them. This is true also of artists, painters, sculptors, poets, dramatists, musicians all through the ages. They are as numerous today in the past. More recently, Sholem Asch has gone to the New Testament for the subject matter for his two great books: one the Nazarene, and the other the Apostle. The book is written by a Jew and about the Jews.

The interesting thing is that not <sup>great</sup> only do writers write about Biblical themes, but the public love to read about them. They are the most popular among the best sellers of our day.

Why do artists go back time and again to a book which is more than two or three thousand years old? What is it that they find in it? What captivates them? Why is the Bible the most widely read book today?

Perhaps the key to the explanation was written by Goethe, greatest of German poets, who said: "The further the ages advance in cultivation, the more can the Bible be used. I am convinced that the Bible becomes even more beautiful the more one understands it; that is, the more one gets insight to see that every word which we take generally and make special application of to our own wants, has had, in connection with certain circumstances, with certain relations of time and place, a particular, directly individual reference of its own. The Bible is a book of eternally effective power."

That is to say: It is always relevant. It has a direct and forceful application to the wants of every generation. It can always be applied. That is what the Rabbis meant when they said: "Turn it round and round again for everything." <sup>5 6 X</sup> The more ~~on~~ probes, the more one meditates, the more meaningful and vital it becomes. It is neither ancient nor modern. It is eternal. It is a book of eternal power.

It has a breath-taking measure of what Duff Cooper calls "beauty and knowledge", and the heart and mind of man have always hungered for beauty and knowledge.



It is a rare combination of both. Beauty is a product of many hands and of successive ages. It is not all of one quality. In that deep mine there is gold pure and unalloyed, also much quartz and humble earth and clay. You find in the Bible the remains of of dead cultures, and some relics of outmoded ways of life and thought, the rust of antiquity, some laws and customs which belong to a remote past, and some scientific and historical data which time has corrected.

But all this can be easily brushed aside, except by one who has some ax to grind. When you brush all this aside, what remains is an amazing human ~~d~~ and divine document - the noblest record of human faith and aspiration ever inscribed ✓ by the hand of man.

The style of the Bible, after you make due allowances for a variety of treatment, of a variety of subjects, is nearly always majestic, earnest, noble, ✓ rich, full of beauty. The style of the Bible is always on a high level of reverence. There is a Cathedral-like quality to the Bible. It is always impressive, a times over-powering, never trivial, never commonplace. What the Bible calls the "majesty of oceans or mountains, or the starry heavens, or deep forests." The ✓ beauty of the Bible is a solemn beauty. It is Beauty and Power!

So much so that even when the Bible is translated into a foreign tongue, it can still communicate that self-same beauty, that self-same power and majesty to the alien speech.

Macaulay said of the English Bible: "The English Bible is a book which if everything else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power."

Whether it is lyric or rhapsody, or prayer or proverb or story or sermon, that ✓ same noble quality of solemn grandeur is seldom if every missing. Seemingly the literary genius of the Hebrew race endowed them all with that characteristic over-tone and quality which are unmistakable. Men call it Biblical.



There is more than literary quality in the Bible that contributes to that wonder and glory. This beauty of style and diction of imagery and literary power is the vehicle for a revelation of an equally amazing knowledge of human life and character. The Bible is a book about people. The Bible is people -- men, women of all kinds, all sorts, saints and sinners, Kings and beggars, sages and fools, rich and poor, those who suffer and those who inflict suffering, the kind and the cruel, those who love greatly and those who hate violently. These people live in the pages of the Bible. They are living human beings, not artificial.

The Bible knows all of the sorrows of men, all their afflictions, disillusionments, false hopes and all of their passions and all of ~~the~~ their temptations. The Bible reflects every human mood. It is a faithful mirror of the whole of humanity and the whole of Man. It hides nothing. It covers up no sins. Interestingly there is not a single character in the Bible that is represented as being completely perfect or unblemished. There are no blameless people in the Bible because there are no blameless supermen in the world. There never have been. There never can be. Realism was never more thoroughgoing than in the Bible, but a realism which is never spiteful, never ill-natured or rancorous. As Emerson put it: "Out from the heart of nature rolled the burdens of the Bible old."...

And because the knowledge of the Bible is so deep, comprehensive, true and penetrating, men and women always turn to it, confident that they will find their own lives reflected ~~in~~ in it, and hopeful that they will find some guidance, inspiration. And they have never been sent away from the pages of the Bible unrewarded.

John Ruskin said of the Bible: "All that I have taught of art, everything that I have written, whatever greatness there has been in any thought of mine, whatever I have done in my life, has simply been due to the fact that, when I was a child, my mother daily read with me a part of the Bible and daily made me learn a part of it by heart."



What a crowded gallery of moving and unforgettable pictures one finds between the covers of the Bible. In the very first pages one comes upon the first tragic murder in the story of the human race, the first fratricide, the first man whipped by a passion which he could not understand, could not master - Cain slaying his brother, the manipulation of criminal guild in the world, jealousy and bloodshed, the first blind rush to self-exoneration and rscape - "Am I my brother's keeper", the first, the first purging sense of confession: "Forgive me. My guilt is more than I can bear." How much of human life since that time is telescoped in that brief story of human experience. Every phrase is pregnant with meaning. How many hundreds and thousands of poems since have been written in the language of all people about this very theme, adding nothing new to it. You read along further in the pages of the Book and you come across another picture of an old man who has found a great faith and lived for it. He was a lonely man. He had no child. Finally a child is granted him. He becomes dear to him, dearer than life itself. How he was summoned to sacrifice this child. There is the whole story about an old man who takes a child whom he loves, together with whom he walks to his sacrifice". One wonders what thoughts crossed through the mind of the old man as he walked with his son, about to sacrifice the thing he loved most, his immortality. All the bitterness of sacrifice for an ideal is reflected in that simple picture of them walking together. An unforgettable picture. How often through the centuries the same thing is repeated, great idealists, some who make the supreme sacrifice, tested, proved by sacrifice ~~mf~~ are found in the first few verses in a chapter of Genesis. You read the pages further and picture after picture presents itself to you.

Here are two brothers who meet after a separation of many years -



Jacob and Esau, twins who hated and distrusted each other almost from childhood. They were rivals for the birthright. Who shall be masters in the world? Two brothers, two cultures, to civilizations, differing in temperament - the man who lived by the soil, the other<sup>a</sup> man of blood, two civilizations doomed to eternal enmity right down through the ages. They meet, fall upon each others' shoulders and they weep. A spurious reconciliation, a reconciliation that can never take place between these two worlds, the whole drama played today on a hundred battlefields. Jacob and Esau met and embraced one another only to be separated again forever after in eternal conflict.

We read on and on the wonder and glory of these pictures, these stories with increasing power.

Here is another picture of the Bible, an old man, Jacob ~~about~~ sees a bloody garment of his son. "Do you recognize it?" he is asked. The old man recognizes it and recognizing it he tears off his own garment and puts on sackcloth. He mourns him for many days. Jacob had loved Joseph deeply. He had given him this coat. He had cared more for him than for his other sons, and had given him this garment of many colors. Joseph was a child of his old age, a child of his Rachel, to sustain him in his old age. Now he was dead.

Another door is opened to the human heart, love which turns into hate. There is a love that destroys. And how many great works of literature were written on this theme since the time of the Bible? Millions of them. And they will continue.

We turn the pages and we come across another story, the saga of Moses on Mt. Nebo, straining his tired eyes to see the land which he will never enter. For forty years he led a rebellious group of wild slaves and the hope that sustained him was the thought that he would see with his own eyes the sacred and beloved soil. That was not given to him. It was told to him that his would be a lonely grave on top of Mt. Nebo, where<sup>he</sup> is



straining his eyes for a last look on the land he will never enter.

And so on and on. There is another story of Samson in Gaza, who was betrayed by the woman he loved, drained of his strength, surrendered to the Philistines, his eyes put out, chained to the millstone in the prison house. Samson was summoned by the Philistines on their festival day to make sport for them. They set him between the pillars. Samson prays: "O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and give me back my strength, only this once, that I may be this once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. His strength is given back to him and he bends under all his might and he brings down the walls of The Temple upon the Philistines and on himself. How much does that picture inspire the unbroken and undefiled spirit of man which rises triumphant from wreck and defeat and makes a final bid of vindication. Here it is all told in the simple story of the Bible.

You read about the patriarchs, judges, about Saul, David, Jonathan, Solomon, hundreds of them.

I close with but one more. There was a famine in the land for three years and David sought the face of the Lord to learn why the famine afflicted the land of Egypt and he was told that it was Saul, King before him who had broken a covenant with the Gibeonites. And David summons the Gibeonites and says: What can we ~~do~~ do to appease the threat of the Lord?" And the Gibeonites said unto him: It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul. The king took the two sons of Rizpah and the fine sons of Micah the daughter of Saul and they were put to death, hanged. The two princes, the sons of Rizpah were put to death and Rizpah, the mother of the princes, says the Bible, took a sack cloth and stood by the dead bodies of her children and she suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night, a mother shielding the bodies of her dead children from the birds and the beasts. One of those unforgettable passages



of the Bible.

Is there any wonder why artists have sought to transcribe on canvas into stone, translate into music this wonder and glory of the Bible? Oh, there is beauty in it and knowledge and something else. Nobility of purpose. For everything that is in the Bible has but one purpose - to help man on the his hard way through life, to make his road easier, to help him face destiny with courage and dignity. Nobility of purpose. Learn how to live a good kindly life. That is th lesson of this immortal book. Whoever has turned to it has found help and guidance and inspiration for his way in the world...





1) 2 things @ soldier (quote). Other soldiers written same vein.  
(b) "David" - Duff Cooper - Minister of War - First Lord of Br.  
Admiralty - Best Seller - Dedication.

"This book is dedicated to the Jewish people to whom the world owes the Old and the New Testaments and much else in the realms of beauty and knowledge; a debt that has been ill repaid."

(c) Thomas Mann - Saga of "Joseph" - 4 remarkable volumes

(d) Again and again - authors, seeking subject matter -  
personal and never-fading source -

Then also of artists, painters, sculptors, poets, dramatists  
musicians - all turn the eyes and as memories  
to-day as in any past generation.

(e) Pholien Asch - also written by Jews and about Jews.

(f) Not only do great writers choose to write about Bib.  
themes - but readers love to read them - Best  
sellers.

(g) Why do creative artists go back <sup>time + again</sup> to a Book  
now? 2 to 3000 yrs old? What is it that they  
find in it? What captivates them? The most  
widely read book in the world to-day?

2) I think that ~~the~~ Goethe suggested the answer: (quote)

"The Bible is a book of eternally effective power."

- It is always relevant! It has a <sup>fresh</sup> application to the  
wants of every generation. It can always be applied!

3220 - The more one probes into it - meditates  
upon it - the more beautiful & meaningful & vital it becomes.  
It is not ancient nor modern. It is Eternal.



3). It has in breath-taking measure what Joff Cooper calls "Beauty and Knowledge" - and the heart and mind of man have always hungered - for Beauty & Knowledge

4). A rare combination of both! It is a product of many hands and of successive ages. It is not all of one quality! In that deep mine there is gold, pure and unalloyed, but also <sup>marble</sup> ~~marble~~ and ~~earth~~ <sup>clay</sup> and clay. There are in it the remains of dead cultures and relics of antiquated ways of life and that, the rest of antiquity. ~~Low~~ <sup>Low</sup> laws and customs which belong to a remote past, and some scientific <sup>this type of</sup> data which time has converted.

But these can be easily brushed aside, except by one who has some axe to grind. What remains is an amazing human and divine document - the noblest record of human faith and aspiration ever inscribed by the hand of man.

Its style, in spite of the markings due allowance for a variety of treatment of a variety of subjects, is always magisterial, deep, rich, full of beauty. Always on a high level of reverence. It has a Cathedral-like quality. Always impressive, at times overpowering - never trivial, commonplace. Cap 1730. The majesty of oceans or mountains in the stony heavens - a deep forest. It is sheer Beauty! ~~It is~~ It is Beauty and Power!

5). So much so that even when transcribed into a foreign tongue it can communicate that same beauty & power to the alien speech.



Macaulay - "The English Bible - a book which if everything else  
in our language should perish, would alone suffice to  
show the whole extent of its beauty and power"

(3)

6) And whether it is lyric or chapbook, or prayer or sermon or story - that noble quality of solemn grandeur is seldom if ever missing. The literary genius of the Hebrew race <sup>endowed</sup> ~~endowed~~ them all with a characteristic tone & quality which are unassailable when call it Biblical.

71. And this beauty of style and diction of imagery and literary power is the ~~ready~~ <sup>best</sup> vehicle for a revelation of an equally amazing knowledge of human life and character. It knew men and women - the B. S. people - with men women - things, things - all kinds, all sorts - saints and sinners - kings & beggars - sages and fools - rich and poor - those who suffer - and those who inflict suffering - the kind and the cruel - those who love gently and those who hate violently. They live and act ~~unselfishly~~ <sup>not artificial - automatic</sup> like - The B. S. knows all the sorrows of men - all their afflictions; all their dreams and all their disillusionments, all the yearnings, all the heartaches, all the fears and all the hopes, and all their passions, & temptations. It reflects every human mood. It is a faithful mirror of the whole <sup>of the whole, then.</sup> humanity. It hides nothing. It covers up no sins! No human frailty! It has not a single <sup>perfect</sup> unblemished human being in its entire vast galaxy of people. ~~It is~~ <sup>no blunders, no sufferings</sup> ~~Heaven~~ <sup>Heaven</sup> was never more thoroughly - but a realism which is



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Pvt. Howard Vactor  
(in a letter to his parents)

"All that I have taught of art, everything that I have written, whatever greatness there has been in any thought of mine, whatever I have done in my life, has simply been due to the fact that, when I was a child, my mother daily read with me a part of the Bible and daily made me learn a part of it by heart."

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The further the ages advance in cultivation, the more can the Bible be used. I am convinced that the Bible becomes even more beautiful the more one understands it; that is, the more one gets insight to see that every word which we take generally and make special application of to our own wants, has had, in connection with certain circumstances, with certain relations of time and place, a particular, directly individual reference of its own. The Bible is a book of eternally effective power."

From  
~~A Companion to the Bible~~  
By  
~~ABRAHAM J. FELDMAN~~







- separated for years - fled  
(3) Two brothers meet Twins - hated & disturbed each other <sup>15</sup>  
from childhood - wars for the birth-right - who shall be master?  
Diff. temperaments - sword - man of blood - <sup>2/3 of the</sup>  
Two civilizations doomed to eternal enmity. - <sup>1/3 of the</sup>  
What a gripping recombination! The drama of it!

(4) Another picture - An old man, Jacob - is there a plucky  
farmer by his sons - ~~Joseph~~ <sup>Joseph</sup> the deceitful it. <sup>1/3 of the</sup>  
<sup>2/3 of the</sup> Tears his own farmer. Fact cloth. Waves many  
days. Jacob had loved J. too much. farmer many days.  
Rachel. Such love meets to feeling her and new  
a broken old man depressed by that day less which  
was to maintain & comfort him in his old age.

<sup>in the</sup> And is another picture - gives another door into the  
human heart - and we are permeated radically.

(5) Moses on Mt. hills - Tired eyes - <sup>40 yrs</sup> a lonely grave -

- There is no sure reward for goodness here on earth.
- not always - nor in ways one imagines.
- Our inimicable reward is not in personal satisfactions  
but in the good we do - serve no render -

(6) And is an other picture after picture -

Saul eyes in foam - Betrayed by the woman he loved -  
drawn his strength - rendered to the Philistines - his  
eyes prayed - chained to the mills turn, & grinding  
corn in the prison house - Dagon - made spit for  
them - set him bet fellows : "O lord for remember  
me, I pray thee, & give me back my strength, only this  
once, that I may, this once avenged the Ph. for my 2  
eyes - beut with all his anger he was there."



and in his death show more, in his life time.

Unbroken spirit of man - rise triumphant from wreck defeat  
and make a final bid of resurrection - & home

⑦ Many, many such pictures in the royal, the patrons,  
Ursus - the Judges, <sup>Saul</sup> David, Jonathan, Blowen -

→ But an arm - Faunus 3 yrs. - Seylt for the land -  
It is bee, Saul - Inheritance - a broken covenant  
sons - 5 hulch - 2 Rizpah.

Put to death in day, harvest. - Mother / prayer  
sackcloth - stood by - day night - and

"suffered ~~not~~ neither the birds, the air to rest on  
her them by day, nor beasts, the field by night"

Tallean - a mother shielding the dead brother / her  
from, uninstructed children fears - what?

- which artists were would to transform into causes, into stun,  
transmute into unseen

14) 4 100 such pictures more - monks & play of BS  
- Beauty - Knowledge and something else - nobility & purpose to help  
all to reach men the lost life - the life under foot  
- to do justice, love mercy & walk humbly



## THE BIBLE

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