

THE DISCOVERY OF NEW WORLDS

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The Discovery of New Worlds

FROM THE ROMAN EMPIRE
TO THE RENAISSANCE

A.D. 4 TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

by

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1. THE ROMAN WORLD

“Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.”

—TENNYSON.

In this new century, the story of the world was the story of Rome herself, for she ruled over nearly all the world that was known to the men of these olden times.

Let us remember that we are still talking of two thousand years ago, though we have almost unconsciously glided from the era known as B.C.—that is, Before Christ—to that known as A.D., Anno Domini, the year of our Lord.

It is sometimes hard to realise all that had happened before this time in the far-off ages of long ago. And yet it is all so interesting and so vastly important. It shows us how earnest work and toil raised each nation in turn to a high position, and how the acquisition of wealth or the greed of conquest brought that nation low.

We must now see how Rome too,—“Golden Rome,” as she was called by the poets of her day,—the Mistress of the World, fell, owing to her desire for wealth and display, indolence and luxury, and how great and terrible was her fall.

While the child Christ was growing up in his quiet home in the East, Cæsar Augustus was still ruling the great Roman world, of which Rome itself was the centre. Augustus did what he could to make Rome, the capital of the whole world, worthy of her name.

Like Pericles at Athens in the olden days, he built beautiful buildings and tried to make the city as famous as possible. Many races met within her gates, many languages were spoken in her streets. Eastern princes and wildly-clad Britons and Gauls, low-browed Egyptians and sunburnt Spaniards,—all might have been seen at this time in the Forum at Rome, together with the Romans and Greeks.

Anxious to communicate with all parts of his mighty empire, Augustus started the imperial post. At certain stations along the great military roads, which now stretched from Rome to Cadiz in Spain, as well as to the coasts of France and Holland, he established settlements. Officers and messengers, with horses and mules, were ready to ride off, at a moment's notice, with messages from the emperor, to those who were ruling provinces under him. Along these great roads the legions of Rome were continually marching to and from the provinces, their tall helmets flashing in the sunlight as they tramped along the paved roads to protect the interests of Rome in distant lands.

The "Queen of Roman Roads," as it was called, was that known as the Appian Way, along which passed the traffic between Rome and the South, extending to Brindisi. It was a splendid road, broad enough for two carriages to pass one another, and built of hard stones hewn smooth.

Thus the countries dependent on Rome could pour their produce into the Golden City; while on the other hand the famous Augustan roads, starting from the golden milestone in the Forum,—the very heart of the Empire,—carried Roman civilisation and life to the western limits of Europe.

Then there were Roman possessions across the sea.

The whole northern coast of Africa was hers, from Carthage to Alexandria. Alexandria was at this time second only to Rome

itself: as a centre for commerce she stood at the head of all the cities in the world.

Egypt supplied Rome with grain, which was shipped from Alexandria; the traffic of the East and West met in her streets; she had the finest Greek library in the world, and she was famous for her scholars and merchants.

But the reign of the emperor Augustus was drawing to its end. He was an old man now, and he had reigned over the empire forty-five years.

There had been peace throughout the latter part of his reign, disturbed only by one battle. This was in Germany, when the Germans won a victory over the consul Varus. It preyed on the mind of the old emperor, and he would sit grieving over it, at times beating his head against the wall and crying "Varus, Varus, give me back my legions."

He was never the same again. He set his empire in order and prepared for death.

"Do you think I have played my part well on the stage of life?" he asked those who stood round him, as he arranged his grey hair and beard before a mirror which he had called for.

Compared with those that came after, he had indeed played his part well. The Romans delighted to honour him. They called the sixth month in the Roman year, August, after him, just as they had called the month before, July, after Julius Cæsar, and these names have lasted to this very day.

2. A GREAT WORLD POWER

“God’s in His Heaven,
All’s right with the world.”

—BROWNING.

Events which affect us to-day were now crowding thickly together. The Emperor Augustus Cæsar was dead. Tiberius Cæsar ruled the great empire of the Roman world, including distant Judæa, where Jesus Christ was living out His quiet life, teaching a new order of things to those who would hear.

But the Jews—those direct descendants of Abraham the patriarch, who had long ago migrated from Chaldea to the land of Canaan,—the Jews were looking for a great earthly conqueror. They had refused to acknowledge the claims of Christ to be that conqueror, and they wished to bring about His death as soon as possible.

“What thinkest thou?” they said one day—“Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?”

“Show Me the tribute money,” answered Christ.

And they brought Him a penny, a Roman penny made of silver, worth about sevenpence-halfpenny of present money.

“Whose is this image and superscription?” He asked them.

“Cæsar’s,” was their answer.

Then saith He unto them: “Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s; and to God the things which are God’s.”

This was no earthly conqueror like the Cæsars, whom they could expect to give them high places, to restore to them their

rights and exalt them above their fellows. This Man taught that the world must be a great brotherhood, bound together by peace and love. And the Jews put Him to death, crucifying Him, according to their eastern custom.

They had killed Him when He was yet young, but they could not kill His teaching. Under His disciples and apostles it spread rapidly.

“Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel (good news) to every creature.”

These had been among the last commands given to the followers of Christ. Among the first to carry out this great command of his Master was Paul.

The first city he chose in which to preach was Antioch—“Antioch the Beautiful,” or the Crown of the East, as the men of old called the city. North of Tyre and Sidon, on the sea-coast of Syria, it stood, on the great trade-road between Ephesus and the East. Here were men from Cyprus and men from Cyrene, here lived numbers of wealthy Romans and Greeks. It was a good place to which to carry the good news. In a year’s time Paul had taught many people, and here the name of “Christian” was first given to those who followed the teaching of Christ.

Tiberius the emperor was dead, and Claudius Cæsar was ruling over the Roman Empire; but the new teaching in far-away Antioch had not yet penetrated into the heart of Rome, though the sayings of the Master had been written down in the four books still known as the Gospels.

From Antioch St Paul crossed over to Cyprus, the island to which the Phœnicians had made their first voyage across the seas, and which now belonged to Rome.

After a time he set sail for the mainland of Asia Minor.

Asia Minor was indeed the highway by which Christianity

passed to the capital of the world. Travelling from town to town, mainly along the great caravan routes of the country, the faithful apostle reached the sea-coast near the old town of Troy.

Here one night he had a dream. A man of Macedonia, in the bright clothing of that nation, appeared to him.

“Come over into Macedonia and help us,” he said.

Paul could not resist such an appeal. Setting sail, he crossed over to Macedonia, setting foot for the first time on European soil. From thence he passed south to Athens, once the most beautiful city in the world.

Here he would see the great statue of the goddess Athene crowning the Acropolis. He knew how corrupt the city had grown since the brilliant times of Pericles, and “his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”

Standing on Mars Hill, a lofty rock rising from the very heart of the city, with the clear blue sky of Greece above him, he spoke to the men of Athens from the very depths of his heart.

Again and again we find him travelling from town to town, standing amidst temples and “idols made with hands,” and telling the people of the Master he would have them serve instead. At Ephesus, where, glittering in brilliant beauty, stood the great temple of Diana, Paul nearly lost his life in the uproar that followed his plain speaking. But he was ready to die for the Master if need be. Again preaching at Jerusalem, tumults arose which ended in his imprisonment and his well-known trial.

“I stand at Cæsar’s judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged,” he said, appealing to the highest tribunal in the land. “I appeal unto Cæsar.”

“Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? Unto Cæsar shalt thou go,” cried Festus, ruler of the province.



3. VOYAGE AND SHIPWRECK

“Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

—ACTS XV. 26.

To appeal to the great Roman Cæsar the apostle Paul now set sail for his longest voyage. A convoy of prisoners was starting for Rome, and with them Paul embarked at Cæsarea, a new Roman seaport named after Cæsar: with a fair wind the ship soon reached Sidon. It was the last city on the coast of Syria he ever saw.

Leaving Sidon, the old Phœnician port, the wind blew from the north-west and drove them to the north of the island of

EMBYNGE.

Cyprus. Still beating against a contrary wind, the ship reached the shores of Asia Minor, and put into the port of Myra, one of the great harbours of the Egyptian service. Here was a ship carrying corn from Alexandria to Rome, a large merchant vessel, which had probably been blown out of her course and taken refuge at Myra. On board this ship Paul and the prisoners were put, and off they sailed once more. Slowly they sailed south against heavy winds and high seas till they reached Crete, where in the harbour, which is known as "Fair Havens" to this day, they anchored to wait for a change of wind.

Time passed, and they were still wind-bound: autumn was coming on, and it was time for navigation in the Mediterranean to cease. The old ships were not fit to brave the storms of winter in the open sea. A discussion took place as to whether they should winter in Crete or push on farther. The owner of the ship was for going on: Paul advised caution.

"Sirs," he said, "I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the cargo and ship, but also of our lives."

In spite of this advice, however, they determined to make for a safer harbour in which to spend the winter. With a south wind blowing softly they set sail, and had neared their desired haven, when a sudden violent wind came down from the mountains of Crete and struck the ship, whirling her round so that steering became impossible. An ancient ship with one huge sail was exposed to extreme danger from such a blast as now blew. The straining of the great sail on the single mast was more than the hull could bear, and the ship might any moment founder in the open sea.

The hurricane blew her southwards, away from Crete, and towards the dreaded quicksands of the African coast near Cyrene.

The violence of the storm continued. After drifting helplessly at the mercy of the wind and waves for two days and nights, they began to throw overboard the cargo to lighten the ship, and then “with our own hands,” says the writer of the Acts, “we threw away all the ship’s fittings and equipment.”

Here is a striking picture of the growing panic. Still the wind blew, no sun shone by day, no stars lit the dark sea by night; cold and wet and very hungry, they drifted on towards death and destruction.

At last Paul made his voice heard above the storm. “Sirs, ye should have hearkened to my counsel, and not have set sail from Crete,” he said; “thus you would have been spared this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but only of the ship.”

The gale continued day and night for fourteen days. At the end of that time, towards midnight, the sailors heard the breaking of waves on a shore.

They were nearing land, but the danger was still great, for the ship might be dashed on the rocks and go to pieces. In an agony of terror they waited for the dawn. No coast was visible, only a wild waste of waters. The sailors, under pretext of casting anchors, lowered a boat, intending to row off and leave the sinking ship and its two hundred and seventy-six passengers to their fate. Paul saw their intention.

“Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved,” he said to those in authority. They had learnt to listen to the words of this remarkable prisoner. The ropes of the boat were instantly cut, and the sailors’ selfish plan failed.

“This is the fourteenth day that you watch and continue fasting, and have taken nothing. Wherefore I beseech you to take some food: for this is for your safety.”

Again Paul's advice was taken. Daylight came, land was visible, and they made for a pebbly beach and ran the ship aground. By means of boards and broken planks they all reached land safely, while the old ship which had borne them through the storm went to pieces before their eyes.

They had reached Malta, and the bay where they landed is known to-day as St Paul's Bay. The sight of the ship attracted the natives on the island—Phœnician and Greek settlers, subject now to Rome—and they treated the shipwrecked crew with unusual kindness.

For three months, until February opened the sea again to navigation, they stayed at Malta. Then another corn-ship from Alexandria—the “Castor and Pollux”—took the passengers on board, and sailed for Syracuse in Sicily. Here they waited three days for a good wind, which carried them through the narrow straits of Messina, dividing Italy from Sicily. They passed between chains of snow-clad hills, till at last the merchant ship sailed into a beautiful calm blue bay to unload its cargo, and very soon Paul found himself in the great city of Rome herself.

He had already sent a long letter or epistle to the men of Rome.

“I long to see you,” he had written to them three years before this; “I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are in Rome also.”

Now he was among them. True, he was a prisoner: a light chain fastened his hand to that of a soldier who was guarding him, though he had his own house in the city.

And here Paul preached the good news he had brought, and the Romans became Christians in such numbers that they were recognised in the city by the emperor.

4. THE TRAGEDY OF NERO

“Butchered to make a Roman holiday.”

—BYRON.

Many changes had taken place in Rome since the days of Tiberius Cæsar, who died four years after the crucifixion of Christ. The last of the Cæsars was now reigning in the person of one Nero. So far his youth had not been uneventful. When he was nine years old the Romans kept the great festival of the foundation of Rome. For eight and a half centuries their city had been growing in strength and importance. The last great deed had been the conquest of Britain, after which the emperor had named his little son, Britannicus.

An account of this festival has come down to us. In the great amphitheatre African lions, leopards, and tigers were hunted by Roman officers; gladiators contended with lions, and bulls fought; but one of the chief objects of interest was the appearance of the two little Cæsars, Nero and Britannicus, dressed in military uniforms richly gilt. Britannicus was but six, while Nero was nine, but the two little fellows took part in a sham fight between the Greeks and the defenders of Troy. The Romans took a great fancy to the boy Nero; and his mother, Agrippina, a very powerful lady, determined that he should be emperor.

When Nero was fourteen another great triumph took place in Rome. The emperor and his wife, Agrippina, sat on two thrones to watch, with the rest of Rome, the captives from Britain led through the streets.

The story about Caractacus, the warrior British chieftain, is well known. He stood before the Roman emperor. It was the custom at a triumph to kill the captives. The other prisoners had pleaded for their lives, but the island chief was proud. Standing before the imperial throne, he spoke fearlessly to the great Cæsar.

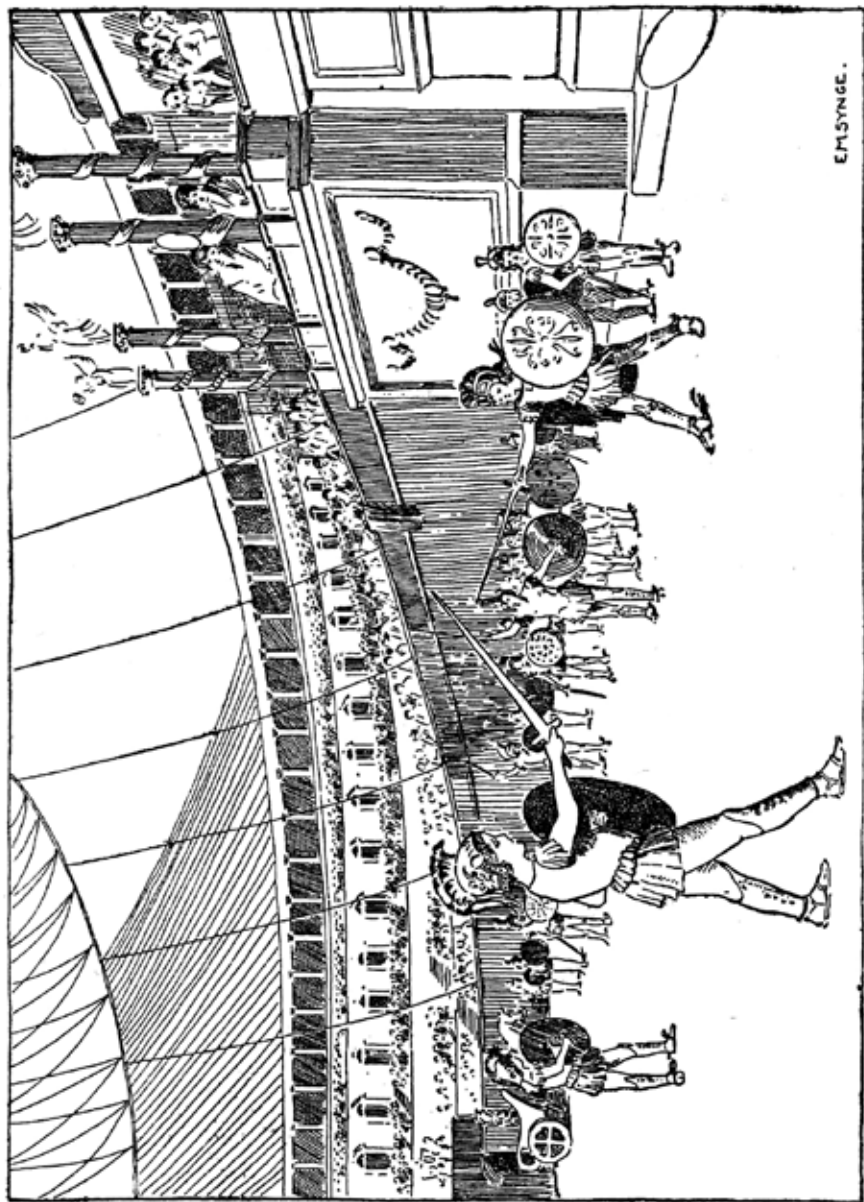
“If to my high birth and distinguished rank I had added the virtues of moderation, Rome had beheld me rather as a friend than a captive. I had arms and men and horses, I possessed extraordinary riches: can it be any wonder that I was unwilling to lose them? Because you Romans aim at extending your rule over all mankind, must all men cheerfully submit to your yoke? I am now in your power: if you take my life, all is forgotten; spare me, and as long as I live I shall praise your forgiveness.”

“He ceased; from all around upsprung
A murmur of applause,
For well had truth and freedom’s tongue
Maintained their holy cause.
The conqueror was the captive then;—
He bade the slave be free again.”

So ends the story: the chains that bound Caractacus were removed, and he passed away from the staring throng of Romans, repeating his gratitude for the emperor’s generosity.

When Nero was seventeen he became emperor of the Roman Empire, now larger than it had ever been before, while his mother Agrippina was made regent. For the first few years of his reign all went well. He was a joyous boy, enjoying his life to the full. Chariot-driving was his delight. Even when a child he had a little ivory chariot with horses, as a toy to drive along on the polished surface of the marble table.

But soon he became cruel and revengeful. When he was



NERO AND BRITANNICUS.

eighteen he determined on the death of Britannicus, lest he should try to win the empire for himself. The story says that he had poison mixed under his own eyes, and made trial of it first on a pig; then he poisoned Britannicus. The boy died at once.

Wanting to marry a wife to whom Agrippina strongly objected, he determined that his mother must die. A ship was built that would suddenly open in the middle and plunge her, unawares, into the sea. This ship he presented to her himself. It was a splendid-looking galley, with sails of silk. Kissing her passionately, Nero handed her on board. The night was warm and dark, though the sky was thick with stars, and the ship glided silently through the waters; till suddenly a signal rang out, and crash went the roof of the cabin, which was weighted with lead.

Agrippina found herself in the water; she struck out for the shore and was picked up by some fishermen. When Nero heard what had happened he was wild with rage, and by his orders she was stabbed to death. Then he married a wife who thought more of keeping good her complexion by bathing daily in asses' milk, than of helping her headstrong husband in the management of his vast empire. Luxury, cruelty, and banqueting were the order of the day, and Nero the emperor was the main actor in the coming tragedy.

5. THE GREAT FIRE IN ROME

“Darkening the golden roof of Nero’s world,
From smouldering Rome the smoke of ruin curled.”

—WM. WATSON.

It has been said, and perhaps it is true, that the emperor was mad at times and not responsible for all he did. Be this as it may, the year 64 was marked by a terrible fire in Rome, which lasted nearly a week and left a great part of Rome in ashes.

The summer had been hot and dry. One warm night in July a fire broke out in some wooden sheds where were stored quantities of spices, oil, and other materials likely to feed the flames. It has been said that the emperor himself set the city on fire in his mad rage; and that, posted on one of the highest points of Rome, dressed in one of his dramatic costumes, he took his lyre, and chanted the verses of Homer on the burning and destruction of Troy.

Here is the account from one of the old historians, Tacitus:—

“All was in the wildest confusion. Men ran hither and thither: some sought to extinguish the conflagration, some never heard that their houses were on fire till they lay in ashes. All shrieked and cried—men, women, children, old folks—in one vast confusion of sound, so that nothing could be distinguished for the noise, as nothing could be seen clearly for the smoke. Some stood silent and in despair, many were engaged in rescuing their possessions, whilst others were hard at work

plundering. Men quarrelled over what was taken out of the burning houses, while the crush swayed this way and that way.

“Whilst this was going on at different points, a wind arose and spread the flames over the whole city. No one any longer thought of saving goods and houses, none now lamented their individual losses: all wailed over the general ruin and lamented the fate of the commonwealth.”

The treasures gained in the East, the beautiful works of the Greek artists—statues, pictures, temples,—all were gone. A few shattered ruins stood up from among the ashes, and that was all.

Whispers that Nero had lit this fire grew loud. The emperor trembled. The guilt must be laid on some one. Why not on the Christians, who refused to take part in the emperor’s riots and plays, his feasts and banquets. They were regarded with suspicion: they would be better away. As they had burned the city, argued the emperor, they themselves should be burned.

At the head of the Christians in Rome Paul was now working with his fellow-apostle Peter. He had toiled hard during his two years’ residence in the great city, where the people had lost their ideals, lost their old love of freedom for their state, and lapsed into that condition of ease and luxury which, sooner or later, brings every nation to its fall. Paul was an old man now. His appeal to Nero had been successful, and he had been set at liberty. Here he had written his letters to the men of Ephesus (or the Ephesians),—beautiful letters, sad yet full of hope.

Again and again he repeated his charge to the brethren; they must carry on the work. His own end was near, his fight was nearly fought, his course was nearly finished. The end was now come.

One night a great show was announced by Nero to be held in the circus, within the gardens of the Imperial palace, at the

foot of the Vatican Hill. It was summer time, and the Roman people crowded to take their places in the circus, now lit up by the flaming torches. The arena was full of stakes to which were tied human beings—Christians—wrapped in cloths of tow steeped in pitch. While these living torches flared and the shrieks of the martyrs rose above the noise of the music, Nero appeared dressed in green, in an ivory chariot, and drove on the gold sand round the circus.

But this was more than the Romans could endure, and, moved to pity, they begged that the dreadful spectacle should cease.

In this first persecution of the Christians it is said that both Paul and Peter suffered martyrdom in some form or other. Paul, as a Roman citizen, was beheaded; Peter was crucified, as his Master had been before him.

A great revulsion of feeling now set in against Nero. Such tyranny must end in disgrace. As time went on, one by one deserted him: courtiers, slaves, freedmen, all forsook him. At last the very guards at his palace left their post, and he made up his mind to flee from Rome. He could find no one to fly with him.

“Is it so hard to die?” said one man, quoting the poet Virgil.

“I have neither friend nor foe left,” wailed Nero, when the gladiator he had ordered to kill him failed to do it.

It was night, a hot summer night, when the wretched emperor disguised himself and rode forth to seek a hiding-place, where at any rate his life might be safe. Summer lightning was flashing over the Alban Hills: it lit up the road before the flying emperor. He shivered with fear. As the morning dawned he was persuaded to creep into a villa owned by a freedman, Phaon. Through a hole at the back he crawled on all-fours, and threw himself on a miserable pallet inside.

A messenger rushed in with a letter. Nero snatched it from

his hand and tore it open. He had been declared an enemy of the state, and was sentenced to die a traitor's death.

He must die now. Again and again he strove to nerve himself for the last effort, but it was not till the sound of the horses' hoofs was heard that he put the dagger to his throat.

So died Nero, the last of the Cæsars!