

ESSAYS ON VOCATION

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Essays on Vocation by Basil Mathews

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ESSAYS ON VOCATION

BY

A. CLUTTON BROCK, B.A.	GODFREY PHILLIPS, M.A.
SIR HY. VERNEY LOVETT,	C. E. RAVEN, M.A.
<small>R.C.S.I., C.S.I.</small>	
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THE NEW WORLD-TREK

BY BASIL MATHEWS

'TRUTH is as Beauty unconfined :
 Various as Nature is man's mind :
 Each race and tribe is as a flower
 Set in God's garden with its dower
 Of special instinct ; and man's grace
 Compact of all must all embrace.
 China and Ind, Hellas or France,
 Each hath its own inheritance ;
 And each to Truth's rich market brings
 Its bright divine imaginings,
 In rival tribute to surprise
 The world with native merchandise.'

ROBERT BRIDGES.

I

' HUMANITY ', as President Smuts has said in a sentence that will certainly stand as a classic picture of the post-war world-situation, ' has struck its tents and is once more on the march.'

' Humanity is on the march.' But the question on which all future history pivots President Smuts does not, and our wisest prophets cannot answer. The question is ' Whither ?'

That man should march is nothing new in his story. There is, indeed, a strange fascination in looking back over history across those dramatic epochs when the races have been moved by some mysterious common impulse to trek from continent to continent, submerging old civilizations and building new ; or in watching those voyages of the human spirit from one culture and order of thought to another.

In them all—as we look back across the great watersheds of history—we can trace a clear movement in defined

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directions. Our historical geography maps reveal by long curving arrow-headed lines across continents and seas the devastating sweep of the Mongol hordes, the fan-like spread of the Aryan tribes, the intermittent lava-flow of the Semite from the human crater of Western Asia. Our histories throw up, also, into vivid relief the voyages of the human spirit—those vast flood-tides of historic change that sweep away an old order and change the coast-line of man's life :—the rise, for instance, of Mesopotamian civilization and its flow across the Near East ; the solid tread of Roman order and mental discipline from the North Atlantic to the Nile and the Euphrates ; the tidal wave of destructive barbarism under which the weakened Roman ramparts broke and were submerged ; the swift rush of Islam across the Near East and North Africa till the scimitar flashed in the defiles of the Pyrenees and at the gates of Vienna. These, with the wonderful Catholic ideal of the Middle Ages, and such adventures of humanity as the mental spring to liberty which we call the Renaissance, and the spiritual clamour for national separatism which we call the Reformation, are marches of humanity—treks, the historical direction of which we can discern and follow.

To-day, however, we are in the presence of a vast and dramatic movement to which none of these past wanderings—tremendous as they were—can offer any adequate parallel. And the total present movement is so enormous in area, so profound in its significance, so universal in its bewildering surge that the mind is confused and dazed in watching it. Men of all races are moving across the plains of history from their ancient camping-places. But across what wildernesses they are trekking ; in face of what enemies they make their way ; and to what goal they move, we simply do not know.

The Israelite had a Moses to lead him, and a Promised

Land to nerve him in face of the drought and the despair of the desert. Islam had a battle-cry of 'Death to the Infidel, and Glory for the Faithful', and an objective of victory. The men who sailed to America had a tyranny to escape, a new world to flee to, a freedom to fight for, and a William Bradford to lead them. But man on trek to-day—so far as we can see in the dust of the movement or can hear in the din—has neither leader nor voice. He has no chart of the new ocean and no map even of the coast of his new world.

II

The dramatic significance of the movement will become clearer if we can stand away from it a little and focus it (as the historians will do more clearly some day) against the background of that unique, world-wide racial movement which forms the greatest single fact in recorded history—the present world-dominance of the white peoples.

The essential meaning of this fresh world-march is that the new trek shows every sign of involving the end of the white man's world-power.

That 'white' dominance is the creation of the last four centuries. It began paradoxically enough when the fall of Constantinople and the control of the Turk over the trade routes overland to India threw the Western merchants back upon the ocean for a route for their Eastern spices and stuffs. That Islamic dam sent Vasco da Gama round the Cape to India and Columbus across the Atlantic on the same quest. So in those squat sixteenth-century craft began the movement by which the white races of Western Europe dominate America, Africa, much of Asia, and at last Australasia.

To-day, as a result, the white races occupy some two-fifths of the earth's habitable surface; they total practi-

cally one-third of the human race ; and, what is more astonishing still, they hold under their political control all save one-tenth of the globe's surface. By far the greater part of that control is now in the hands of the English-speaking section of the white races. There is, as I have suggested, no other recorded fact of history so tremendous as that.

If it were possible (which it is not) by the most penetrating power of imagination to recover the outlook of a fifteenth-century Western man, we should realize how incredible to him—even in his wildest freaks of inventiveness—would be this amazing realized white domination over continents and oceans and races the very existence of which had barely dawned on his consciousness. Why should little groups of white peoples in the north-west corner of the small continent of Europe grow to stupendous numbers and achieve power beside which Rome itself is dwarfed ? Yet there the fact stands as the dominating feature of the world's landscape.

III

We have, however, now to let a new fact not only dawn upon our consciousness, but soak into our spirit and saturate our judgement. The new fact is that the Great War and even more, the attempted peace, have witnessed the real emergence of racial movements which challenge that white domination in the most thorough-going way. That white domination—I suggest—is essentially transitional and tutorial. It must pass. It may, of course, not pass necessarily to other hands ; it may simply die and no new centralized domination take its place. It would seem, however, as though the new world-trek of humanity had in it the power definitely to break the white man's almost hypnotic authority. Man on his new trek has no leader and no voice : the march is a wander-