

THE CRAFTSMAN

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"See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship." Exodus 31:2-3.

The children of Israel could not build a great cathedral in the wilderness. They did not intend to stay in one place long enough to use a permanent building. They had to build something they could move from place to place. Although light and easily moved, the tabernacle was anything but cheap. The arc of the Covenant, with the cherubim, was covered with pure gold. They still had this symbol of God's presence when Solomon built the great temple.

Moses, the great lawgiver, could not build the tabernacle. He was one of Israel's greatest sons, but he must call on the craftsmen of the race to build the house for God.

Bezaleel means in the shadow of God. The craftsmen of the race are truly born in God's shadow. What power gives some men such skill with their hands? What power gave Luther Burbank such skill with seeds and plants? What power gave Michelangelo his touch with pencil, brush and chisel? What power gave Homer and Shakespeare such skill with words? Statesmen, philosophers and rulers of men alike would be helpless without the craftsmen of the race.

It was the craftsmen of the race that gave man his first victory over the wild beasts. He was placed among the creatures of the earth the most helpless among them. He was

as naked and defenseless as the rabbit; but he lacked the rabbit's keen sight and hearing and the rabbit's fleet limbs. He could neither fly nor swim. Most of the creatures could out run him and most could beat him in a fight with tusk and claw. Yet he triumphed over them all. His victory was due solely to the craftsmen of the race. They fashioned the first crude spear, the first flint hatchet. They gave him his first snares and nets. 8

The craftsmen of the race gave man his finest victories in war. David, the craftsman, slew Goliath. David knew his strength was no match for the giant. He found he could not fight in Saul's armor; it did not fit. But he knew what he could do with that sling. He had used it on lions and bears. He knew it would take no greater blow to bring down the giant than it took to kill a bear.

It was the skill of the Englishman with his long bow that won the battle of Crecy. Almost a hundred years later, at Agincourt, he won another great victory with the same weapon. So great was the skill of the English craftsmen in making and using the long bow they continued to use it long after the discovery of gun powder. It took the gun smiths of England a long time to make a weapon a man could carry in his hand that was as accurate and as deadly as the English long bow.

It was the craftsmen of the race that gave man his first cultivated fruits and grains. For a long time men thought these were a miraculous gift of the gods, or due to an accidental discovery. They came to us before the dawn of recorded history. But a study of botany reveals that they were produced by skilled plant breeders in the dim, dim past. Who taught these men the science of plant breeding? Who gave

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them the "green thumb?"

Booker T. Washington hoped to make Tuskegee Institute a school of craftsmen. For a time it did give the Negro boys a training in the crafts they could not have obtained elsewhere. Now modern industry trains its own craftsmen. No school can train craftsmen as well as a big industrial plant, with all its machines and laboratories.

Three men were working in a marble quarry. When asked what they were doing, the first said he was working for wages, the second said he was cutting out beautiful stones, the third said he was building a great cathedral. The third man was a true craftsman. He saw the building when it was finished.

In the early days of man only the geniuses were craftsmen. Craftsmen then had to make their own tools, build their own shops, and fashion each article from the crude materials found near at hand. If the article had to be painted, polished or decorated, he had to do that too. Benjamin Franklin's story of the Speckled Ax is a familiar one. The local smith made a man an ax, but he only ground the blade. The bright shiny metal, freshly ground, made a striking contrast with the black metal from the forge. The customer wanted to know why the whole ax could not be made as pretty as the blade. The smith told him it could if he would turn the grindstone. The man agreed, but as the labor progressed he found it was going to take a lot more grinding than he had thought. When he expressed impatience the smith told him they were not near through. He said the ax was only speckled. The man said that was exactly what he wanted, a speckled ax. The first craftsmen could not bring his tools

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from one country, his materials from another, and have other skilled workmen do a lot of his work for him.

The modern craftsman is a specialist. He buys his tools already made, or has them bought for him. His materials are brought to his lathe or forge, tempered, polished, and often shaped, ready for the final finish. He works in an air-conditioned factory owned by a corporation. Many articles are made wholly by machines. Complex articles are often made by hundreds of different craftsmen, none of which could do the other's work.

The atomic bomb was made by several thousand craftsmen, working in cities thousands of miles apart, working on parts, the function of which the craftsman did not know. The parts were assembled by craftsmen that could not have made the parts, and did not know the function of the parts they were putting together. When the bomb was finished it is doubtful that any one man could have made another or taken the first apart.

The lot of the craftsman and the genius has not been an easy one. More men have been crucified for knowing more than their neighbors than have been killed for their ignorance. The hero among primitive men was often a big ignorant bully. He got most of the honors and most of the pay. Even in the higher civilizations the scholars, the wise men and the rulers were in a class above the most skilled craftsmen. They ate their baked meats and drank their wines; he ate his bread and washed it down with water. He was often driven into exile or slain by the scholars for having too close an association with spirits.

"Five cities claim the Homer dead
Where the living Homer begged his bread."

Even in more recent times the lot of the craftsman has not been an easy one. Our forefathers let Stephen Foster die in a charity ward. The greatest song writer of all time was denied a soft bed to die in.

Some lines in Gray's Elegy fit the craftsman's lot:

"Let not ambition mock their useful toil
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boasts of heraldy, the pomp of power
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave
Await alike th' enevitable hour:--
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre:

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some Millage Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood."