

December 8<sup>th</sup>

### Memory Verse

Out of the strong came forth sweetness Judges 14:14

For information on this easy verse to learn see 14<sup>th</sup> December's lesson. Children can apply this "riddle" to the Lord Jesus, the Lion of Judah, from whom comes our salvation – and surely that is something very sweet!

### A letter to read<sup>1</sup>

Last month we read about David Livingstone's discovery of the Victoria Falls and his fight to end African slavery.<sup>2</sup> It was on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1840 that the great explorer and missionary left London for Bechuanaland (modern name Botswana). One year later on December 8<sup>th</sup> 1840 after a journey of 700 miles, he sat down to write a long letter to his sisters at home in Scotland describing his experiences. Here is part of what he wrote:

In our journey which was undertaken to ascertain the actual condition of some tribes concerning whom we had often heard favourable accounts, we had to endure a great deal of heat and fatigue. You don't know in Scotland what is meant by heat during the middle of the day. The sun's rays are so strong, one feels quite afraid of going into them from under the shade in which you may be stewing. The sand is burning hot, and the stones too, if you sit down on one, even long after the heat of the day is gone.

We travelled over hundreds of miles of dreary wilderness, not a soul appearing in sight. Now and then a herd of wild horses, giraffes, ostriches or different kinds of antelopes served as a relief to the eye, wearied with the monotony of the perpetually recurring thorn bushes and camel thorn trees. It is no wonder that Hagar lifted up her voice in the wilderness and wept when the water was spent in the bottle. We had some natives with us from the Interior tribes, who came about 300 miles on foot for the purpose of selling a few skins and an elephant's tooth they had got. They carried water in ostrich egg shells, and when we got beyond the region they knew, nothing would induce them to drink their water (although suffering severely from thirst) until they saw the next we should come to. Wisdom, taught them by experience, induced them to preserve it carefully in case they should be brought to extremity. We travelled on one occasion between 50 and 60 miles without a drop of water for the oxen for more than two days, this with the sun so hot in the middle of the day that centipedes coming out of their holes are roasted alive.

Why does Livingstone refer to Hagar?

Read Genesis 21:1-21.

Can you find Botswana in your atlas? How far is it from Scotland?

I have highlighted some words in the first sentence of the extract from Livingstone's letter above. Can you write out the sentence and substitute a simpler word or words for each of the highlighted words?

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1 Adapted from Owen, Evan, *What Happened Today?* Book 3 available on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com/>

2 See the lesson for 16<sup>th</sup> November.

### Something to do<sup>3</sup>

For many years a fair was held underneath the branches of this venerable oak tree, Fairlop Oak, in Hainault Forest, Essex. When the botanist and pupil of Carl Linnaeus,<sup>4</sup> Peter Kalm, visited it in 1748 he measured it and found it to be 30 feet (over 9.1m) in girth if measured at 4 feet (about 1.22m) from the ground. Can you use a tape measure or some string to measure out a circular shape of that dimension in your garden or perhaps in a local park?



The spread of the seventeen great branches that grew from its crown was said to cover almost an acre (over 4000 square metres) of land. You could use a local map to give yourself some idea of how large a space that is. If you have an Ordnance Survey map of your own area mark an area of 4000 square metres round your own house.

The tree suffered storm damage and began to show its age. In the reign of George III all the dead and decaying wood was cut away and the royal gardener was paid to apply his own special mixture to plaster over the “wounds” thus made in the tree. But its decline continued with more branches falling until the hollow interior was exposed; a huge space in which families could picnic.

One picnicing family went too far, though. The fire they lit to boil their kettle while inside the tree caused the tree to catch fire. After 24 hours the fire was put out by the local inhabitants but the Fairlop Oak was never quite the same again. Spring gales in 1820 finally caused the great tree to fall.

But that is not quite the end of the story. In 1951 the country was in the grip of the Festival of Britain, an attempt to brighten post-war life, stimulate trade and generally celebrate the arrival of peace. As part of the celebrations on **December 8<sup>th</sup>**, the Mayor of Ilford planted a new Fairlop Oak on a site as near as could be found to that of the old tree. It still stands today but no one will be picnicing under its shade – it is in the centre of a busy roundabout!



If you, like the mayor, would like to grow your own oak tree, nothing could be easier. You will need to find an acorn. Have a look in the park if you live in a town. You can spot an oak tree in the countryside and even in December you may find some acorns lying around. You can check whether your acorn is a healthy specimen likely to grow by putting it in water. If it sinks it is a good one! Now you can plant it in a small pot of soil or compost. Your tree will take a couple of years to grow sturdy enough to be planted out. Think carefully about where to put it as oak trees can get big! If you have hedges in your garden that would be a good place as oaks can also be trimmed into a hedge.

<sup>3</sup> Information from <http://www.hainaultforest.co.uk/3Fairlop%20Oak.htm> and other sources. Image of New Fairlop Oak: Hopefully Acceptable Username, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

<sup>4</sup> See the lesson for January 10<sup>th</sup>.

## Some missionary history to read<sup>5</sup>

On December 8<sup>th</sup> 1913 Lord Radstock's son, returned from taking an evangelistic meeting in Paris to the cheap hotel where he and his father were staying. He found the peer lying motionless with his wife's Bible in his hand: he had gone to glory! It was the earthly end of a remarkable life.



Lord Granville Radstock (1833-1913) came from a wealthy and distinguished family. He had had a good education at Harrow and Oxford. Like most boys of his social class in those days, before he was old enough to go to boarding school he was educated at home. This early education turned out to be far more important. For the young man became an army officer during the Crimean War, and like many he went down with the fever that Florence Nightingale and her famous nurses did so much to combat as it spread among the soldiers. Granville realised he was dying. He knew that he was not ready to die but he remembered that his mother had taught him the way of salvation. He earnestly prayed and his prayer was heard.

To everyone's amazement, Granville got better but he was never the same again. Now he was a real Christian. At first he continued his round of balls and grand dinners that was typical of aristocratic life at the time. He undertook a little hospital visiting as a form of Christian service but he did not enter into it with any enthusiasm until a poor Spanish man who was dying came to faith responded to his reading of the Spanish Bible to him.

Granville inherited his father's title and married a godly lady. He began to be more and more forthright in gently introducing the gospel when at dinner parties. The number of invitations he received began to decline. He and his wife began to hold Bible studies in their home where Waldegrave, now Lord Radstock, patiently witnessed to their godless friends. Then came the example of Hudson Taylor, the missionary to China.<sup>6</sup> Lord Radstock realised that he too could be a selfless witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave up his military work and began speaking at evangelistic meetings, devoting his whole life to preaching the gospel. He soon found that there were many openings and he began to preach in many different places. People flocked to listen.<sup>7</sup>

Lord Radstock went on to preach in many countries including Holland, Scandinavia and India but he is best known for the remarkable work which God used him to do in Russia.

Russia at this time was in a period of political turmoil. Russia had been defeated in the Crimean War. The peasants who worked the land had only just been liberated from serfdom – a condition that was little better than slavery. The Czar ruled as an autocrat and the aristocrats owned all the land. The government worked together with the Russian Orthodox Church which formed a part of the civil service. There was no real middle class, very few lawyers and doctors and they had no power or say in government. Everyone knew things were wrong and there were all sorts of solutions proposed. Some wanted a democratic system, some considered education was the answer, some thought it would be better if the Czar, free from interference by a parliament, carried out the reform of society. Almost everyone recognised that the Orthodox Church was empty of spiritual life. Among the aristocrats there was much atheism. There were various social movements and nihilism and terrorism led to a government reaction of repression. In this atmosphere, Radstock's Bible centred preaching with its emphasis on personal salvation drew large crowds.

<sup>5</sup> Information from David Fountain, Lord Radstock of Mayfield (Southampton, 1984) and other sources.

<sup>6</sup> See the lesson for 21<sup>st</sup> May.

<sup>7</sup> It was at one of his meetings at this time that Dr Baedeker was converted. See the lesson for August 3<sup>rd</sup>. If you missed this lesson because you were on holiday it would be well worth reading the part about Dr Baedeker today.

A great awakening began in St Petersburg as a result of Lord Radstock's preaching with the conversion of many members of the aristocracy and even the royal family. The nobles opened their grand homes to working people for church services. Over seven hundred people attended one meeting in the home of General Pashkov!

“...I found nothing startling. He spoke neither particularly cleverly, nor in a particularly dull manner. But yet he performs miracles over human hearts; people are flocking around him, many of them are astounded; they are looking for the poor, in order as quickly as possible to bestow benefits upon them; they are almost ready to give away their fortunes . . .” Dostoevsky

Lord Radstock's status as an English peer gave him admittance to the highest ranks of Russian society. He did not speak Russian but that did not matter for it was the fashion for the Russian nobility to converse in French, in which he was fluent.

To begin with those converted under Radstock's preaching remained in the Russian Orthodox Church. However they were deeply resented by the church authorities, not least because of the numbers both of the aristocracy and of the peasantry who were touched by these “new” ideas. Persecution followed and they were driven out of the Orthodox Church. In many parts of the Russian Empire there were already scattered groups of Christians who were not in the Orthodox Church. Under the Czar Alexander I there had been a considerable distribution of Russian Bibles which had helped them. They welcomed the new believers with joy. The converted nobles opened their homes to the poor, began financing projects to help those in need.

In 1884 when the St Petersburg Christians heard of the other Christian groups in different parts of Russia they called a conference in St. Petersburg. Poor peasants from all over Russia mixed freely in the homes of wealthy aristocrats as they arrived for the conference. After a few days all the conference participants were arrested. The peasants were put on trains and sent home. The organisers were exiled from Russia. Harsh and cruel persecution of Christians followed all over Russia. Aristocratic Russians who espoused Biblical teaching were banished. To his sorrow Lord Radstock was banished from Russia and he was never able to return although at the time of his death he was making arrangements to visit Russia again. But the work he started went on and by God's grace there were Christians in Russia throughout all the terrible times that followed (in a few days' time we will be looking at some of them in the lesson for 13<sup>th</sup> December) and there are Christians there today!

Throughout this section I have highlighted some words, topics and people that you might like to look up in your own encyclopedias, dictionaries and reference books.