

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE:

NOAH'S ARK AND GARBETT'S APOTHEOSIS

Inventions

Garbett believed that every fresh problem should be met with the full accumulation of knowledge. He believed in tradition. Usually this meant integrating all sorts of fragmentary facts to arrive at a complex and frequently obscure explanation. This cohesion of fragments and the tortuous connections in thought which is necessary to make them bind together gives some insight into his mind. His intentions were nearly always laudable; his reasoning when he was able to refrain from wilful viciousness towards the architectural establishment or the clergy is occasionally clear. But just as one begins to settle into reading, it is as if all the bitterness of his accumulated failures burst through the text. At that moment, one feels, he obviously lost himself and his self control and his prose degenerates into the strangest reproaches. Even so those glued fragments represent a principle of

uncontrolled eclecticism which also allowed him to indulge in both inventing, exegesis, science and social reform, albeit with very little result or public recognition.

Already in 1853 he writes that he had, years ago, invented a method for colour photography but:

seeing no immediate prospect of leisure justly applicable to experiments on it, yet no call to abandon my natural property in it, and no legal protection in this country on terms that make it worth purchasing, I shall recur to the mediaeval and seventeenth century mode of recording such a claim, after the manner of Roger Bacon and Doctor Hooke. The essentials of this process, beyond those for ordinary photography will be expressible in these twenty-five letters:- eeeghhhhiknoopprrssttty. ¹

Understandably his claim has never been discussed in any history of photography. It is

1. E.L.G. "Coloured Photography. A Note," *The Builder*, XI (Nov. 5, 1853) 682.

somehow a shame that no more of this process is known than the cryptic and undecipherable phrase reminiscent of Galileo's similar obsession with priority. Perhaps there never was such a process. Who knows. What it does illustrate is that Garbett clearly foresaw the uses of good reproductive techniques: *Of course, by this manufacture when perfected, labourer's cottages will be adorned with the handiwork of Raffaele and Titian.*² Certainly his serious interest in photography was amply borne out by his work in optics as manifest in his first ever publication on Parhelia.

That Garbett was much concerned with ventilation and fire-proofing we have already seen. He applied for two patents for an improved method of fire-proof building, only one of which was ever published. The other must have either been withdrawn by himself or declared void by the patent office.³ "Garbett's Improved

2. Ibidem.

3. *Specification of Edward Lacy Garbett. An Improved Mode of Fireproof Building*, Published and sold at the Patent Office Sale Branch, 1st

Mode of Fireproof Building" is, judging from the drawings, completely consistent with his principles concerning the imitation of nature. A cross section of the hollow tiles show a remarkable resemblance to the cellular structure of living organisms. The pattern of ducts through the tiles which were supposed to improve ventilation, were probably based on the circulation systems of plants. The patent was bequeathed in Garbett's will to his first cousin Isabel Harriet Lacy.⁴ Without wanting to question the generosity of this gesture, there is no evidence that she greatly profited by it.

Garbett did apply for a third patent, but this too was declared void, or was withdrawn. It concerned the invention of an improved sextant. How it worked is not known.

January, 1884. The Complete Specification appeared on the 29th of September of that year.

4. He wrote the will in 1884.

A project for a dam was actually published in *The Builder*.⁵ The design tries to combine the Gothic economy of material with fitness to purpose. Having already referred to the use of catenaries in determining the shape of arches and the dispersal of thrust, attention must be focused on the striking resemblance between Gaudi's portico of Park Guell and the lowest and therefore strongest arch in the illustrated dam. Both have a similar solution to the problem of supporting lateral thrust.

Geological Miracles

The geologist Sir Charles Lyell, an intimate friend of Darwin, had in 1830 rejected the catastrophe theories of Cuvier and others in his *Principles of Geology*.⁶ Lyell had argued

5. E.L. Garbett, "Constructed Dams versus Heaps," *The Builder*, XXII (April 9, 1864) 259-260.

6. Lyell (1832). The book was immensely popular, by 1840 it had gone into its sixth edition.

convincingly that the order of nature in the past must have been uniform with the order of nature in the present. On that basis, the geologist had to always try to explain geological phenomena by analogy to the present.⁷ He emphasised that the magnitude of the geological changes which had occurred during the past was not a reason to postulate extraordinary convulsions or catastrophes. The greatest changes, could, according to him, have been accomplished by ordinary geological processes acting gradually, if they were given sufficient time.

Garbett tried to prove that Lyell's theories rested just as much on the assumption of a miracle as other theories. The assumed miracle being that no cosmic catastrophe occurred during so long a period.⁸ Garbett calculated the chance of

7. For my information on Lyell I used Gillispie (1973) and Gillispie (1951).

8. E.L. Garbett, "Geological Miracle Assumers," *The Athenaeum*, 2032 (Oct. 6, 1866) 436-437.

a comet colliding with the earth during the course of a million years and concluded that at least four or even five must have done so, causing a swift and major upset in Lyell's slow natural processes.

In another article Garbett relates his catastrophe theory to Noah's flood.⁹ He wanted to explain Darwin's puzzle concerning the migration of fresh water animals and came to the conclusion that the cataclastic deluge, mentioned in the cosmological accounts of most religions, consisted of fresh water. In other words, the similarity of fresh-water animals throughout the globe could be accounted for by the fact that the flood, diluting the salt of the sea, simply washed the animals away and dispersed them to the four corners of the earth. It is the iron logic of the absurd. What happened to the salt? And if that was diluted to allow the fresh-water fish to swim about, what happened to the salt-water fish? Such a dilemma still requires the

9. E.L. Garbett, "Noah's Rainbow," *Knowledge*, (June 13, 1884) 440-442.

adaptive flexibility of evolution to account for it.

Whatever the logical peculiarities of his explanation, Garbett was trying to make Noah's story compatible with scientific thought. Using rational and positivist explanations he concluded that the Bible represented a truthful historical authority. The Bible could not only be explained satisfactorily by science but once parts of the bible were so explained, Garbett imagined he could use other passages in the Bible to explain science! Consequently, if specific stories in the Bible could be interpreted rationally and positivistically, then a similar approach to the prophecies of Daniel and revelations of St. John, would automatically confirm their value as literal truths. The whole Bible represented a literal truth. This did not, however, mean that what the Bible left out, or left unsaid was necessarily untrue. This last was an important consideration with regard to Garbett's approach to theology. It gave him a licence to exploit science within the

context of theology and at the same time to deduce the most incredible *truths*.

Prophecy

Back in 1861 Garbett had criticised Fergusson's topography of Jerusalem in *The Builder*. He disagreed with the latter about whether Constantine's Dome of the Rock covered the true sepulchre of Christ.¹⁰ This marks the beginning of an ever intensifying theological tint to all his writings. In his drive to integrate his knowledge and ideology, he embraced every new subject in order to fuse it with a previous interest, ultimately hoping to arrive at a universal explanation of everything. His theological preoccupations, like his geological and astronomical ones, all relate to a desire to understand indiscriminately. Through his curious form of rationalisation he tried to show that the agnostic and even atheist ideas of Lyell and Darwin were not only

10.E.L. Garbett, "Mr. Fergusson's Topography of Jerusalem," *The Builder*, XIX (Mar. 2, 1861) 135-136.

contradicted by the Bible, but that the Bible offered a far more cogent and *scientific* solution to the problem geological development. Once he had established the Bible as a logical and consistent authority, he plunged into religion wholeheartedly. He now became a prophet and evangelist. Soon all his energies were employed in summoning the proof of his theological convictions: the scientific truth of the Bible. He never let go of his earlier preoccupations however.¹¹ The most

11.In his Pamphlet *England's God, The Bible's Baal, A Challenge to the Archbishop of Canterbury*, London, 47th year of the fulfilment of Daniel he writes among other more purely theological questions the following: *Another practice of your Grace is very decisive of what manner of God you worship. Whenever some of your Pig-goat devils (as the Chinese call them) want a new meeting house, called a church, they, not having a man to design it for the builders, as churches of old were designed, or as even Sir Christopher Wren designed*

spectacular of his ventures into theology are contained in exegetical pamphlets with titles such as *Daniel Fulfilled*, *Bishops in Victoria's Time*, *only Idolaters*, *England's God*, *the Bible's Baal* and *3,130 Grounds for holding that Satan inspires our Clergy*. These not only provide all who care to peruse them with his interpretation of such things as the fulfilment of Daniel's Prophecies, or the word denoting the beasts number 666, but also denounce the Church of England most

those in the city of London, send to a Pandemonium of percentage-devils called architects, for a Devil to design it. This "God" of yours is one who cannot have a temple, without hiring a Devil, on Devil's pay to provide it! Exactly as if the Saviour whom you profess to worship were some damned Capitalist or Shopkeeper of yours displaying his plunder. The pamphlet is concerned with trying to get the Archbishop release his knowledge of what the beast's number stands for, knowledge that Garbett claims to know.

viciously for ignoring his freely given advice on the impending doom.

His theology is a curious form of Christian science, an uncontrolled Pythagorean mysticism pervades each pamphlet. Science and theology are not just forced into an unhappy marriage, their fusion is complete in the chaos of the mixture. His use of mystical numbers combined with ordinary mathematics, for instance, makes the number 666 not only a symbol of evil, but it becomes itself the climax in a pseudo-rationalist and very obscure calculation. His juggling with numbers in establishing the timetable of the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecies may be seen in a similar light.

The book of Daniel has traditionally been the concern of modern-day prophets of doom; unhappy men and women, carrying signs of foreboding, decreeing an imminent destruction and desperately believing that they were themselves descendants of Lot.¹² Garbett joined this

12. *Daniel*, 12, 10.

army of men; he had been chosen, some five years before he published the *Treatise* to warn his fellow men of the imminent fulfilment of Daniel's prophecies.¹³ But his excursions into the mystic took on yet greater ambitions:

*Now I was occasionally in those days [1867] and earlier, what is called an "impressional medium." So at least a Trance-speaker has since declared. They say that we impressional mediums are never Ghost-seers nor Ghost-hearers, but liable to be suddenly interrupted by rapid suggestion.*¹⁴

He goes on to describe a conversation he had with such an *interrupter*. It concerned

13.E.L. Garbett, *Daniel Fulfilled, Showing all the dates to have been exactly verified...* This appeared on the flap of *A Plan and Plea of National Medicine*, see below.

14.E.L. Garbett, *God's View of Our Babylon, Shown in Slaying Alford the Beginner of the Bible Revision*, London 1885, p. 18.

a member of the established church called Alford, who, while busy revising the Bible was to be slain because he would not reveal the word denoting the beasts number to the general public; a horrible knowledge which Garbett had imparted to him.

It is hard at this point not to pass some dismissive judgement on Garbett's state of mind. Ralph Waldo Emerson did. I would argue that this state of mind was the climactic conclusion of philosophical convictions that were already evident in the *Treatise*. His drive to reform architecture was, as we have seen not solely fuelled by his concern for aesthetics. Architecture was a larger question, and for Garbett this carried immense and universal moral implications. To reform architecture was logically related and prior to the reformation of the whole of society. His rationalisation of architectural morality was epistemologically related to his belief that science could be used to explain biblical occurrences and that biblical occurrences could therefore be used to explain science.

Where different religions agreed roughly on an historical occurrence, in other words where there was universal consensus, a truth was implied. As the Biblical flood was echoed in other cosmological accounts, Garbett therefore assumed that it must, not unreasonably, represent an actual fact. If Noah's flood could be used to explain natural phenomena, and natural phenomena could explain Noah's Flood, then a similar approach could reveal the truth in other Biblical stories. That was a dangerous assumption. But it is such an assumption that accounts for these incomprehensible pamphlets.

The surprising coincidences, revealed by his mathematical conjuring tricks on Daniel's predictions, gave numbers a double symbolic or cabalistic function. They not only signified amount, but could also work as a celestial language. Numerical coincidences were proved significant by right of the innate rationality of numbers which somehow transcended the axioms of mathematics to reveal the unknowable mysteries.

From this idea stems his interest in the beast's number as a mathematical, not just numerical, code for the beast's word, which in turn represented the essence of what was wrong with society. Naturally, Garbett, having identified the word, believed he had diagnosed society's disease and was therefore in a position to cure it. The word he thought denoted the beast's number was paradosis, which stands for tradition. This can be seen in the context of Garbett's earlier involvement in the problems concerning tradition in architecture. Garbett was, despite his conservatism, his reactionary ideas, an anti-traditionalist, but not in the sense that past authority should be rejected out of hand. Instead he loathed the blind reliance on tradition which bred mental sloth, mindlessness and copyism. Tradition is good only if it goes hand in hand with constant reappraisal. This had been Garbett's fight, it was exactly that which he had condemned in architects and what he later condemned in the Anglican clergy. It was also what he tried to

show in his concern for harmonising geology with biblical occurrences.

It would too simple an explanation to say that Garbett became a prophet of doom, or a madman out of simple delusion, or disease. Sure enough he may well have been mad. Even so, his foreboding attitude was a stage in a quasi-logical development from architectural to messianic reformer. The madness resided not in that development but in his personal logic. Examples of this logic are to be found among the most compelling arguments of the *Treatise*, arguments which are self-consistent but which start from dislocated premises. Mysticism and mystery, Garbett believed throughout his publishing life, existed only because ignorance existed. But it was precisely that ignorance in combination with the peculiar cogency of souvenir proof which made him indulge in all sorts of remedies such as arbitrary mathematical concurrence as the solvent of ignorance.

Messiah

Jacob Voorthuis

There is a shift in Garbett's madness towards the end of his life. From the moment he starts contributing in an anecdotal and nostalgic spirit to *Notices and Queries* in 1880. The natural climax to Garbett's accumulative ambitions was not just to understand the world, but to improve it by applying his salvational gnosis. It was a resounding but largely unheard crescendo to his career as philosopher, architectural reformer, inventor and prophet. In the 1880's Garbett became a Christian socialist. With a highly individual program of course. These pamphlets are far from mad, at least in their intentions. Cutting away the roll-call of his accumulated obsessions which accompany each pamphlet and rehearse their esoteric arguments time and time again, some of these pamphlets show an intelligent concern with contemporary social problems.

There are several pamphlets which deal with specific systems for the development of a new society. The first of these sociological systems is described in a pamphlet called *Finite Avarice: A Socialism*

Drawn from the *Genesis Trade Union Law*, London, 1877. Unfortunately the contents are unknown to me. A note in the *National Union Catalogue* says only that it identifies the difference between capital and anti-capital, as society's destroyer. In the pamphlet he sketches rules for an anti-capitalist society. On the flaps of several of the other pamphlets a similarly entitled booklet is advertised, which promises to show how a few wealthy Christians can entirely abolish capitalism.¹⁵ The idea is supposed to have been based on Joseph's redistribution of land in Genesis, Chapter 47. While dealing with a famine in Egypt, Joseph establishes a feudal system whereby all the land is given to the Pharaoh, but is tended by the farmers who, in exchange for the use of the land, have to give him a fifth of their produce.

Female emancipation

15. See the flap on *Facts of the Jesus Huxley-Case*.

Garbett's socialism is typical of his syncretic attitude to all ideologies. Marxism had to be shown to have been anticipated in the Bible. In fact every modern concern had its justification and its model in the Bible. A pamphlet with title *Free Wifehood, A Lay Sermon to Young Girls* provides a framework for the emancipation of women and was published in London in 1892. The pamphlet argues for the abolition of marriage:

Nothing seems more natural than for a girl to follow her mother's example, and say "the condition of marriage to which my mother attained must be good enough for me." But girls thus reasoning, forget the rare fortune by which they individually, or their mothers, have escaped the ordinary average lot.¹⁶ and he laments the fact that the number of widows, and still more of abandoned wives, illegally separated, is so increasing that Fatherlessness must soon

16. *Free Wifehood*, p. 5.

become the most general condition of growing-up girls.

The Church and State have utterly failed to achieve permanence of marriage. To remedy this is Garbett's task. Instead of the Wife leaving family and home it is the husband who should *cleave unto his wife*. And the proof is found in the bible. Quoting Sir J. W. Dawson he writes that after the Fall it was decreed that Eve's husband should rule over her; *but this like other disabilities arising from the Fall, may have been regarded in early times as a Evil to be removed if possible.*¹⁷ Approvingly quoting Edith Ward, Garbett argues that the curse on Eve, the first human sinner, was a personal one, and its extension to any later person was a *masculine fraud*.¹⁸ Garbett advocates the establishment of a *Sisterly Communism* consisting of communes for

17. Garbett quotes from "Tract 42" in *The Religious Tract Society*, p. 34. cf. *Free Wifehood*, p. 7-8.

18. *Free Wifehood*, p. 9.

girls who may chose a mutually compatible and monogamic husband. On being chosen the husband has to surrender all personal property to the commune. Husbands and wives live separately, and the women organise yearly meetings after the harvest to determine the number of births allowed for the next year. When this is decided, each pair is sent on holiday with some money in order to fulfil their conjugal duty. Garbett, in an act of *historical exemplification*, closely reminiscent of the *Treatise*, even tries to prove that Jesus Christ himself was born in just such a community, and that he had been married and produced two sons before his baptism.

Apart from being too trusting in the will and determination of his fellow humans to succeed in his proposed system - a problem that most designers of Utopian schemes share - the preoccupations he reveals show him concerned with social change in a way that hints at an appealing and profound side to his character. Many of his utopian schemes also give the impression of being immediate responses to contemporary

events. Incidentally, he suggests that the words *serve and obey* should be dropped from the marriage service, a thing that is now becoming common practice.¹⁹

National Health

His last plan for social reform, which was published two years before his death, is contained in a pamphlet with the title, *A Plan and Plea for National Medicine*. London, 1898. He signs himself as "E.L. Garbett of the Peculiar People".

The Peculiar People were an Evangelical sect started by a man called William Bridges in 1838.²⁰ They accepted, unconditionally, the divine inspiration

19.Princess Diana had made such a request on marrying Prince Charles.

20.The information concerning the Peculiar People is taken from *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 9, ed. James Hastings, Edinburgh 1917; and *Man Myth and Magic, The illustrated Encyclopaedia of Mythology, Religion and the Unknown*, Vol. 78, ed. R. Cavendish, London 1983.

behind every word of the Bible. This led them to interpret James 5.14,15 quite literally. The text refers to the healing powers of prayer being better than the work of physicians. As a result of this interpretation the Peculiar People chose to receive no medical care when they were sick, but instead relied on constant prayer. The word peculiar refers of course, not to any strangeness in their habits, they were a highly respectable people, but echoes their identification with the people of Israel. As such, peculiar means special and chosen, a fact that seems to coincide well with Garbett's own idea about himself. What seems strange, however, is that Garbett, who calls himself a member of that sect, should choose to design a system whereby Doctors could provide health care more fairly. This apparent inconsistency is cleared up by another biblical text. Garbett quotes Matthew, 9,12 where it says that *They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick*. Garbett argues, therefore, that *He never adds that the whole are not to pay for Physicians, but only*

*the sick.*²¹ As everybody is liable to sickness, the expense ought to be general, and the emphasis should not be on cure but on prevention. The private employment of surgeons can lead to nothing but *private Class interest*. Quoting Robert Dale Owen, the son of the socialist, on *The Opposition of Interests*, he writes that it is in the interest of doctors to keep their patients in ignorance. All this is a clear reaffirmation of his socialist credentials and a clear echo of his former preoccupations with the payment of architects. In fact he mentions his architectural grievances in the pamphlet, which sound strangely out of context there. But as far as the system of payment itself is concerned he suggests that doctors should be allocated a number of lives, they are not allowed to chose their own patients. All of these are to be given a standardised value according to their age, (not their status) on which the doctor's salary is dependent. If the doctor loses a patient he loses an amount of pay related to the value

21.E.L. Garbett, *A Plan and Plea*, p. 6.

of that patient. In other words, as the life of a new-born baby is not as secure as that of a healthy man of forty, losing the former costs the doctor a lot less. Similarly, the value of an old man close to his natural end, poses no major threat to the doctor's income. One can already hear the Kafkaesque bureaucracy creaking the floors of the castle.

At the end of the pamphlet Garbett again confirms his membership of the Peculiar people and ends in the call to arms to defend his various obsessions such as the payment of architects and the beast's number. He violently rejects Mary Baker Eddy as well as *the Mormon prophet*. Even so his affiliation to the Peculiar people can do something to complete his strange and erratic portrait. He must have been an old man by now, close to seventy-four years old. The Peculiar People wore dark clothes and, curiously, no moustache. Their hymnal is one of the most extraordinary publications, containing some 1058 hymns, some of which contained endless verses which were sung with great enthusiasm,

over and over again. A verse which reprimands those who come late to the service, somehow also reflects Garbett's attitude to things, and in a way echoes his views on thought and consideration:

*Shall chapel doors rattle and
umbrellas move
To show how you the service
disapprove?...
A little less indulgence in the bed-
A little more contrivance in the head-
A little more devotion of the mind-
Would quite prevent your being so
behind.*²²

There he stands then with his back to us, triumphantly singing his hymns in a dark suit, his back straight and his eyes always focused on his own opinions.

Death or Conclusion

In a pamphlet entitled *Facts of the Jesus-Huxley Case, On Noah's Flood or Which is*

Nature and Which is Miracle, London 1893, Garbett tries to argue against Darwin's theory of evolution. Relying on such authorities as Isaac Newton, Halley, Cuvier and Auguste Comte, Garbett uses a positivist approach to uphold the biblical version of the great catastrophe, arguing that the deluge was a natural cometary phenomenon, which, among other things, ended the ice age and hurled us into the present order of things. The Flood caused the general water level to rise by some 300 or 440 feet in a few days. Such a theory was, according to him, more natural than the idea proposed by Lyell and Darwin, who assumed a far greater miracle by supposing that so many millions of years could have left the earth undisturbed by major catastrophe.

Ararat, the mountain on which the Ark landed, he writes, was formed by a sudden upswelling of the land due to the enormous cataclastic load of 16 million cubic miles of water descending on the earth within the space of a few days, accompanied by volcanic action. The continuation of this

22. *Man, Myth and Magic*, Op. Cit., p. 2157.

process, after the flood had receded, could, he thought, explain the fact that the remnants of Noah's Ark were found 1500 feet below the summit by the archdeacon J.J. Nourri, something that would otherwise be inexplicable as Noah's Ark should, by rights, have landed on the summit: *Until someone besides Nourri visits the Remains, it seems impossible to add more conjectures.*²³

On the 13th of October 1900, Edward Lacy Garbett of 3 Myddelton Square, Clerkenwell died in Baku town hospital. He was not married, left no children and had made out his will in 1884 to the benefit of his three cousins. His death in far away Baku, Azarbadjan on the coast of the Black sea, represents the most fitting climax to a most peculiar career. To have gone at the age of seventy-six, on a pilgrimage to try and find the remains of Noah's ark, must be seen as a tribute to his determination and his loyalty to his own thoughts which

constituted a religion in itself. He wanted to formulate the most spectacular anti-Darwinistic theory, arriving at a literal interpretation of the Bible through a scientific and positivist approach. The attempt was as noble as it was Quixotic. His ambition was to integrate all knowledge into one fantastic system. He wanted to fuse religion and science, philosophy with a deeper philosophy, and prove it empirically, by holding up the fossilised remains of a piece of wood and proclaim it authentic. Once he could explain it all, he, as the spiritual reincarnation of Isaac Newton, would discredit the Godless values of Huxley, Darwin and Lyell, and harmonise religion and science establishing a socialist world on Christian principles deduced from his reading of the bible. He would fight them all on their own terms, arriving at an explanation of the past by analogy to the present. His quest for Noah's Ark, his journey to Ararat, represented a triumphal procession of his own beliefs, ending in his death and the inevitable apotheosis into oblivion.

23. *Facts of the Jesus - Huxley Case*, p. 1.

the end