



A SON OF GOD

THE LIFE AND PHILOSOPHY OF AKHNATON, KING OF EGYPT

by

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**DEDICATION
TO MY HUSBAND**



“Thou art in my heart;
There is no other that knoweth Thee,
Save Thy Son, Akhnaton.
Thou hast made him wise in Thy designs
And in Thy might.”
Akhnaton — Longer Hymn to the Sun
(Translation by Breasted)

“The modern world has yet adequately to value or even to acquaint itself with this man who, in an age so remote and under conditions so adverse, became the world’s first idealist and the world’s first individual.”

Breasted — *History of Egypt*, page 392

INTRODUCTION

Roughly fourteen hundred years before Christ, at the time Egypt was at the height of her power, King Akhnaton ruled over that great country for a few years.

He was a thinker; he was an artist; he was a saint — the world's first rationalist, and the oldest Prince of Peace. Through the visible disk of the Sun — Aton — he worshipped “the Energy within the Disk” — the ultimate Reality which men of all creeds still seek, knowingly or unknowingly, under a thousand names and through a thousand paths. And he styled himself as the Son of that unseen, everlasting Source of all life. “Thou art in my heart,” he said in one of his hymns, “and no one knoweth Thee save I, Thy Son.” And his words, long forgotten, have come down to us, recorded upon the walls of a nobleman's tomb — these amazing words in what is perhaps the earliest poem which can be ascribed with certainty to any particular author: “I, Thy Son. . . .”

Akhnaton is one of the very few men who ever put forth such a bold claim. The aim of this book is to show that, in doing so, he was no less justified than any other teacher of the truth, however impressive may appear the success of the latter contrasted with his defeat; however widespread may be his fame, contrasted with the total oblivion in which has lain the Egyptian king for the last thirty-three hundred years.

* * *

Who is a “son of God”?

There are men who vehemently deny the honour of that title to any person whosoever, in consistency with the fundamental idea of a transcendent God, above and outside the Universe and distinct from all that is within it. Others recognise no “Son” but the founder of their own creed, to

whom they attribute a miraculous birth as the proof of a divine origin.

In harmony with an entirely different conception of God, we believe that any man who realises to the full that true relation of his finite individuality to the immanent, impersonal Essence of all things can call himself the Son of God — at once human and divine — for the relation of which he is then aware is one of substantial identity with that supreme Essence. We also believe that, properly speaking, the word “God” has no meaning except to those who have realised this. Such men are rare, always and everywhere. But they alone stand to justify the existence of the human species.

The aim of this book is to show that Akhnaton was one of those few men, and the earliest known, perhaps, among those whose life can be dated.

* * *

The failure of his teaching to survive him as an established religion can be regarded as one of the tragedies of history. We can explain it; we can even try to redeem it. But the bitter fact remains, for nothing can undo the past.

Other great souls have had disciples to preach their message, martyrs to bear testimony to their greatness in torture and death, missionaries to carry their name and domination to the limits of the earth; they have had commentators, admirers, detractors — philosophers, poets, artists — to keep their memory alive century after century. But Akhnaton’s fate was different. He had no sooner died than the fervour of his followers seems to have been spent out. Within a few years, his name was anathematised, his new city pulled down stone by stone, his remains profaned and his memory systematically destroyed, without, apparently, a single cry of protest on the part of any of those eighty thousand¹ or more who had, in their zeal, left Thebes with him, thirteen years before. Ever since then, until a part of his foreign correspondence and fragments of his hymns were

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Short History of Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1934), pp. 149-150.

brought to light, some fifty years ago, there was not a man on earth who knew of his existence. And to this very day, notwithstanding the genuine admiration of a learned few for his rational religion, there are hardly any people in the world whose daily life he fills with his presence.

Why?

Men who are in the habit of judging in haste will at once infer that his teaching cannot have been as perfect as those that have become the nucleus of living faiths.

But success is not the criterion by which one should decide on the value of a religion. In the diffusion of any doctrine far and wide there are too many factors at work for one to be able to ascribe its conquests to the sole amount of truth it contains. Moreover, it is only when that amount of truth appears to be of immediate and tangible use that it appeals to the herd of men sufficiently to help the propagation of the creed. The finer side of every religion is precisely that which escapes the attention and leaves unmoved the sensitiveness of its average followers. Therefore the number of people who profess a certain faith, and the extent of the geographical area in which it is recognised, prove nothing.

The quality of the nations that officially adhere to it does not stand any better as a guarantee of its value. For it is man who makes religion; not religion that makes man. Through some historic accident — migration, conquest, or the whims of some powerful chief — a sublime teaching can become and remain the collective creed of a pack of gross barbarians. They will no doubt misunderstand it; but they will, none the less, hold sacred the whole mythology and symbolism that tradition has attached to it. And reversely one has seen — and one sees still — cultured, progressive, rationally-trained nations adhere to childish dogmas invented or accepted by their uncritical ancestors. True, they do not fail to produce subtle theologians to interpret the nonsense in terms of hidden wisdom. But nonsense it remains.

A religion should be judged in itself, independently of its real or apparent influence upon any society, apart from its success or failure among men. And its founder — when it has a founder — is the only man whose life and personality one

should consider when speaking of it. Judged in that manner, from the sole standpoint of its inner beauty, Akhnaton's simple and rational religion, of which hardly anybody knows, can be compared advantageously with recognised faiths professed by millions of men. And its promoter, with perhaps not more than one or two living disciples, can nevertheless be ranked among the divine souls that honoured this earth — among those whom we call “incarnations” or “Sons of God.”

* * *

We can now try to explain why the worship of Aton failed to endure as an organised collective cult. From the little that can be gathered of it through the existing fragments of Akhnaton's hymns and through the history of his life, one can assert, to say the least, that it was far in advance of the time in which it appeared.

The abyss that separates a man of genius from his contemporaries does not necessarily awe them into accepting his leadership. If it be the result of his superiority in technical knowledge or in skill, it will make him powerful — a hero, a worker of wonders, a giant of war or of industry, whatever be the case. His counsels will soon be followed, and his inventions or discoveries soon admired and put to ever-increasing application because of the obvious advantages that they immediately procure. But if it be the abyss that separates a perfect man from the average human cattle, a rational mind and an enlightened soul from the superstitious crowd of believers; an all-loving, all-understanding heart, from the narrowly selfish majority of men, then, it only helps to render the great one lonely and powerless. The greater the difference between himself and his people, the lesser the immediate success of the man of moral, philosophical or religious genius. His words, his actions meet with no understanding; his lofty example has no imitators; the creation he strives to bring forth remains a dream. To be technically in advance of one's time is a source of strength, an assurance of worldly achievements; to be morally or philosophically ahead of it, is not.

The towering superiority of Akhnaton over his fellow-men has no parallel in the mechanical sphere. “Were it invented to satisfy our modern scientific conceptions,” his religion “could not be logically improved upon at the present day,” writes Sir Flinders Petrie.¹ Could we imagine a man of the fourteenth century B.C. in possession of the secret of our modern aeroplanes, we would then realise what would have been the mechanical equivalent of Akhnaton’s religious revolution. The very idea of it shatters us by its enormity. But, while our imaginary inventor could have safely conquered the world with the help of a single aircraft, the earliest rationalist failed to convince a minimum number of disciples capable of carrying on his work. His teaching “suitable for our own times,” met little response in his. Those who could easily have gathered it from his lips and transmitted it to posterity in all its details, were not moved to do so. And we, who would have done so, were not yet born. That is the main reason why nothing was left of it after the thirteen glorious years during which it flourished.

There are other reasons for its extinction.

One of them is that the cult of Aton was too rational to appeal to the average people of any time. Another is that Akhnaton himself was too good — and perhaps too farsighted, also — to establish it by means of violence.

Three elements seem to have contributed to the propagation of every widespread religion: a mythology; miracles; and a more or less definite doctrine concerning the hereafter. (By “mythology,” I mean the true or fictitious story of all natural or supernatural beings connected with the creed: men, angels, beasts, saints, demons, gods, etc.) I do not know of a religion which has stood up to now the test of time without one or two, at least, of these three elements. And most of the great international creeds owe much to all three.

But the cult of Aton seems to have been devoid of all three from the start. That is perhaps why some modern authors have called it a philosophy rather than a religion. But it did possess that stamp of devotion that distinguishes a religion from a philosophy. It was not purely a philosophy,

¹ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 214.

whatever one may say. It even comprised a daily ritual, with hymns and music, incense and flowers. It was a religion, but one which offered its followers, at the same time, rational thought, the warmth of devotion, and a stately display of sensuous beauty.

But there were no marvellous tales connected with it. The one theme that could have become the centre of a whole literature, had the religion lasted a little longer, was the life of its Founder. And that was too simple, too human, too obviously natural to impress the coarse imagination of the commoners.

Akhnaton, in his love of truth, seems to have deliberately stripped himself of all the mystery that had helped his fathers to appear as gods in the eyes of their prostrate people. He was of unconventional manners and of kindly approach. His divinity was not the showy privilege of a Sun-born king, or of a prophet, asserted by external signs, but rather the innermost perfection of a man whose heart, will and understanding were in complete harmony with the eternal laws of life; of a man who had fulfilled man's divine purpose as naturally as others drift away from it. He felt therefore no need of ascertaining it by a fastidious pomp, any more than by strange renunciations. There was no excess in him; nothing that the vulgar eye could look upon as "striking," nothing that popular enthusiasm could catch hold of and magnify. He wrought no extraordinary deeds, as other teachers are said to have done. The only wonder of which he spoke was the everlasting miracle of order and of fertility — the rhythm of day and night, the growth of a bird or of a baby.

And he brought with him, apparently, no new ideas about death, and put no stress upon the ones that were common in Egypt in his time. From the beautiful prayer inlaid upon his coffin, and probably composed by himself, one infers that he believed in the eternal life of the soul. But that is all. No allusion to the nature of that life beyond death, and especially not a single reference to sin, reward and punishment can be found in at least what has survived of the young king's hymns, or in the inscriptions in the tombs of the

nobles who boast of having “hearkened to his teaching.” Not that the religion of Aton was in any way devoid of a moral character, as some of its modern judges¹ have supposed — a gratuitous assumption, contradicted by the very motto of Akhnaton’s life: “Living in Truth.” But its morality concerned what one was rather than what one did. It was the inherent character of a harmonious life rather than the outcome of any catalogue of “dos” and “don’ts.” As all natural things are, it was foreign to the idea of promises and threats. And that was a reason for it not to appeal to a number of followers. Most men do not want true morality any more than true religion. They want mythologies and miracles to wonder at, and police regulations to abide by; illusions in this world, and punishments and rewards in eternity. In one word, they want eternity made small and exciting to suit the measure of average life. They do not want life simply stripped of its shallowness and made divine — “life in truth.” And as Akhnaton had nothing else but that to offer them, his teaching left them indifferent. It did not spread beyond the narrow circle of courtiers.

* * *

The one means by which he could have secured its success as an international creed was violence.

The religion was, indeed, far in advance of its time and of many future ages. And it lacked the elements that generally make a creed popular. Men would, no doubt, have misinterpreted it, misused it, and degraded it within a few years. But it would have spread. Force of money and force of arms can make any people accept any faith, even one that does not suit them. And Akhnaton was both the most powerful and the richest king of his days. We are convinced that, had he chosen to use his strength to impose his new cult upon the world, he would probably have largely succeeded.

But he felt too deeply and he knew too much to sacrifice

¹ J. D. S. Pendlebury: *Tell-el-Amarna* (Edit. 1935), pp. 156-157. Also Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, and Egyptian Monotheism*, pref. XV; also pp. 114-115.

the spirit of his doctrine to an illusory triumph. Far from using violence to propagate his religion, he did not even persecute those who tried to destroy it. As a result, it is they who enjoyed the thrill of triumph — for the time being. It is they who imposed their will upon the world. They wanted Akhnaton to be cursed, and so he was; they wanted him to be forgotten, and so he was; it was their will that never, never again the world should hear his name, and for over three millenniums the world did not.

But his beautiful, rational teaching, however incompletely known, remains unstained by superstition, unmarred by compromise, unconnected with any of the crimes committed, in course of time, in the name of many a successful religion; pure, whole, as its Founder conceived it — a thing of beauty for all ages to come.

* * *

But if there are psychological reasons for which Akhnaton's teaching had little chances of becoming one of the widespread creeds of the world, it could have remained, at least, the religion of an elite. It could have; and it most probably would have, in different surroundings. One of its main features is the diversity of its appeal. It satisfies reason; it fulfils our highest aspirations towards the beautiful; it implies love, not of man alone, but of all creatures. In the midst of general superstition and strife, the better men could have sought in it an ideal to live up to. A pious tradition could have kept the name of Akhnaton sacred to the few who are worthy to know of him.

But such a tradition was never started, or at least never permitted to develop. Egypt, in the fourteenth century B.C., was already too deeply engrossed in formalism to respond to the forgotten message of living life. And the countries around her were either too barbaric or too decadent to understand it. Strangled at home by priestly fanaticism and by popular indifference, the new religion was submerged, abroad, amidst a crowd of conflicting practical faiths that promised men tangible advantages in this world as well as

in the next. Persecuted as an organised cult, it soon ceased to exist even as a secret worship. To keep it alive, it would have needed an atmosphere of earnestness and of toleration, a truly religious atmosphere as it was difficult to find anywhere on earth for many centuries, except perhaps among a minority of Hindus.

We may remark here that none of the lofty doctrines of antiquity which originated before Christianity have survived, west of India. And, unexpected as this may seem, India might well be the only land that would have given the youthful worshipper of Radiant Energy a place worthy of him in his time, had she heard of his teaching; the only land, also, who probably would have continued to venerate him to this very day as one of the incarnations of the Supreme Soul.

* * *

The aim of the present book is to tell the world how perfect Akhnaton was.

We believe that no teaching would meet, better than his, the exigencies of the critical modern mind. Yet, it is not our intention to try to revive it on a broad scale, as the basis of a public cult. We do not think it desirable to attempt what its Founder himself does not seem to have aimed at — he who, though fully conscious of its universal value, did not try to explain it to the many. With all their pride in progress, our times are no less foolish and no less barbaric than his. We now use electric fans, while in Thebes they did not; that is about all the difference. The resuscitated religion of Cosmic Energy would soon offer, in the hands of any crowd, as ludicrous a sight as that of the great “living” faiths of to-day. We do not wish to rob the other world-teachers of a few millions of insignificant admirers in order to give a noisy following to the great man who is dear to us. We know too well, through daily experience, what the quality of that following would be.

But we do wish to make the name and teaching of Akhnaton popular among the best of our contemporaries — among those who really represent the higher tendencies of

our sceptical and at the same time mystical age; among those to whom dogmas no longer appeal, whom wonders no longer impress, whom religion without a background of positive knowledge, and science without the feeling of the seriousness of life, leave equally unsatisfied. It is among such people that we earnestly wish to revive the spirit of him who, a thousand years before Socrates and nearly nine hundred years before the Buddha, united the boldest rationalistic views to the deep intuitive certitude of the oneness of God, the oneness of Life, and the brotherhood of all creatures.

Modern scholars have already recognised his undeniable greatness. The earliest and most eminent of all those specialists who have laboured to revive his memory among the learned, Sir W. Flinders Petrie, has paid him a magnificent tribute.¹ But what we want also is that Akhnaton's name be held sacred by all those who, without being scholars, can think in terms of truth and feel in terms of beauty and who are capable of modelling their lives on an immortal example of living perfection.

More so, if few be likely to live up to the spirit of his teaching, let all at least know that there has been such a man as he, once, long long ago. Let them remain superstitious, vulgar and violent, if they will; but let them know that there has been a man in whose life religion and reason walked hand in hand; a man whose very being was harmony, balance, supreme elegance, and who lost an empire for the sake of truth. Few meditate upon the beauty of the Sun; yet all behold it. Above man's unchanging mediocrity He shines in glory. In a similar manner, worshipped by a few, but familiar to all after thirty-three hundred years of silence, we want the name of Akhnaton, Son of the Sun, young for ever, to live once more in the consciousness of our old world.

This will no doubt appear as a stupendous dream.

The aim of this book is to make others feel that the dream will become true the moment they sincerely realise its beauty.

¹ In his *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, pp. 214 and 218. Also in his *Tell-el-Amarna* (Edit. 1894), pp. 41-42 (§102).

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Part I

THE WORLD'S FIRST INDIVIDUAL

CHAPTER I

FLEUR SÉCULAIRE

Akhnaton was born in Thebes, in about 1395 B.C.¹ in a world already as old, as civilised and as sophisticated as our own. And he was the son of the greatest monarch of that world; the last offspring, in direct descent, of a long and glorious line of warriors over-loaded with the spoils of conquest; the heir of an empire that stretched, in modern words, from the Sudan to the borders of Armenia, and of a culture more than four thousand years old.

When he was a child, the famous Pyramids of Gizeh were nearly as ancient as the Roman remains in England are today, and the first empire-builder of whom we know something definite — Sargon of Agade — was already as remote in time as Nebuchadnezzar is now.² And beyond the glories of which the oldest monuments bore witness, and beyond the mighty shadows of half-forgotten heroes and king-gods lost in the midst of legend, a still remoter antiquity, with its immemorial art and wisdom, extended over centuries, down to the dim beginnings of the Neolithic Age, and further still. Crete and the Ægean Isles had flourished for over two thousand years, and Babylonia and Elam for several millenniums more, while, unaware of each other and of the rest of mankind, distant India and China counted long centuries of polished life.

If, indeed, instead of letting ourselves be over-impressed

¹ According to Sir Flinders Petrie, who places his accession in 1383 B.C. (*History of Egypt*, Vol. II, p. 205). L. W. King and H. R. Hall (*Egypt and Western Asia*, p. 365) place his reign half a century earlier, and Arthur Weigall places it from 1375 to 1358 (*Life and Times of Akhnaton*, new and revised edit., 1922, p. I; *Tutankhamen and Other Essays*, p. 80).

² According to Nabonidus. See Cambridge Ancient History (Edit. 1924), Vol. I, p. 155. Sir C. Leonard Woolley, however, believes him to be of a much later period. (See *Ur of the Chaldees, A Record of Seven Years of Excavation* (Edit. 1929), pp. 160 and 203; or Pelican Books Edit., 1937, pp. 76, 112, 142).

by the few hundreds of years that separate us from him, we stop to consider the endless length of time that separates both Akhnaton and ourselves from the mysterious origins of civilisation, we might well look upon him as a man of yesterday, almost as one of our contemporaries.

He was the tenth Pharaoh of that glorious Eighteenth Dynasty which opens the period known in history as the “New Kingdom.”

His ancestors, the kings of Thebes, had freed Egypt from foreign domination; his great-great-grandfather had made her the head of an empire; his father had made her the abode of unprecedented splendour.

Sporadic revolts in Nubia and in Syria had been utterly crushed, and peace had at last succeeded the unceasing struggles of the former reigns. From all parts of the immense empire, tribute in gold and silver, in ivory and slaves and cedar wood, poured in regularly. King Amenhotep the Third, whom some modern writers have rightly called Amenhotep the Magnificent, lived a life of pleasure in the midst of every kind of luxury, with a number of beautiful wives and concubines collected from every country of the known world.

The granaries were full and the people content. Thousands of foreign slaves — the prize of war — were toiling for the welfare of Egypt: tilling the fields, digging or repairing canals, extracting gold from the Nubian mines, dragging down the Nile huge barges loaded with granite, building temples and palaces and keeping the highways in good condition. And the faraway kings of Babylon and of Mitanni — the Pharaoh’s brothers-in-law — and the king of the Hittites and the king of barbaric Assyria wrote with equal greedy envy, in their despatches to Amenhotep the Third: “Verily, in thy land, gold is as common as dust.”

Every refinement in pleasure, every treasure of art, every subtlety of thought, every comfort, every delicacy, every brilliancy was to be found in Thebes. Nothing equalled the beauty of its monuments, the pomp of its festivities, the wealth of its priests who enjoyed throughout the world a reputation of mysterious powers and of hidden wisdom. Its

temples, of which the gigantic ruins still stir the admiration of travellers, stood then in all their glory. Their half-dark halls inspired something of that sacred awe that one feels in the cave-temples of medieval India; and their rows of mighty pillars with lotus-shaped capitals displayed already that harmony of proportions, that grace blended with majesty, that perfect elegance that was one day to distinguish the art of Periclean Greece.

Thebes was not merely the metropolis of the greatest empire then existing, not merely one of the largest and most sumptuous cities that the world had ever seen; it was the masterpiece in which the genius of the Near and Middle East had finally expressed itself, after having groped for centuries in quest of perfection. It seemed as though nothing could be added to its beauty.

It seemed, also, as though nothing could be added to its glory.

Along with the words of praise to all the gods, that covered the walls and columns, the crowds of worshippers that thronged the halls of the temple of Karnak could read in golden hieroglyphics, on a slab of black granite, the song of war and triumph of King Thotmose the Third, the words of the Theban god to the maker of Egypt's greatness:

“I have come; I have granted thee to trample over the great ones of Syria; I have hurled them beneath thy sandals in their lands...”

It is one of the most beautiful hymns of victory of all times. Its echo had run through the world from the Nile Valley to the Black Sea and to the Persian Gulf, from the Libyan Desert to the boundaries of India. And as he beheld the solemn words, the Egyptian pilgrim was filled with national pride. What song would ever efface the glory of that one?

Thus, in wealth, in splendour and in warrior-like fame stood Thebes, the capital of the first nation of the earth, the seat of divine royalty, the proud City of Amon, the mighty god. Millenniums of culture had created it; the skill of all known lands had adorned it. And the sword of its kings had

spread far and wide the glory of its name and the terror of its local deity whom the priests had boldly identified with Ra, the immemorial Sun-god of the Egyptians.

It is then that he came.

* * *

On the western bank of the Nile, upon a site which to this day retains its loveliness, was built the Charuk palace, the residence of the Pharaoh Amenhotep the Third.

It was a light but beautiful structure of brick and precious wood, decorated with exquisite paintings and surrounded by immense gardens full of shade and full of peace.

From the terraces of the palace one beheld to the east, beyond the Nile and its palm-groves, white walls contrasted with dark shadows, flat roofs of different levels, flights of steps, broad avenues and gardens and monumental gates: all that glory that was Thebes. In the foreground, the towering pylons of the great temple of Amon emerged above the outer walls of the sacred enclosure that stretched over miles. And the gilded tops of innumerable obelisks glittered in the dazzling light or glowed like red-hot embers in the purple of sunset. One could distinguish many other temples dedicated to all the gods of Upper and Lower Egypt, temples with doors of bronze and gates of granite, of which the humblest would have been the pride of any other city.

To the west, the eye wandered over the vastness of the desert.

It is in that palace that Akhnaton was born.

His mother, Queen Tiy, was the chief wife of Amenhotep the Third, and one of the ablest women of all times. While her weary lord, after experiencing in his long life of pleasure the vanity of all pursuits, had gradually brushed aside the tiresome duties of kingship, it was she who received the foreign ambassadors, gave orders to provincial governors and drafted the despatches that messengers were to carry to Babylon or to the faraway capital of the Hittites. It was she who, through a well-organised network of informers, kept an eye on the restless vassal princelings of Syria as well as on

the movements of the unconquered tribes below the Fourth Cataract of the Nile; she who saw to it that the public officers did their work well, and that the taxes came in without delay.

Consort of the mightiest monarch, and the virtual ruler of his empire no less than the head of his “house of women,” she had enjoyed all through her twenty-six years of married life every pleasure, every luxury and every glory that a woman can imagine in her wildest dreams. For her the gardens around the Charuk palace had been extended and adorned at great cost with an artificial lake. For her the priests of the oldest Sun-god, Ra — which they also called Aton, the Disk, in the sacred city of On, his abode — enjoyed favour at court in spite of the secret jealousy of the powerful priests of Amon, for the god of On was Tiy’s favourite god. In pomp and power the queen’s years had drifted away. She was fairly past thirty-five, and perhaps not far from forty, when at last she bore the little prince, her only son.

The babe’s coming into the world was greeted by the joy of a whole nation. Sacrifices of thanksgiving were offered to the gods of Egypt; distant vassals from North and South welcomed through their messengers the child who was one day to be their lord, and allied monarchs congratulated the king, his father, in friendly despatches.

But the birth of Akhnaton was a greater event than anyone in his days could realise. The world was already old, as we have said — as old as it is now. Men had already invented many arts and many gods, and built up many kingdoms. The infant who, in the Charuk palace, now smiled for the first time to the Sun, was, in a few years, to transcend the very idea of nation, to preach the oneness and universality of the Principle of all existence, and to show men the way of life in truth, which is also life in beauty — life divine upon earth. That he was to proclaim — less by his words than by his deeds, less by his deeds than by his attitude towards things — which the weary world had dimly sought, age after age; which those who know him not are still seeking: the synthesis of total knowledge and perfect love.

His life, which had just begun, was to last very little

indeed: less than three decades. Yet, in that short span of time, he was to be what neither the victories of his fathers, nor the wealth and wisdom of his country, nor the arts and glories of all the ancient kingdoms had succeeded in producing: a perfect Individual of equal genius and sanctity — a divine Man.

His mother, who had grown-up daughters but no male child, may well have looked upon his birth as the fulfilment of her long, active and sumptuous life. It was, in no less manner, the culmination of a long evolution towards the rational and the beautiful, the ultimate achievement of the oldest cultures of the world, already so fruitful in outstanding creations. Like unto the cactus-tree which, so they say, blooms after a hundred years into one resplendent flower that lasts less than a day,¹ Egypt had lived and dreamt and toiled four thousand years — and mankind perhaps fifty times longer — in order to produce him whose life was to remain in history only a flash — but a flash of unsurpassed beauty.

¹ “Et le grand aloès à la fleur écarlate,
Pour l’hymen ignoré qu’a rêvé son amour,
Ayant vécu cent ans, n’a fleuri qu’un seul jour.”
José-Maria de Hérédia, in “Fleur Séculaire” (Les Trophées).

CHAPTER II

PRINCE AMENHOTEP

There is no historical record of Akhnaton's life before he succeeded his father as king of Egypt. What we know definitely about him at an earlier date is very little. We know, for instance, that his parents had conceived him in an advanced age, and that he was given at his birth the name of Amenhotep — his father's name — which means "Amon is at rest," or "Amon is pleased" (the name under which he is famous in history he chose himself later on). We know that he was, as a baby, committed to the care of a woman — the "great royal nurse" — who bore, like the queen herself, the name of Tiy, and was the wife of Ay, a court dignitary and a priest. We know also that he was married, some time before his father's death, to a princess called Nefertiti, of whom it is not certain whether she was an Egyptian or a foreigner. That is practically all that can be gathered from the written documents so far brought to light, about the first part of a life so remarkable.

But if nothing precise can be stated about the facts of those early years, yet, from what we know of Amenhotep the Third's "house of women" and its inmates, something can be inferred of the atmosphere in which the royal child was brought up. And something, too, we can expect to guess of his first reactions to the world around him, in the light of all that we know of his subsequent life.

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To say that he was the son of parents of mature age is already to suggest some prominent traits of his personality, such as eagerness, seriousness of mind, depth. To add that he was not, like most babies, the casual product of a moment's fancy, but the fruit of yearning and of prayer no less than of

pleasure, not only accepted but intensely desired; to recall that his mother — herself an exceptional woman — with all her power and glory, with the love of her lord and the graceful presence of several daughters was not happy until he, a son, was born to her; that she longed for him, year after year, as for the one blessing she could dream of, is to explain, to some extent, how he was no average child, and could never grow into an average man. Few children indeed ever were so desperately wanted — and so much loved — as the only son of Amenhotep the Third and Queen Tiy.

The queen, as we have said, was surely over thirty-five, and perhaps not far from forty at the time of his birth — an age which is not young for a woman in any climate, and which, in the tropics, in the days of Egypt's greatness just as now, was considered old. We may try to imagine her feelings when she came to know that she was once more to become a mother, long after her daughters had grown up; her joy for an event that had so long seemed unlikely, if not impossible, and then the hopes, the dreams she had concerning him who was not yet born; the prayers she addressed to the most powerful gods and goddesses, especially to her favourite deities, for the welfare and future greatness of her child. Those ardent hopes, those dreams, that fervour of prayer, that constant anxious thought concentrated on him in an expectation of glorious days to come, were the very earliest influences upon the formation of Akhnaton's personality — the earliest, and the most impossible to retrace, but certainly not the less powerful, nor the less important.

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The god whom Tiy worshipped was Aton — the Disk — the oldest Sun-god of Egypt. The seat of his venerable cult was not Thebes, but the sacred city of Anu or On — “the city of the obelisk” — which the Greeks were one day to call Heliopolis, “the city of the Sun.” The priests of On were less wealthy but more thoroughly versed in ancient wisdom than those of Thebes. For a generation or two they had been trying to make their deity popular in the great metropolis,

and especially at court. They hoped that, if they succeeded, the god would recover all over Egypt the prominent place which he held of old. And they had succeeded to some extent. People were beginning to add to the name of the mighty Amon, in votive inscriptions, that of the elder god.¹

And when he had inaugurated the newly-built artificial lake in the gardens around his palace, the Pharaoh had named the pleasure-boat in which he had glided over its waters with Tiy, his chief wife, Tehen-Aton, *i.e.* "Aton gleams."²

But the name of Aton was still that of a secondary god among many. Tiy herself was far from looking upon him as the only god worth praying to; she had grown up, like everybody else, in a world full of various deities, and her father, Yuua, was a priest of Min, the fertility-god. Yet she was impressed by the great antiquity of the cult of the Disk. Perhaps also did she realise, with her sharp intelligence, that there was much more in the less popular religious traditions of the priests of On than in the pious devices that the ministers of Amon in Thebes were in the habit of using to impress the people, and sometimes to force their will upon the kings. She probably disliked their increasing grip upon public affairs and, without wishing to displease them openly (for she was a worldly-wise woman), she dreamt within her heart of a new order of things more in accordance with the rights of royalty. Perhaps she had already the dim presentment of a possible conflict between Aton and Amon, as of a struggle of royalty against priestcraft.

Whatever might have been her aspirations at the moment, there can be little doubt that they coloured her conception of her child's greatness. The child would be a son — that was certain; the queen had too long waited and prayed and hoped for her to be disappointed once more. But that is not all; he would be a providential child, a man the like of which are born once in many hundreds of years; he would put an

¹ A stele of the two brothers, Hor and Suti, overseers of the works of Amon in Thebes. (British Museum, Stele 475.) See Sir Wallis Budge's *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (edit. 1923), p. 46.

² James Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 90.

end to the arrogance of the priests of Amon, restore the cult of the old Sun-god of On on a wide scale, reassert the meaning of divine kingship, and surpass in power and glory all his forefathers.

Were these the thoughts of Queen Tiy while day after day she felt the unborn prince come into being within her body? It is difficult to say. All one can state is that it was natural for a woman with her ambitions to entertain such thoughts and that, if she did so, her hopes were to be rewarded a hundredfold — though not in the way she might have expected.

* * *

The young prince spent his early years in his father's "house of women." To judge by what we know of his health all through his life, and also by some of the portraits of his boyhood, he was probably a delicate if not a sickly baby, perhaps also a premature one. Though, as we repeat, there is no information to be gathered concerning the very first part of his life, we may, with some chances of not making a mistake, imagine him, when four or five years old, as a quiet, slender boy with a long neck, delicate features, large dreamy eyes, pretty hands like those of a girl, and nothing of the boisterousness of ordinary children of his age.

The uncompromising spirit that he showed, hardly ten years later, as a king, leads us to believe that he already had a strong personality, and that he was conscious of it; also that he loved truth and was incapable of dissimulation. This must have urged him, more than once, to rebel against whatever shocked him or simply bored him; to speak when he was not expected to, and often to take a hasty initiative in matters which the grown-ups preferred to reserve for themselves. It is likely that he used to put a quantity of puzzling questions, as most intelligent children do — many of which, no doubt, were unanswerable, but others that he was himself to answer, one day, in the most eloquent manner. It is likely, too, that he never obeyed but those whom he really loved, and then only after asking many "whys" and "what fors." In one

word, if conventional behavior be the measure of what is “good,” then many a well-intentioned pedagogue might have called him a “naughty child.” That much-used adjective is equally applied to children who are worse and to others who are better than their environment. Prince Amenhotep was of the latter.

* * *

The greatest and most lasting influence to exert itself upon the royal child was surely that of his mother. His father, who had prematurely grown old, loved him, no doubt, who was his only son and heir. But he had put in him less hopes, less dreams than the queen had, for he was himself weary, and took less interest than she did in the future, even in the present. It was several years since he had practically let the burden of government lie upon his able chief-wife, whom he knew he could trust. It is probable that he also relied entirely on her for the education of his son.

As already stated, the queen was a worshipper of the solar god of On, Aton — the Disk. She must have taught the child to render homage to him at sunrise and sunset. The boy, who was born an artist, opened his heart to the beauty of the Sun.

It is likely that many times his mother’s sweet words rang in tune with his rapture in front of a glowing sky, in which the Disk appeared or disappeared. He saw the fiery reflection of the Sun upon her face, which it beautified, while she repeated to him, in a tender voice, something of what the wise men of On and her own common sense had taught her about the beneficent Lord of the Two Horizons. He watched the birds fly round and round, with joyous thrills, as the Sun flooded the gardens, the Nile and the western hills with pink morning light, and the queen told him that they were glad because He, the Father of all creatures, had come back. She showed him in the ponds the water-flowers that had just opened to receive His warm kiss. And he looked at them, and understood that they were alive, like himself; and he loved them, and loved the birds and the beasts and the

many-coloured insects, and all things that live and feel the Sun's caress.

It is true that the history of his early years is not recorded; and even if it were, would history have remembered to note the small facts of daily life, psychologically so important? Yet, one can well imagine Prince Amenhotep, a delicate and sensitive child, stooping to pick up a fledgling fallen from its nest, because he felt for the fragile drop of life, or smoothing down with his little hands the burning-hot fur of a cat lying in the sun — a sight so common in ancient Egypt, where those graceful felines were universally cared for — and enjoying to see how, while it purred, it kept gazing at the faraway Disk with its half-shut emerald eyes. He loved the Sun as a living and loving God, and, being by nature kind to living creatures, he loved them all the more, in Him. His mother encouraged him in that true, spontaneous piety, so different from the vain display of bigotry she had so often witnessed among grown-up people. And the Disk, of which he was one day to evolve a personal conception more lofty than anything Tiy could dream of, was always to retain, in his subconscious mind, the indefinable charm of things we have loved from childhood and which remain intertwined with our dearest associations.

The queen, however, was no monotheist, and surely no philosopher, and we think it would be a great mistake to attribute to her early influence the essential of Akhnaton's religious ideas. They were decidedly his own. The only thing that one can say is that his mother was one of the factors (and the most effective one, probably) which helped him, from the very beginning, to find his way. That she did, and no more. But that was enough. And besides the positive influence she exerted by directing him to ponder over the beauty of the Sun, she played also a negative part, equally important. She helped to create around him the psychological conditions in which the whole religion of Egypt, with the exception of the ancient Heliopolitan solar cult, would appear to him the least lovable. She did not create the facts that would have impressed him anyhow as he grew to know them: the dead ceremonial of the temples of Amon, "as

intellectually low and primitive,” in the words of Arthur Weigall,¹ “as its state of organisation was high and pompous”; the hypocrisy of the priests, whose piety was dwindling as their wealth and power increased; the superstition of the people, and that narrow national pride which, kindled by constant victories, had become more and more aggressive since the liberation of the country from the yoke of the Hyksos. But, willingly or unwillingly, she probably drew his attention to some of those facts — and to many others — as soon as he could think. And even earlier still, stray remarks of hers about the priests of Amon, whom she did not like, and about their impressive tricks, which she probably detested, must have made it impossible for him to feel, towards those sacred persons, the respect — not to speak of the awe — that generations of princes had felt; impossible even for him, perhaps, to take their faith seriously.

It is quite plausible to suppose that on more than one occasion the child, who was extremely intelligent, overheard such bitter remarks. Moreover, he was soon given preceptors who, apart from reading and writing and the elements of the sciences of his age, taught him what he should know of the history of his fathers. In a country in which everything was calculated to impress upon the future king the consciousness of his divine origin, every mark of supernatural favour shown by the gods to his family must have been stressed to the utmost. And Prince Amenhotep was surely told of such miracles as that, for instance, which occurred under Queen Hatshepsut, when during a solemn procession the statue of Amon suddenly stopped in front of him who was to succeed the queen as Thutmose the Third, and nodded to him before everybody, so as to make the choice of heaven manifest. The story seemed suitable enough to inspire the child with reverence for the Theban god as well as for his illustrious great-great-grandfather, the builder of the Egyptian empire. What impression it made upon him, nobody knows. But we do know that the prince was to show a very critical mind in early adolescence. And that is enough for one to hold it possible that, already as a

¹ Arthur Weigall, in *Tutankhamen and Other Essays* (1st Edit. 1923), p. 81.

child, he only half-believed the marvellous tale. His next step was probably to ask his mother about it, in answer of which she told him that the whole scene had been staged by the priests of Amon, who favoured Thotmose the Third as Queen Hatshepsut's successor. She added, perhaps, that when he grew up, he would acquire still more glory than his great ancestor if only he succeeded in keeping those same priests in their place, for they were now becoming a nuisance — if not a menace — to royal power. And she spoke emphatically, for she felt what she said.

Prayers, ceremonies, sacrifices in honour of the “king of gods” were, of course, a part and parcel of the young prince's official life, so as to say. As heir-apparent, he had to be present wherever his presence was considered necessary. He was never taught that Aton was the only god; and for some years at least it appears that he did not question the existence of other deities. Yet, his early devotion to the Disk must have had the natural exclusiveness of every ardent love. Those dutiful attendances to shrines of other gods must have seemed boring to him, to say the least, in spite of the surrounding pomp. And his inborn disposition to tell the truth and to act according to his feelings — a trait of his character so dominant that it cannot but have distinguished him, even as a child — must have made him feel morally uncomfortable every time he was forced to be the silent witness of some priestly magic on grand occasions, or to pay a public homage to Amon, the god whom he seems never to have loved.

It has been said that every great life is the realisation of a child's dream. In the case of Akhnaton, who was little more than a child when he began to put his ideas into action, this is obvious. But it is likely that he conceived his main ideas before he gave them a public expression, and that the great tendencies which were to direct his astonishing career were discernible in him long before he even had ideas. That is to say that his contempt for Amon and for most of the national gods, and his passionate adoration of the Sun alone, are probably to be traced to an incredibly early age. His whole life being a marvel of precocity, there is nothing unnatural in supposing him to have been a “heretic” from the start.

The rôle of his mother was not to make him such, but to encourage him to remain such, without perhaps a clear understanding of what she was doing.

* * *

One may assume that, besides his mother, the prince's step-mothers had a place in his early life. We know next to nothing about them, but we know at least that they were numerous and that they came from various countries far and near. One of the wives of Amenhotep the Third was the sister of the ruling king of Babylon; another, named Gilukhipa, was the sister of Dushratta, the ruling king of Mitanni. Apart from her, the Pharaoh had married at least one other Mitannian princess — if not more than one — and a number of women from all the countries of the Near East, especially from Syria and Mesopotamia. Alliances with foreign ladies of rank were no longer uncommon in the royal family of Egypt since Thotmose the Fourth had taken Mutemuya, the daughter of Artatama, king of Mitanni — Dushratta's grandfather — as his chief wife.

It is now established that, apart from the great war-god Teshub, the Mitannians, whose ruling class at least seems to have been of Indo-Aryan race, worshipped also Mithra, Indra, Varuna, and other well-known Vedic gods. The remarkable similitude that exists between Akhnaton's conception of the Sun and that found in certain hymns of the Rig-Veda has prompted some authors to suggest that the Egyptian king might have received the essential of his religious innovations from India through Mitanni. And the influence of his father's Mitannian wives upon him in his childhood, as well as that of other Mitannians, possibly, during the rest of his life, has been stressed in support of this view.

There are, however, as yet, no available Mitannian documents describing the Vedic gods which we have mentioned. Those gods are merely enumerated, under names slightly different from their Sanscrit ones, as witnesses of a treaty between Shubbiluliuma, king of the Hittites, and Mattiuaza,

son of Dushratta, king of Mitanni. From some Mitannian proper names, such as for instance “Shuwardata,”¹ one may also infer the existence of a god whose name was not much different from that of the Vedic sun-god, Surya. But that is all. So much so that Sir E. Wallis Budge,² one of the authors who stresses the most the similarity of Aton and Surya, backs his argument with quotations from the Rig-Veda, not from any Mitannian text. The argument, as a result, loses much of its weight. For the idea two different nations have of the same deity is not necessarily the same. And whether the Mitannians borrowed their Surya and their Mithra from India, or whether both they and the Aryans of India, borrowed them from a common source, still it remains to be proved that Surya or Mithra represented, to the Mitannian mind, the same religious conception as that expressed in the Rig-Veda. And as long as that point is not well established, it is not possible to assert that a conception of the Sun more or less similar to that in the Rig-Veda is derived from Mitannian influences.

The part played in the prince’s religious education by the Mitannian inmates of his father’s harem must therefore be, we think, considerably reduced.³ Of course, it is plausible to imagine the royal child coming to know from the mouth of his step-mothers the names and legends of different gods. And it is possible that some of those glimpses of foreign religion, especially under its solar aspects, made a greater impression on him than others. It is also not impossible that he might have heard on some occasions of a sun-god little different, at least in his superficial features, from the Surya of the Aryans and from the god he was himself to praise one day under the name of Aton. But the point remains doubtful, for lack of information. And the impression the prince received must have been rather vague, anyhow. For even

¹ James Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 209.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), pp. 113-115.

³ The proper explanation of the doubtless striking similitude between his conception of Divinity and that of the Aryans of India, as expressed in the Rig-Veda, lies, not in the assumption of any influence exerted upon Akhnaton, but in the fact that he was himself partly Aryan (being the grandson of a Mitannian princess).

if there did exist any noteworthy solar philosophy behind the sun-gods of the Mitannians (or of any other nation represented in Amenhotep the Third's "house of women"), it is doubtful whether any of the Pharaoh's wives or concubines would have been able to convey adequately the essence of it, especially to a child. It is much more natural to imagine that the young prince, popular among his step-mothers (as among women in general), because of his mild disposition and girlish beauty, gladly used to go to their rooms; that he spent his time there playing, chatting about trifling things, as children do — partaking of the sweets they gave him; and that occasionally he listened to some outlandish tale of gods and demons, of heroes and hidden treasures and fairy-like queens, tales such as have always been told to little boys and girls all over the world.

Knowing of the child's precocious understanding, we are inclined to believe that he loved stories and also that he readily put questions to his step-mothers, and to any foreigners he would meet, about strange lands and customs. We do not know if anybody ever threw into his subconscious mind the idea of a foreign sun-god with some of the attributes he was one day to transfer to Aton, or if the god of the priests of On, of which he knew well, was sufficient to set him dreaming lofty religious dreams. But we may say, without much risk of being misled, that through his daily contact with his step-mothers Prince Amenhotep acquired one thing at least which was to leave upon him an indelible impression, and that was the knowledge that every land had a sun-god. That is, no doubt, the one important thing he learnt, at a very tender age, from Gilukhipa and the other ladies of the royal harem: Mitannians, Babylonians, Syrians and Canaanites, Libyans and Nubians, women from the Upper Euphrates and from the Arabian desert and from the sacred land of Punt; Cretans also, possibly, and women from the Ægean Isles, perhaps even from farther northern shores, who had all brought their gods with them.

There were not only sun-gods, it is true. Every land had also its moon-god, and its war-god, and many other gods and goddesses in great numbers, some of which could more or

less be paralleled with those of Egypt. Another intelligent child would have remarked that all the gods were universal, and universally made in the image of their worshippers; and he would have stopped there and troubled himself no longer about the nature of Godhead. The child who was one day to be Akhnaton probably made the same remarks; but he did not stop there. For along with that keen, analytical, destructive intelligence with which he was soon to crush all man-made gods, there was in him an immense power of devotion which he had already directed to the one God whose beauty overwhelmed him — the Sun. Among the hosts of deities of which he gradually came to know, the Sun alone he chose to see. And he saw Him everywhere, for everywhere He was present. He was the true God of all nations.

And as from the terraces of his palace the child gazed day after day at the real Sun and watched Him rise and set in incandescent splendour, strange thoughts came to him — thoughts that no boy of his age, and perhaps no grown-up man had ever had before. That Sun — the Disk, the god of his mother — was surely not a god like the others, not even like those who were supposed to represent Him. How could indeed those clumsy sun-gods — Shamesh of the Babylonians, Moloch of the Tyrians, Amon of the Thebans, worshipped throughout Egypt — gods with bodies like men's and with men's passions, who were pleased, when fed and flattered, and who got angry for trifling offences; how could such gods be really the same as He? Since all nations saw the Sun in heaven, why then did they not look up to Him directly instead of making themselves graven images so unworthy of Him?

No one knows what age he was when he first put such questions to himself. It may have been a few years before his accession to the throne — that is to say, when he was a mere child. Children do, sometimes, open new horizons of thought for themselves. But their best intuitions are, half the time, crushed by so-called "education." Prince Amenhotep's intuition of the oneness of God, which he grasped through the visible Sun, was too strong to be crushed. As he grew in years, he more often and more thoughtfully gazed at the

sky — the very image of glowing Oneness — and became more and more devoted to the life-giving Disk, the one God whom he loved. And a time must have come when what had been at first, in him, a dim desire, burst forth into a determination that nothing could bend; a time when, conscious of the power he was destined one day to exert, he resolved to use it for the glorification of his God.

* * *

The prince's education was confided to learned men, mostly if not entirely chosen among the priests. We know nothing of the curriculum followed in his studies, but it is plausible to imagine that the sciences the most in honour in Egypt — mathematics and astronomy on one hand, and the history of the past on the other — had a prominent place in his programme. Apart from his mother-tongue, he was probably taught Babylonian, which was the international medium of trade and diplomacy for centuries and the language in which kings wrote to one another. It is likely that he was able to speak, possibly also to read, several other languages. Brought up as he was in the crowded harem of his father, where so many nations and tribes were represented, it seems hardly believable that he was not. Much less gifted children get acquainted with foreign speeches with amazing facility.

The method of teaching in Egypt, fourteen hundred years before Christ, was not much different from that which prevails to this very day in the Mohammedan schools of the same country, and in the East in general; nay, from that used in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. It consisted mainly of making the child repeat over and over again, until he knew it by heart, all what it was not absolutely necessary to explain to him thoroughly, that is to say, all his curriculum save mathematics. And young Prince Amenhotep was probably made to learn in that manner whole scrolls of hieroglyphics: sayings of the wise men of old, treatises on good behaviour and good government, hymns to different deities, in cadenced verses, summaries on the movements

and influence of the heavenly bodies, and lists of battles in which the kings of Egypt had routed their enemies with the help of the gods.

It is reasonable to suppose that the history of what we call to-day the Eighteenth Dynasty — the line of kings of which he was himself the scion — was given an important place in his course of studies, and that special stress was put, in it, upon the struggle against the Hyksos (the Egyptian “War of Independence”), and the following victorious campaigns in Syria and in Nubia which had resulted in the making of the Egyptian empire. Those happenings, which read like very ancient history to most of us, were modern, almost contemporary events to the people of the time. The ruthless punitive expedition of Amenhotep the Second against Syria was then hardly more remote than the Russo-Japanese War is to-day; and the staggering victories of Thutmose the Third, though less recent by some thirty years or so, were as vivid as ever in everybody’s imagination. Men who had been children under the Conqueror were still alive. It is therefore but natural that the whole glorious period extending from the reign of Seqenen-Ra and Aahmose onwards should have been presented to the young prince as a subject of which he was to be particularly proud. The kings of the Twelfth Dynasty were certainly great ones; and so were, long before them, the famous Pyramid builders of the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties. But they already belonged to what was then antiquity.

There can be also no doubt that the prince’s preceptors thoroughly insisted upon the protection which Amon, the patron god of Thebes and of the Dynasty, had bestowed so lavishly upon all his forefathers. For however popular the ancient god Aton had re-become at court on account of the queen’s devotion, Amon remained the great god of the land, and Prince Amenhotep was expected to be, like all his ancestors, his loyal servant — in fact, his first priest.

In the light of what we already know of the royal child’s tendencies, we may now try to picture ourselves how he probably reacted to the education thus given him.

First, the very method of teaching is likely to have made

much of the imparted knowledge appear to him as uninteresting. The wise but commonplace maxims and proverbs and the sacred hymns he was probably made to repeat in paying great attention to subtle rules of cadence and pronunciation, must have stirred less joy in his heart and conveyed to him less meaning than did the song of a bird, the music of a shepherd's flute in the distance, or a single glimpse of blue sky. Like most children who are all round intelligent — and not gifted with memory alone — Prince Amenhotep had little taste for bookish knowledge devoid of the touch of life. He may have grasped it easily; and we have indeed no reasons to suppose he did not. But one may doubt if it interested him. The main distinctive traits of his mind, relentless logic and poetic enthusiasm, so remarkable in the man, were certainly prominent already in the child. He must have liked all that could set in motion his reasoning power or captivate his imagination. And, as far as we can infer, the manner in which he was taught could do neither.

On the other hand, it is likely that he used to put to his preceptors many embarrassing questions and that he made, now and then, remarks which already revealed his triple genius as a forerunner of modern science, as an artist and as a saint.

There are no means of knowing what those remarks were. Possibly, as we have suggested, the prince compared more than once the ungainly figure of several of the deities he knew — of which some, such as Taurt,¹ the Egyptian hippopotamus-goddess, were little inspiring indeed — with the radiant beauty of the real Sun-disk, which he adored. Possibly, when told that the crocodile-headed god, Sebek, was another manifestation of Ra, the Sun,² he refused to believe it on aesthetic grounds. Possibly, too, when urged to pay more attention to the moon-god, Khonsu — the son of the great Amon — he may have retorted that the moon only shines by the reflected light of the Sun, without knowing how

¹ Or Ta-urt, “the Great One.” Sir Flinders Petrie: *Religious Life in Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1924), pp. 13, 82, 185.

² “Sebek, the Crocodile-god, an ancient solar deity.” Sir Wallis Budge: *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection* (Edit. 1911), Vol. I, p. 63.

rigorously true his statement was. It would be too much to attribute such an intuition as this to any other child without sound historic evidence; it is not distorting the spirit of history to hold it possible, even likely, in a child who was, but a few years later, to grasp intuitively the fundamental equivalence of light and heat.

Finally, if there be anything true in the belief that the basic aversions of an individual appear very early in life, we may suppose that Prince Amenhotep always showed a particular repulsion for acts of cruelty of any sort, including those justified by war and sanctioned by religion, that some of his great ancestors might occasionally have committed. It seems, for instance, impossible for his gentle nature not to have shrunk as he heard of the well-known torture of the seven Syrian chiefs captured by Amenhotep the Second during his campaign and hung, head downwards, in front of that Pharaoh's galley, as it sailed triumphantly up the Nile. The idea of those same men solemnly sacrificed to Amon, and of their bloody remains left to rot for days upon the walls of Thebes and of Napata, must have filled him with hardly less disgust. And whatever be the spirit in which they were related to him, such accounts have perhaps contributed no little to infuse into him, for life, the horror of war; to thwart in him every desire of imperial expansion at such a cost; and to turn his indifference towards the national god Amon into positive hatred.

* * *

Some time before his accession, Prince Amenhotep, then hardly more than ten years old, was married with all the customary pomp to a little princess of about eight or nine, Nefertiti.

Scholars do not agree about the bride's parentage. Sir Flinders Petrie identifies her with Tadukhipa, daughter of Dushratta, king of Mitanni.¹ Arthur Weigall rejects this view on account of the princess's "typically Egyptian" features, and supposes her to be the daughter of Ay, a court

¹ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 207.

dignitary,¹ while the striking resemblance between her portraits and those of her young husband has prompted others to suggest that she was his half,² or even his full sister.³ Brother and sister marriages were common in Egypt, as everyone knows.

We have no opinion to express on the subject. Yet, we find it difficult to dismiss Sir Flinders Petrie's version on the sole ground of Nefertiti's looks. For, if the princess were indeed the daughter of Dushratta, then her mother would be the sister and her paternal grandmother, the paternal aunt of Amenhotep the Third, while the prince's paternal grandmother — the chief wife of Thotmose the Fourth — was, as we know, Dushratta's paternal aunt. In other words, the wedded children would be even more closely related than ordinary first cousins are, and there would be nothing strange in their resembling each other as brother and sister. However, it makes little difference whose daughter Nefertiti actually was. To history, she remains Akhnaton's beloved consort. It is curious to observe that her beauty, revealed in her famous limestone portrait-busts — the loveliest masterpieces of Egyptian sculpture — has made her far more widely known than her great husband to the modern European public at large.

It is probable that the idyllic love that was to bind the prince and his consort together all through their years began long before their actual connubial life. If the features and more particularly the expression of the face do reveal something of what we call the soul, then we must suppose that the two children, heir-apparent and future queen of Egypt, had much in common. Their earliest portraits represent them both with the same regular, oval face, slender neck and large, dark eyes full of yearning; with already, in their gaze, a touch of thoughtful sadness which is not of their age. A delicate, almost feminine charm seems to have distinguished

¹ Arthur Weigall: *The Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 49.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 76.

³ James Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 243. H. R. Hall: *Ancient History of the Near East* (Ninth Edit. 1936), pp. 258, 299.

Akhnaton's person all his life. But it was balanced in latter days, as his portraits testify, by a stamp of manly determination. In early youth, and especially in childhood, before his struggle with the surrounding world had actually begun, his virile qualities had not yet found their expression; the delicate charm alone was prominent; and the newly-married prince resembled his wife even more than he did in subsequent years.

The two played together, sat and read or looked at pictures together, listened together to the stories that grown-up people told them. They admired together a lotus-bud that had just opened; they watched a velvety butterfly on a rose, or a flight of swallows going north with the coming of hot weather. A painted bas-relief, dating perhaps a few years later, pictures the prince leaning gracefully on a staff while Nefertiti gives him a bunch of flowers to smell. An indefinable sweetness pervades the whole scene, which we may plausibly take to be a faithful likeness of the young couple's everyday life.

It is probable, too, that Prince Amenhotep soon initiated his child-wife into what could already be called his higher life. Whatever be her parentage, the worship of the Sun was nothing new to the little princess. But through her daily contact with the inspired child with whom she was now wedded, what had meant to her, until then, little more than a mere succession of grown-up people's gestures, became an act of personal love. Although his own ideas were yet far from definite, Prince Amenhotep probably taught her to see the Sun as he did, that is to say, as the most beautiful and the kindest of gods; we do not know if we should add, at this early stage of his religious history: as the only God worth praising.

If Nefertiti be, as Sir Flinders Petrie suggests, the daughter of the king of Mitanni, then one may suppose that she told her young husband about Mithra and perhaps Surya, the sun-gods of her country, and that she described to him in a clumsy manner, putting too much stress upon details, as children do, some of the rites with which they were worshipped there. It is doubtful whether there could be in those

details, as she presented them, anything impressive enough to be of psychological importance in the prince's evolution. But he may have seized the opportunity to tell the little girl, pointing to the fiery Disk in heaven, that this was the only real Sun, under whatever name and in whatever way one may praise Him in different lands. And she possibly felt that there was truth in his childish remarks, and began to look up to him as to somebody very wise — wiser even, perhaps, than the grown-up people.

* * *

We have tried to emphasise that, before becoming the Founder of the Religion of the Disk, Akhnaton was once a child with many of the weaknesses natural to his age, but, at the same time, a child in whom the first sparks of genius must often have burst forth; a child whose coming greatness must have appeared, at times, undoubtable.

As there is hardly any information about his early years to be gathered from historical records, one has to be content with imagining what expression the main emotional tendencies must have taken in the prince, as a little boy, the qualities of mind, and traits of character which made his life and teaching, as a king, what we know them to be. But one can assert with a high degree of probability that those psychological elements were already observable in him at an extremely early age, and that he was therefore not a child like others.

It is likely that he was a serious, meditative child, full of the vague call of an Unknown that he could not yet think about, but that he could feel at times with strange intensity. He had vivid, delicate sensations, and was already deeply moved by visible beauty — even more so, as far as we can infer, by that of land, water and sky, and of living creatures, than by that of the highly artistic luxuries in the midst of which he was growing up. He was a sensitive and loving child, who would burst out in indignant rage at the report, not to speak of the sight, of any act of brutality committed, with whatever purpose it be, on man or beast. He was an

exceedingly logical child, who would question the very foundation of whatever did not seem evident to him, and who would never be content with such evasive answers as grown-up-people often give to children who discuss, in order to make them keep silent. Above all, if there be any children who, from the day they were born, have never told a lie or acted deceitfully, he was certainly one of them. And we may safely believe that he renounced many times in his childhood, for the sake of truth, little advantages which seemed great ones in his eyes, as readily as he was one day to sacrifice an empire to the consistency of his life.

CHAPTER III

ALONE AGAINST MILLIONS

In about 1383 B.C.¹ the prince ascended the throne of his fathers as Amenhotep the Fourth, king of Egypt, emperor of all the lands extending from the borders of the Upper Euphrates down to the Fourth Cataract of the Nile — in modern words, from the neighbourhood of Armenia to the heart of the Sudan.

He was crowned not at Thebes but at Hermonthis — the “Southern Heliopolis” — where a brother of Queen Tiy was high-priest of the Sun.² The list of his titles, as found in the earliest extensive inscription yet known of his reign,³ presents an interesting combination of the old traditional style with expressions foretelling an entirely new order of thought. It runs as follows:

“Mighty Bull, Lofty of Plumes, Favourite of the Two Goddesses, Great in kingship at Karnak, Golden Horus, Wearer of diadems in the Southern Heliopolis, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, High-priest of Ra-Horakhti of the Two Horizons rejoicing in his horizon in his name ‘Shu-which-is-in-the-Disk’; Nefer-kheperu-ra, Ua-en-ra; Son of Ra; Amenhotep, Divine Ruler of Thebes, Great in duration, Living forever, Beloved of Amon-Ra, Lord of Heaven, Ruler of Eternity.”⁴

In this long succession of titles, the one of “High-priest of Ra-Horakhti of the Two Horizons rejoicing in his horizon in his name ‘Shu-which-is-in-the-Disk’” is remarkable. Whatever may be the higher conception of the Sun which the new king was soon to preach, we must remember that originally his God was the Sun-god revered in the old sacred city of On

¹ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 205. According to Arthur Weigall (*Life and Times of Akhnaton*, New and Revised Edit. 1922, p. 1), he ascended the throne in 1375 B.C.

² Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 111.

³ The Inscriptions of Silsileh. See Breasted’s *Ancient Records of Egypt* (Edit. 1906), Vol. II, p. 384.

⁴ Breasted: *Ancient Records of Egypt* (Edit. 1906). See also Arthur Weigall’s *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 50.

(Heliopolis) and identified with the well-known Ra. As noticed by some authors, the Pharaoh never attempted to conceal the identity of his God with the antique solar deity¹; rather he gave the immemorial deity a new interpretation. The compound name which we have just recalled was therefore but another designation of the god Aton.

Why was that designation specially chosen to figure in the titulary of the newly-crowned Pharaoh? Why not simply the words “High-priest of Aton”? It may be that the compound name, being of more current use, was considered more suitable in an official document. It may be, also, that the king was already conscious that the real God whom he loved was something more subtle than the visible Sun; the expression “Shu” (heat, or heat and light)² “which-is-in-the-Disk” rendered the idea of that unknown Reality as adequately as language permitted.

One might think that such a consciousness was well-nigh impossible in a boy not yet in his 'teens. Most writers do, in fact, insist on the king's extreme youth, and seem to believe that the religious views of which we find the evidence in documents dating from this early period of his reign, were mostly, if not entirely, those of the dowager queen and of her entourage.³

That Amenhotep the Fourth was a mere child in years, and consequently in worldly experience, is beyond doubt. The letters in which Dushratta (or Tushratta), king of Mitanni, asks him to refer to his mother concerning all matters previously discussed with Amenhotep the Third, prove that, at least for some time after his accession, he still acted practically as a minor, under the tutelage of Queen Tiy.⁴

¹ Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 111.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 80.

³ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 211. Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), pp. 50-51.

⁴ “As to the words of Nimmuria (Neb-maat-ra, *i.e.*, Amenhotep the Third), thy father, which he wrote to me, Tiy, the great wife of Nimmuria, the beloved, thy mother, she knows all about them. Enquire of Tiy, thy mother, about all the words of thy father, which he spake to me . . .”
“All the words together which I discussed with thy father, Tiy, thy mother, knows them all; and no one else knows them. . . .”

(Letters of Dushratta, Amarna Letters, K.28)

It is likely that the messages addressed to him by foreign kings and by vassals were first read by her, and not handed over to him without ample comments about the intentions of their writers, whom she had learnt to know through and through and to tackle with all the shrewdness of a diplomat. It is possible that certain changes in the dealings of the Egyptian court with foreigners, the reluctance of the young king, for instance, to lavish his gold on his neighbours, in extravagant presents, as his father had done — a change of which the monarchs all complain in their letters — were partly due to the influence of Queen Tiy.

But religious and philosophical matters were quite a different thing. On that plane, as we remarked before, Amenhotep the Fourth, though still a child in years, probably showed signs of an extraordinary power of intuition and of both analytical and creative intelligence far beyond his age. We cannot, it is true, assert on the sole ground of a few words in his titulary that he had already conceived the idea of a God of a more subtle nature than the material Sun. But we can no more reasonably deny him the capacity of conceiving such an idea on the sole ground that he was not more than twelve years old. It is quite possible that it was he himself who insisted on being called, in the list of titles that was soon to remain officially attached to his name, “High-priest of Ra-Horakhti” (*i.e.*, of Aton), as other Pharaohs had been called “High-priest of Amon.”

Other titles of his, such as “Wearer of diadems in the Southern Heliopolis,” “Son of Ra,” etc., emphasise his close connection with the old Sun-cult of On, in which his religion has its roots; while his names “Nefer-kheperu-ra” (Beautiful Essence of the Sun) and “Ua-en-ra” (Only One of the Sun), are to be found throughout his reign in all inscriptions concerning him. Other expressions in the titulary, however (such as “Favourite of the Two Goddesses,” “Beloved of Amon-Ra”), seem to indicate that even if, to some extent, he was already conscious of the subtle nature of his God and of His superiority over other gods, the king had not yet reached the stage at which he was soon to look upon all special, partial or local — limited — ideas of Godhead as absurd no less than sacrilegious.

It is likely that Queen Tiy, though herself no fervent devotee of Amon, inserted into the titulary of her son one or two typically orthodox expressions in order to please the powerful local priesthood. Even if it be so, the king does not appear to have too strongly objected, since the sentences were, in fact, inserted. Moreover, we see that at the present stage of his history, he still bore the name of Amenhotep, and that the most distinctive of all the titles which accompanied his name in later days — that of “Living in Truth” — was not yet mentioned in the inscriptions.

* * *

Amenhotep the Fourth was greeted on his accession by the kings of the North and of the East — the rulers of the civilised world outside Egypt. Their letters, fortunately preserved to posterity, are interesting in their diversity. That of Burnaburiash of Babylon is friendly; that of Shubbiluliuma, king of the Hittites, is formal, somewhat stiff; that of Dushratta of Mitanni is touching in its unaffected sincerity. Dushratta had been the friend as well as the cousin and brother-in-law of Amenhotep the Third; it was he who had sent the Pharaoh the miraculous statue of Ishtar of Nineveh, in the hope that the goddess would re-give him his health, and if she had failed to do so, it was not his fault.

Each monarch, however, considered the accession of the new king of Egypt as an important event because Egypt was a very powerful country; also, perhaps, because they imagined that the son of Amenhotep the Third — so mighty, so amiable in his dealings with them, and so fabulously rich — was no ordinary prince. They expected handsome presents from him — “more gold,” and still “more gold,” for gold in his land was “as common as dust.” They sought his alliance, for they knew he had soldiers garrisoned along their frontiers and strongholds overlooking the roads that led to their kingdoms. But none of them had the slightest idea of the actual greatness of the child to whom they were writing. None knew that the main event of the world in which they

lived was the rapid dawning of eternal truths in the consciousness of that lad of twelve, and that the splendour of his kingship was nothing compared with that of his priceless individuality. Nobody knew it. It takes time to become aware of what is really important.

Meanwhile, in the palace of his fathers in Thebes, the young Pharaoh thought of his God.

He was now less free than before, being a king — and a god, in the eyes of his people. His daily round of duties was fixed by rigid custom. From his stately visits to the temples and his reception of high officials and foreign envoys down to the minute details of his private life, all his actions were regulated, with implacable exactitude, by a time-honoured etiquette little short of a religious ritual. He could neither do what he pleased at the time he pleased, nor be alone whenever he wished. He probably appreciated all the more the moments allowed to him for rest or recreation, and used them to feel the presence of the divine in the beauty of the visible world and in the silence of his own soul.

As we once remarked with reference to the Pharaoh's childhood, that which is psychologically the most important in a man's life is generally left out from recorded history, however detailed. Of the period extending from the coronation of Amenhotep the Fourth to the erection of the earliest temple to Aton of which we know — completed before the sixth year, and therefore begun not later than the fourth year of his reign — there is no written information. And were there any, still we would probably know nothing of the actual process by which the dominant idea of the oneness of an immaterial God came to fill the king's consciousness; still the history of the king's religious life in those years immediately preceding his great struggle against tradition — by far the most interesting thing — would necessarily have to be conjectured.

Though already from his childhood he had been, to no little extent, of a contemplative nature, susceptible of unusual inspiration, we may suppose that it was between the age of eleven and that of fifteen or sixteen that the eminently intelligent and intuitive young monarch went through some

particular religious experience, after which the basis of his doctrine was fixed. The sudden determination with which he pursued his aims, from the erection of Aton's temple onwards, seems to indicate that there was a change in his inner outlook; that what had been, up to then, at most a strong feeling, had become to him a truth — nay, the truth — overwhelming his mind and heart, and most probably his finer senses, with all the power of logical, moral and physical evidence.

What his experience actually was, nobody will ever know. Some historians, on the authority of certain remarks of Professor Elliot Smith, who examined his skeleton, suggest that the young Pharaoh was possibly subject to fits and hallucinations. Several truly great individuals are said to have shared the direct knowledge of those singular nervous states, and there may be some relevance in the expression of “divine” illness that served in former days to designate them. It seems difficult, however, even for a medical expert such as Elliot Smith, to assert after so many centuries the exact nature of those temporary lapses out of normal consciousness, if any. The pathological names given to their supposed cause — epilepsy,¹ “water on the brain,”² etc. — help us very little to guess what they meant, in fact, not to the outward observer, but to the particular adolescent who is said to have undergone them. Nor can their abnormal character throw the slightest discredit either upon Amenhotep the Fourth or upon the teaching which he was led to conceive, perhaps partly through their agency, as some all-too-normal creatures might be inclined to believe.

Whatever it be, we must remember that Sun-worship had never meant to Amenhotep the Fourth what it meant to everybody else. Enraptured, from the very start, by the beauty of light, which seems to have made upon him an extraordinary impression all through his life, he saw in our Parent Star neither a god among many other gods, nor a physical body among many other physical bodies, but the

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 51.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 75.

supreme source and embodiment of all that appeared to him worth adoring: beauty, power, heavenly majesty; and that sweetest complement of all these things — kindness.

It is likely that he had once associated all the divine attributes of the Sun with the material Disk, but that very soon he had conceived a more subtle idea of Godhead by considering the “Heat” or “Heat-and-Light”-(Shu)-which-is-in-the-Disk. The god Ra-Horakhti of the Two Horizons of which, in his titulary, he proclaims himself the high-priest, is referred to under that particular name. We should, it seems, suppose that the king’s third step was to identify the “Heat within the Disk” with the Disk itself — the invisible form of Godhead with the visible; the immaterial, or apparently such, with the material, or apparently such.

Sir Wallis Budge¹ tells us that the old god Tem, or Atem, the lord of the sacred city of On (Heliopolis), whose supremacy is asserted in the Pyramid Texts, formed a trinity with the deities Shu (heat, or heat and light) and Tefnut (the watery element). In the identification of Aton (the Disk) — the same as Atem or Tem, according to Budge — with “Shu-which-is-in-the-Aton,” we may see the outcome of a process towards unity, perhaps already latent in the trinitarian teachings), but brought to its full effect in a direct consciousness of the One in the complementary three no less than in the infinite diversity of the many. This explanation, whatever be its value, seems far more in accordance with all that is known of religious experience than Sir Wallis Budge’s own version that Amenhotep the Fourth worshipped all along but the material Sun, and that there was “nothing spiritual” either in his hymns or in his religion.²

All religious geniuses seem to have become aware, in their meditations, of some indefinable Oneness, the nature of which it is impossible to convey to those who have not lived through the mystic state. In the case of Amenhotep the Fourth, the

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism (Edit. 1923), pp. 57-58.

² *Ibid.*, p. 79, also p. 112 and following.

truth he was to set as the foundation of his teaching (if not the experience that led him to the knowledge of it) can be expressed to-day in scientific terms. Originally, the object of his meditations was neither a metaphysical entity, nor an idea, nor a symbol, nor anything abstract, but solely the visible Sun — the Father from whom our material earth and its sister planets sprang. Therefore, any discovery concerning Him, through whatever channel it be made, was, in the long run, susceptible of being tested by the ordinary scientific means by which we test all knowledge of the material world. And, as Sir Flinders Petrie has admirably pointed out,¹ the young Pharaoh's discovery of the equivalence of light and heat, and of the Sun as source of all power has been tested in recent times, and proved accurate. It is nothing else but an anticipation of the principle of equivalence of all forms of energy, which is the basis of modern science. We may add that, if such be the correct interpretation of the king's conception of the Sun, we may regard his identification of Aton (originally, the material Disk) with Ra-Horakhti of the Two Horizons, rejoicing in His name, "Shu (heat, or heat and light)-which-is-in-the-Aton," as an equally bold anticipation of the fundamental identity of "energy" with what appears to the senses as "matter" — the latest great scientific generalisation.

In other words, Amenhotep the Fourth reached, through some direct realisation of the Essence of all things — through an experience of which we can say nothing — the ultimate result that scientific thought was one day to attain, after thirty-three centuries of patient labour. Whether such occurrences as fits or trances helped him to leap into supernormal stages of consciousness, or whether he reached those stages simply through an unusual aptitude for concentrated meditation, it makes little difference. The fact that, by sole means of direct insight, he grasped the fundamental truth concerning the material no less than the spiritual world, and opened to himself the only outlook on nature and on divinity which can be called scientific in all times, is perhaps the most illustrative historic proof of the unity of all truth; the

¹ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 214.

most illustrative instance, also, of the ultimate equivalence of all methods which lead to its knowledge.

* * *

The Pharaoh's first important act of which there is any record was the erection in Thebes of a temple to Aton. Like all the buildings consecrated to the Disk, that temple was utterly destroyed in subsequent years by the enemies of the king's faith, and nothing is left of it save a few blocks of sandstone, detached from one another, which were mostly re-used in the construction of later monuments. It appears to have been a large building, if we judge by the size of the fragments of bas-reliefs that can still be seen on some of the blocks. (In one such fragment, for instance, the width of the king's leg, at the lower edge of his kilt, is of twenty inches.) An inscription — invaluable for the study of this period of the reign of Amenhotep the Fourth — states that new quarries were opened at Silsileh, in the South, to provide sandstone for the construction of this temple. High officials of the court were appointed to supervise the transport of the stone to Thebes. We also know from an inscription that a scribe named Hatay was made "overseer of the granaries in the House of Aton."

From the little that remains of it, it is hardly possible to tell whether the temple was built in the traditional style or whether it resembled the temples of Tell-el-Amarna, of which we shall speak later on. In the writing upon the stones that belonged to the new building, as well as in the well-known inscription of Silsileh, the king is referred to as Amenhotep, which shows that he had not yet changed his name. The name of Aton is not surrounded by a "cartouche," as it is in all later inscriptions; and the expression "Living in Truth" — which recurs continually in all documents dated after the sixth year of the reign — has not yet been found, and possibly had not yet been incorporated by the king into the list of his most usual titles. Moreover, references to several of the gods recognised by orthodox Egyptians — such as Horus, Set, Wepwat — are to be read

upon the fragments of stone that once formed the temple walls. Apart from that, above the commemorative inscription of Silsileh, there was originally a figure of the king praying to Amon while the Sun-disk with rays ending in hands — the distinctive symbol of the new religion — shed its life-giving beams upon him. The image of the national deity has been afterwards effaced; but traces of it are still visible. In the tomb of Ramose, in Thebes, which dates from about the same time apparently, there is an image of the goddess Maat; and Horus of Edfu is invoked in an inscription. And, in a letter addressed to the king in the fifth year of his reign, by a royal steward named Apiy, who lived in Memphis, Ptah and “the gods and goddesses of Memphis” are mentioned without Apiy seeming to suspect in the least that his sovereign no longer adhered to the traditional religion — an instance all the more impressing that here, in that letter, Amenhotep the Fourth is for the first time referred to as “Living in Truth,” the motto which he kept to the very end of his reign. Finally, on the scarabs of this period, the Pharaoh is spoken of as “beloved of Thot,” the god of wisdom.¹

From these various data, most authors have inferred that, when he built this first temple to Aton of which history tells us, the king had not yet conceived his religion in its definitive form. This interpretation presupposes that the changing of the king’s name, the abolition of all cults save that of the imageless Aton, the erasure of the name and figure of Amon and the plural word “gods” from every stone, were all unavoidable consequences of the new faith — a translation into action of its essential tenets. And it is generally in that light that those facts are viewed. It has been written that Aton was “a jealous god,”² as if the Pharaoh, in waging war upon the gods of his fathers, was but implicitly obeying some rigorous religious dictate similar to the first of the Ten

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 74.

² Sir Flinders Petrie: *Religious Life in Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1924), p. 95. Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), pp. 168-170. *Tutankhamen and Other Essays* (Edit. 1923), p. 82. James Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 251.

Commandments that Moses was one day to give his wandering Israelites in the name of their tribal deity. Perhaps a certain resemblance between one of the king's hymns to the Sun and a psalm of David, written centuries later¹; perhaps, also, some unconscious desire of seeing in Amenhotep the Fourth the forerunner of a religion out of which Christianity was one day to spring, has prompted many modern authors to attribute to him a monotheism of the same nature as that of the Jews.² The data concerning the construction of the earliest temple to Aton, and the whole of the monarch's reign up to his sixth year, do not point to such a religious conception. Therefore the writers conclude that the king did not know his own mind before the sixth year of his reign, or at least that his faith evolved after that period in the sense of a more and more rigorous monotheism.

But, to a man with no preconceived idea whatsoever as to what sort of a god Aton should be, it does not appear at all necessary to suppose anything of the kind. For if, indeed, as Sir Flinders Petrie has pointed out,³ Aton be none other but Radiant Energy deified — that is to say, an all-pervading reality of an immanent character — there is no reason to attribute to Him the all-too-human desire of being worshipped alone. On the contrary, it would seem natural that one who sees divinity in the “Heat-which-is-in-the-Disk” (and which is of the same essence as the Disk itself), far from proscribing the time-honoured gods of his land, should look upon them as man's halting attempts to reach the Unreachable; as imperfect symbols of the One true God. It is thus that sages of all times have looked upon the traditional deities in lands where popular polytheism prevails side by side with the most exalted religious realisations. And it seems to us most probable that Amenhotep the Fourth considered

¹ Psalm 104. See Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1923), pp. 134-136; *Tutankhamen and Other Essays* (Edit. 1923), p. 82; *The Glory of the Pharaohs* (Edit. 1923), p. 147; *Short History of Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1934), p. 154.

² It has been asserted — and that by an Israelite — that Jewish Monotheism was entirely derived from the worship of Aton. See Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. See also Arthur Weigall's *Tutankhamen and Other Essays* (Edit. 1923), p. 93.

³ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 214.

the gods of his country — and of all countries — in that very light. It may be that the figure of Amon was carved out on the slab bearing the Silsileh inscription by a sculptor who “simply followed the time-honoured custom.”¹ But, had the king found the slightest objection to its presence, he would certainly have had it effaced — as he did, in fact, later on. The thing is that he had no quarrel with any of the gods, not even with Amon. His God was above them all and contained them all as He contained all existence; He was not against them. At most, the king may have felt a little contempt for the man-made deities, on account of their local character and of their alleged petty interferences in human affairs. He did not love them. But, at first, he tolerated them — as a pure Vedantist tolerates to-day the popular gods and goddesses of India — knowing that most men can never rise to a higher and more comprehensive idea of Godhead.

It seems that he would easily have tolerated them to the end, had it not been for the serious opposition of the Egyptian priests — especially of those of Amon — to the execution of his legitimate designs. The series of steps he was soon to take, and the new aspect of his religion in the eyes of whoever considers it from outside, can be explained as a masterful reaction to unwelcome priestly interference rather than as signs of a religious evolution towards a new and narrower idea of God. This view receives confirmation from the fact that, even after the abolition of the public cult of Amon and of the other gods, still, as we shall see, the Pharaoh made no attempt to spread his own faith beyond a small circle of disciples.

* * *

It is also supported by the inscription in the tomb of Ramose at Thebes — an early document, no doubt, for the tomb is decorated in the “old” style, and wherever the king’s name appears, it is still Amenhotep. The general tone of the inscription plainly indicates that, at the time the tomb was built, not only was the king already in possession of a

¹ Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 254.

definite truth which he had received directly from God — that is to say, which he had grasped intuitively; which had forced itself upon his mind with all the strength of evidence — but that he was, also, fully conscious of being, himself, substantially identical with the Essence of all life, the Sun. He addresses himself to Ramose in the inscription, and says: “The words of Ra are before thee, of my august Father who taught me their essence. All that is His . . . since He equipped the land . . . in order to exalt me since the time of the god. . . . It was known in my heart, opened to my face — I understood.” And Ramose answers: “Thy monuments shall endure like the heavens, for thy duration is that of Aton therein. The existence of thy monuments is like the existence of His designs. Thou hast laid the mountains; their secret chambers. The terror of thee is in the midst of them as the terror of thee is in the hearts of the people; they hearken to thee as the people hearken.”¹

The old Sun-god Ra, the divine Ancestor of the most ancient Pharaohs, is clearly regarded here as the same as Aton. But if we bear in mind all that we already know of the religion of Amenhotep the Fourth — his idea of the “Heat-which-is-in-the-Disk” identical with the Disk itself, his conception of a thoroughly immanent Godhead — then we cannot but see much more than customary dynastic boasting in the king’s assertion that Ra is his “august Father,” and much more, also, than the polite exaggerations of a courtier in Ramose’s reply: “Thou art the Only One of Aton, etc. . . .” This document, the earliest one perhaps in which the king and his God are as boldly identified as in so many later texts, is a further proof that, even in this first part of his reign, the Pharaoh’s religious views already appeared to other men as something decidedly new, and that they probably were very little, if at all, different from what we know them to have been at the time he lived in his new capital and wrote his famous hymns.

¹ Breasted: *Ancient Records of Egypt* (Edit. 1906), Vol. II, p. 389.

The king's next step was to decree that the quarter of Thebes in which the newly-built temple stood would henceforth be called "Brightness of Aton, the Great One," and that Thebes itself — the proud City of Amon, whose patron-deity had become the god of a whole empire — would henceforth be known as the "City-of-the-Brightness-of-Aton."

One need not see in this a deliberate insult to the local god on the part of Amenhotep the Fourth. There is, at least, no evidence suggesting that such might have been the monarch's intention; and if our interpretation of his religious views be right, there is every reason to believe that it was not so. The Pharaoh did not endeavour to crush the Theban deity out of existence, or even to defy it, as the worshipper of a "jealous god" would have done. He only wished to keep it in its place — to relegate it among the partial symbols of Godhead which a man who thinks and feels must sooner or later learn to transcend. He did not suppress the cult of Amon or of any other gods; nor, probably, did he intend to do so at this stage of his career. But he surely wished that the One invisible, intangible God, Essence of all things, Whom he had come to realise through his contemplation of the visible Sun, should be honoured above all the minor deities, protectors of families, cities, or even nations, whose power was limited and whose nature was apparently finite, like that of their human devotees. And, in giving its new name to the capital of his fathers, he paid a public homage to the true God of the whole universe, as opposed to all the man-made tribal gods.

It is likely that the priests of Amon failed to understand this attitude — or perhaps did the most intelligent among them understand it but too well? As a result, they were unable to accept the change with equanimity. They and their god had been receiving such extraordinary honours in Thebes and throughout Egypt, for so many centuries, that it was hard for them to realise that a new order was dawning, in which their unchallenged domination would no longer have a meaning, and therefore a place. Amon, whom they had identified with the old Heliopolitan god Ra — the Sun — so as to legitimise his sway over all Egypt, was in their eyes the actual sovereign of the land. It was he who had rendered

his sons, the Theban Pharaohs, invincible in war, magnificent in peace. And it was the custom that they should visit every day his shrine, and, through the performance of certain traditional rites, receive from him the breath of life — justify, so as to say, through a daily renewed supply of divine power, their age-old claim to divinity.¹ We know not at what time Amenhotep the Fourth ceased to conform himself to this practice. But we may conjecture that he did so very early in his reign if, as suggested in the inscription in Ramose's tomb, he already realised that his oneness with the Sun (and, through Him, with ultimate Cosmic Energy) was a fact, and that therefore he needed no rites to maintain it or even to assert it. Doubtless the priests resented bitterly this break with immemorial tradition. What they resented no less — if not more — was the steady decrease in the revenues of their temples, now that the king had started encouraging the sole cult of the Disk, and had withdrawn from them the habitual royal gifts, which were enormous.

They had not, however, been able to show their displeasure openly, as long as Amenhotep the Fourth had contented himself with honouring his God without stressing His priority over their and over the other national deities. But when, by the change of the capital's name, he made public his intention to place his own intuitive conception of Godhead above the established gods of the land, their fury burst out.

We do not know how, nor exactly when, they began to show stern opposition to the Pharaoh's designs. The only record of that opposition is a later inscription in which the king tells of the priest's wickedness. The inscription is mutilated, and the reference therefore vague, though vehement.² In all probability, however, the step we just spoke of — the renaming of the City of Amon (Nut-Amon, or

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism (Edit. 1923), pp. 34-35.

² "For as my Father liveth . . . more evil are they (the priests) than those things which I have heard in the fourth year; more evil are they than those things which King . . . heard; more evil are they than those things which Men-kheperu-ra (Thutmose the Fourth) heard . . . in the mouth of Negroes, in the mouth of any people." — (From a mutilated inscription on one of the boundary-stones of Tell-el-Amarna.)

Thebes) as the “City-of-the-Brightness-of-Aton” — was the signal of a bitter conflict between the king and the ministers of the Theban god.

It is difficult to say what the priests actually did to assert what they considered to be their god’s rights. Did they try to frighten the people by foretelling calamities which they ascribed beforehand to the wrath of the deity? Did they start spreading rumours against the king, in order to create disaffection? Or did they use men in their pay to do more effective mischief — to try, for instance, to destroy the newly-erected temple of Aton, or even to make an attempt on the monarch’s life? We shall never know; but they appear to have been capable of anything, once their fanaticism was stirred. And, if we judge by the extreme measures which the king took immediately in reply to their intrigues, and also by the bitterness he still seems to feel in recalling his experience with them, even after having broken their power, we may believe that the servants of Amon and of the other gods acted with unusual harshness towards him who, until then, had tolerated their faith and who, even afterwards, was never to seek to harm their persons.

The outcome of the struggle was a change not in the king’s actual religious outlook, but in his practical attitude towards the national forms of worship, and a series of new decrees of an uncompromising spirit, by which all hopes of future reconciliation were annihilated at one stroke. The priests of Amon were dispossessed of their fabulous wealth; the name of Amon and the plural word “gods” were erased from every stone where they were found, whether in public monuments or in private tombs. Even the compound proper names which contained that of the Theban god were not allowed to remain; and, carrying out his decision to its ultimate logical consequences, the Pharaoh did not hesitate to have the name of his own father erased, even from the inscriptions in his tomb, and replaced by one of the other names by which he had been well known: Neb-maat-ra. And by the sixth, perhaps even the end of the fifth year of his reign, the young king changed his own name from Amenhotep — meaning, as we have seen: “Amon is pleased,” or “Amon is at rest” — to

Akhnaton — “Joy of the Disk,” that is to say, “Joy of the Sun” — the name under which he has become immortal. The cult of Amon, and finally that of the innumerable other national gods and goddesses, was abolished, and images were destroyed.

It is these measures which seem to have stirred the indignation of Akhnaton’s modern detractors, and prompted them to call him a “fanatic,” an “iconoclast,” and so forth. But we believe it would be more in keeping with historical truth to see in them, as we have said, a vigorous reaction against sacerdotal interference, a determined assertion of the Pharaoh’s rights, as a ruler, against a class of ambitious men who, under the cover of religion, had been grabbing more and more power for centuries. The man who conceived God as the all-pervading impersonal Life-force — the Energy within the Sun — cannot have shared the aggressive piety of such later believers as Charlemagne or Mahmud of Ghazni, the Idol-breaker. It is unreasonable — nay, absurd — to attribute to him a zeal of the same nature as theirs.

Nor can we suppose that he suddenly changed his idea of God by the fifth or sixth year of his reign, just after completing the first temple which he built to Him. All subsequent evidence — in particular that of the king’s admirable hymns to the Sun — goes to prove that he worshipped till the end of his life that all-pervading Energy which he had discovered intuitively and which he adored already in his early adolescence.

Apart from being stern efforts to free himself and his country from the ever-tightening grip of the priests, these measures against the national cults of Egypt seem, however, to indicate a phase in Akhnaton’s psychology. We have just said that his religious views remained the same. But his estimation of man’s capacity to realise, within the frame of traditional symbolism, the Truth that he had grasped apart from it, had changed a lot. Until then, he had tolerated the time-honoured deities of the land either because he had seen in them possible steps towards a higher Reality, or simply because he looked upon human superstition with the kindly smile of many a philosopher: that is to say, because he considered

those gods helpful to most men's religions progress, or at least harmless. The time had now come when he found out that they were neither. The trouble stirred up by the servants of Amon after the renaming of Thebes was to him both a revelation and a warning. It suddenly thrust upon him the fact that the generous toleration which he had shown until then would find no imitators among the professed religious leaders of the people. It taught him that the national gods were indeed "jealous gods," in the sense that, as long as their priests remained in power, no truer and broader conception of the divine could find its way to the hearts of the worshippers; that, far from leading gradually to the knowledge of the One God, they would continually be used to keep the people away from Him — to bind them to a state of satisfied religious routine; to kill both criticism and inspiration under the weight of a vain formalism; to prevent the dawning of a sense of universal values, by constant stress upon local, or at the most national, concerns.

It warned him that, if he allowed the priests to hold their sway, his God would never receive the whole-hearted public worship due really to Him alone; that His truth would never be made manifest. One of the two had to be pushed into the background: either national tradition, or universal truth. It is this dilemma which seems to have forced itself upon the king's consciousness from the time of his first open conflict with the priests of Amon. Had these men let him organise, unopposed, as he pleased, the religious life of the whole country, around the central truth which he had discovered; had they admitted that their gods were but partial aspects of the One ultimate Reality — the Heat or Energy within the Disk — or steps in quest of it, and had they acted up to that belief, it is probable that he would never have gone to the extremities which history has recorded. But now, the only reasonable course before him was that which he took and followed, in fact, to its utmost implications. It was not "religious fanaticism," but a clear understanding of the situation that prompted him to act. The "fanatics" were not he, but the priests; they who, by their violent hostility to a teaching of exceedingly broad significance (which,

religiously speaking, should not have upset them at all), set forth the dilemma which we have just recalled.

The thoroughness with which Akhnaton followed his course is one of the early recorded instances of that unbending determination that he showed all his life, once he felt sure which way he was to act in accordance with truth.

* * *

In fact, it is not exactly for what one could call religious reasons that the priests of Amon and of the other gods showed such stubborn opposition to the king's projects.

It has been said¹ that "the religious thought of the period just preceding the reign of Akhnaton was distinctly monotheistic in its tendencies," and that, with all its startling originality, the new movement was the natural outcome of the long unconscious evolution of the Egyptian mind. The universal power of the Sun is already asserted in the famous "Hymn to Amon as he riseth as Horus of the Two Horizons," inscribed upon the stele of the two brothers Hor and Suti, architects of Amenhotep the Third. He is called there: "Sole Lord, taking captive all lands, every day" — an expression hardly different from that which we find later on in Akhnaton's hymns, and which may well be much older than the inscription quoted. In the same inscription, the name of Aton appears as practically identical with that of Amon, for the "Hymn of Amon" runs: "Hail to thee, O Aton of the day, Thou creator of mortals and maker of their life."² It has even been proved that, under Amenhotep the Third, a temple to a god bearing the full title of "Horus of the Two Horizons, rejoicing in his horizon in his name 'Shu-(heat)-which-is-in-the-Aton-(Disk)'" — the title we find in Akhnaton's inscriptions — existed, with the sole difference that this god was there represented in the traditional style, with a falcon's head. Both the figure and the title are to be found on one of the blocks re-used by King Horemheb in his pylon at

¹ By Blackman; quoted by James Baikie in *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 314.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 49.

Karnak; and in the royal cartouche can be seen the name of Nefer-kheperu-ra (one of Akhnaton's names) altered from that of Amenhotep the Third.¹

The elements of the new faith were therefore, to some extent, latent within the old. What Akhnaton did was to assert that such a conception of divinity as that of the "Heat (or Energy)-within-the-Disk" at once transcended and comprehended all others. And he possibly preferred to worship his God under the older name of Aton — the Disk — so as to point out, as we have said, the identity of the visible Sun and of the Heat within it — ultimately, the oneness of the Visible and the Invisible; of Matter and Energy. Religiously speaking, there was no radical antagonism between his pantheistic monism (for such it seems to be) and the popular polytheism of the priests with the underlying monotheistic tendency that burst out, now and then, in its most intellectual aspects.

The truth appears to be that the priests did not really mind Akhnaton going further than any of the former Egyptian thinkers in his conception of the divine. But they cared a good deal when, as a logical result of his new lofty idea of Godhead, he decreed that the City of Amon should henceforth be called: City of the Brightness of Aton; when, in other words, he made public his desire to do all he could to urge Egypt and the empire to look upon the cosmic God as God, the other city-gods, national gods, etc., being nothing, if not secondary aspects of Him, to be merged into His infinity. They objected to his purely religious — and therefore individual — idea of God being given priority over their mainly customary, ritualistic, and therefore national one. The struggle between the king and them was not a struggle between two different religious conceptions, but perhaps the oldest recorded phase of the still enduring age-long conflict between individual inspiration and collective tradition; between real religion and state religion; between the insight of the religious genius and the vested interests of the spiritual shepherds of the crowd — and of the crowd itself, one might add.

¹ T. Eric Peet: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 205.

Sir Wallis Budge has criticised Akhnaton in the most violent language for not having upheld the cult of Amon, already popular throughout the Egyptian empire. “None but one half insane,” says he, “would have been so blind to facts to attempt to overthrow Amon and his worship, round which the whole of the social life of the country centred.”¹ Professor H. R. Hall, apparently for a similar reason, brings also against the enlightened Pharaoh the same accusation of being “half insane.”² It is the expression used, in last resort, by most average men, about the spiritual giants whom they hate without knowing why, but in fact because they are incapable of understanding their greatness. It only shows how irredeemably average even learned scholars can be where religious insight is concerned. The authors of the foolish statements just quoted seem to have entirely missed the meaning of Akhnaton’s efforts. If Aton and Amon were but two Egyptian deities like any other, then indeed the exaltation of the former at the expense of the latter could perhaps be interpreted as the whim of a “fanatic.” But if, as evidence forces one to believe, Aton be the name given to deified Cosmic Energy, while Amon, as everyone knows, is the patron-god of Thebes, promoted to the position of a god of all the empire only through the victories of the Theban Dynasty, then the whole perspective changes, and one understands how Akhnaton could not look upon the local deity as identical with the ultimate Essence of all existence.

He could not do so, because of the close association of Amon with all the limited interests of nation and church — because of his political miracles, his partiality in war, his satisfaction in man-ordained rituals and sacrifices. He could not merge his own religion of the Universe into the existing religion of the State; his own intuitive truth of all times into the narrow framework of custom, which had no meaning to him. What he wanted to do, on the contrary, was to have the true religion recognised as State religion — pushing the existing one into the background. And that seems to have been

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 78.

² H. R. Hall: *Ancient History of the Near East* (Ninth Edit. 1936), p. 298.

the reason for his giving a new name to the very stronghold of the national cult, the City of Amon. He wanted to start a new tradition — more rational, more scientific, more beautiful, more truly religious — on the basis of his extraordinary individual insight; to raise the State religion of the future to his own level; to make himself — the consciously divine Man — the spiritual head of the nation, to which he would teach how to transcend nationhood. The priests of the nation stood in his way; he brushed them aside — without, however, persecuting them.

* * *

The struggle between Akhnaton and the priests was to be a deadly one precisely because it was less a conflict of ideas than a conflict of values. Had the quarrel merely been about the attributes of divinity or some other such question, a compromise might have taken place, if not during the king's life, at least after him. His message, even if rejected, would have left some trace in history. With time, Amon, while still continuing to protect Egypt in war and peace, might have taken over some of the more subtle qualities of Aton. But there was no possible compromise between the values that the inspired Individual, Akhnaton, stood for, and those represented by the priests of the deified State. As we shall see later on, it is the practical implications of his teaching that were finally to estrange the Pharaoh from his people, from his age, from the average men of all ages. In the meantime, his conception of religion was, from the start, a greater barrier between him and his contemporaries than the lofty philosophical tenets of his religion; his attitude towards his God, something more unusual to them even than his incredibly advanced idea of the nature of God.

The priests would have remained content had he paid a lip homage to tradition — had he, for instance, continued to accept his divinity as a Pharaoh from a daily ceremonial contact with the divine patron of the Pharaonic State, in his temple. It would have mattered little if, while doing so, he

worshipped the “Heat-within-the-Disk” as the One supreme Reality. But he could not do so. His devotion to the Sun, deeply coloured by an artist’s emotion if we judge it by the fragments of hymns that have survived, must have had the character of mystic rapture. There was a sort of mysterious understanding, a strange intimacy between the young king and the fiery Disk — something quite different from the official filiation of any prince priding in his solar descent, with any man-made Sun-god. Whether stretching out his hands in praise to the rising or setting Sun, or gazing during the middle of the day into the cloudless abyss which He filled with burning light, Akhnaton was in tune — and consciously so — with Something intangible, shapeless, unnameable, and yet undeniably real; Something that was, at the same time, within the vibrating waves of existence all round him, within the deep rhythmic life of his body, within the silence of his soul. He experienced his oneness with the Sun, and through Him, with all that is. This experience made him, in fact, what other Pharaohs were merely by name and by tradition: the true Son of the Sun. What need had he of receiving his divinity from the patron-god of the State, when he was conscious of sharing by nature the life of the real Sun — of being in tune with the Essence of all things: one with It? “The heat of Aton gave him life and maintained it in him,” writes Sir Wallis Budge; “and whilst that was in him, Aton was in him. The life of Aton was his life, and his life was Aton’s life, and therefore he was Aton.” . . . “His spiritual arrogance made him believe that he was an incarnation of Aton — that he was God; not merely a god, or one of the gods of Egypt — and that his acts were divine.”¹

Budge is right, with the difference that there was no “spiritual arrogance” on the part of Akhnaton. The series of beliefs — or rather the successive stages of consciousness — which his detractor ascribes to him, are nothing more than those reached by all men who have the privilege to go through the ultimate religious experience — through that which the Hindus call “realisation” of the divine — and who

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism (Edit. 1923), p. 82.

are bold enough to draw to the end the conclusions that it implies. Unknowingly (for he does not seem to have had, himself, a similar experience), and also unwillingly (for he does not seem to like the young Pharaoh of the Disk), Budge only proves that Akhnaton was a genuine spiritual genius at the same time as an intellectual one, the greatest tribute which a man — and especially a detractor — can pay to another man.

The king's contemporary enemies, apparently, did not understand him any better than his twentieth-century critics. Deeply attached as they were to their ideology of dynastic Sun-worship — of royalty created, protected, and deified by the gods of the State, through the intermediary of their traditional priesthoods — they could hardly imagine what was going on in the monarch's consciousness. They opposed him for the new values he set forth. They did not even share with him that which enemies often hold in common: an ultimate similarity of purpose if not of views.

The people, who doubtless considered their Pharaoh in the same light as their fathers had done — as the son and embodiment on earth of the national god Amon — must have been at a loss to make sense of what appeared to them as meaningless, sacrilegious novelties.

Queen Tiy herself, who had probably played the greatest part in the early formation of the king's soul, could perhaps hardly recognise the distant result of her influence (combined with his personal genius) in the present expression of his faith. It is noteworthy that all the drastic steps taken by Akhnaton against the cult of Amon are posterior to the fifth year of his reign. Even in supposing, as some authors have done, that, still as a king, he remained for some time virtually under the tutelage of his mother, it is probable that this state of dependence had already come to an end before he promulgated his first religious decrees. Those decrees are not the dowager queen's, but decidedly and fully his. The king's opposition to Amon's public cult seems indeed to have become more stern as his personal part in the government became more unquestionable. We may even believe that, as long as she had any say in the matter, the dowager queen

tried to check rather than to prompt her son on the path of open conflict with the priests. She was first a queen — and a shrewd one, with long experience of the world, and great ambitions — and then only the devotee of a particular deity; perhaps also, to some extent, an initiate into a particular esoteric philosophy, originated among the priests of On. But he was, first and last, a man who had realised the truth, both in the mystic and in the intellectual sense. He happened to be the ruler of the greatest empire of his time. But the truth he had discovered always passed, and was always to pass, with him, before the interests and “obligations” he had inherited. And it is possible that this attitude of his alienated him from his mother, in a certain measure. We know positively that she did not follow him when he left Thebes for good.

We doubt if even Akhnaton’s followers — and they appear to have been numerous in the beginning¹ — were able to grasp the full significance of his message. The inscriptions which some of the most prominent of them have left in their tombs, at Tell-el-Amarna, tend to point out that many did not. Most of them seem to have joined the Religion of the Disk for motives either of material interest or of personal attachment to the king — perhaps sometimes for both. It is possible that Akhnaton saw through their minds but accepted their allegiance all the same, hoping, with the natural confidence of youth, to make them sooner or later his true disciples. Yet he had probably already found out how difficult it is to create higher aspirations in men who do not have them, and one may believe that he was not totally ignorant of the enormity of the task before him. He must have realised the strength of tradition, the inborn apathy of the human herd (which includes men of all classes), the frequent incomprehension even of the best intentioned of friends; and, at times, he must have felt desperately alone.

Each time he threw a glance across Thebes from the flat roof of his palace; each time he passed through the streets in his chariot — and we infer, from pictorial evidence, that he did so more usually than any other Pharaoh, even in this

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Short History of Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1934), p. 149.

early part of his reign — it certainly struck him how little the capital was worthy of its new lofty name: “City-of-the-Brightness-of-Aton.”

The great temple of Amon towered above all the buildings of the immense city. It was now closed by the king’s orders; its splendid halls were silent; and the name of the god had been erased from every pillar, from every wall, from every statue, whether inscribed upon granite or alabaster, or bronze, or lapis lazuli. Still, there it stood, in all its defiant grandeur. It had taken a hundred years to build; a thousand years to adorn, to enrich, to complete. Forty generations of kings had lavished upon it the wealth of the Nile, the treasures of conquered lands, the workmanship of the best artists from all the known world, and had made it a thing unsurpassed in magnificence.

The people bowed down before the closed gates to the hidden deity whom they still revered and feared. The temple remained the heart of Thebes. And there were shrines to other gods within its sacred enclosure — to Mut, Amon’s consort; to Khonsu, the Moon-god, Amon’s son; to Ptah; to Min — and other temples, all over the city. Every house, in fact, was a temple in which the traditional gods and goddesses were honoured daily, and propitiated occasionally, with magic incantations and ritual offerings.

Akhnaton gazed at it all in a bird’s-eye view, and understood that Thebes would never be his. What could he do? Destroy all those temples of the man-made gods? He could have done it if he liked. His word was law. And it was not more difficult for him — and hardly more sacrilegious, perhaps, in the eyes of many orthodox Egyptians — to pull down Karnak stone by stone than to have the name of Amon erased from his own father’s tomb. But the idea seems never to have occurred to him. In spite of the hasty judgments passed on him by so many modern critics, he was not an iconoclast. He was too much of an artist ever to dream of becoming one.

He gazed at the sober, majestic architecture of Amon’s dwelling-place, and was impressed by its beauty. Then he gazed at the sky — the simple blue depth, without a line,

without a spot, without a shade; the void, luminous, fathomless abyss; the dwelling-place of the real Sun in front of which all the splendours and uglinesses of the earth seem equally to vanish into nothingness. And the well-known feeling of absorption into the vibrating infinity, of oneness with that intangible existence that contains all existence, would take him over once more. If only he could have made people understand what he knew, he would not have needed to take steps against the traditional cults. The man-made gods would have automatically sunk into their place as mere symbols, far below the One Reality. But at the sight of the magnificent City of Amon stretched before him, with its temples, its pylons, its avenues bordered with great rams of granite, he knew that he could not. These dazzling earthly glories, with their all-powerful collective associations, would always mean more to the people and the priests — to the herd and its shepherds — than the transparent truth, unconnected with national pride, hopes, or fears, which he had come to realise and to reveal. And no matter how brilliantly and how long he would preach to its thousands the message of the One God made manifest in the real Sun, Thebes would never follow him.

The men of the capital — in fact, of all the great centres of traditional worship — represented that intellectually lazy, superficially artistic, prejudiced, irresponsible, apathetic, uninteresting crowd upon whose stupidity and for whose guidance governments and priesthoods — states and churches — are established. Perhaps, indeed, the city-gods that they made so much of were good enough for them; perhaps any new god they would start worshipping would finally become to them a city-god hardly any better than the old ones; perhaps gorgeous architectural structures of polished granite and gold — the signs of wealth and power — would always represent the supreme acquisitions that nations take pride in, and live for, and die for.

But he could not be content with improving on those, as his fathers had. He had raised his senses from the fascination of sculptured curbs and painted colours and resounding formulas, to the inner vision of intangible waves of heat and

light; from the spell of the temple service to the clear and joyous understanding of the silence of the sky. James Breasted has most appropriately called him “the first individual in human history.” He was indeed the oldest historic embodiment of the outstanding Individual as opposed to the dull majority of mediocre men; of the Individual whose aspirations, whose experience, whose *raison d’être* are different from anything the crowd can understand and accept; of the Individual who, in his own singular logic and beauty, stands alone against the background of all times and all countries, in tune with absolute realities and absolute standards forever inaccessible to the many.

Thebes would never side with him — nor would any city, any state, any crowd with age-long collective associations. And yet, in his youthful desire for success, in his inherited consciousness of unchecked power, he wished to be a leader; to proclaim far and wide the truth that was to him as clear as daylight, and make the cult of intangible Energy the official State religion of Egypt and of the empire; to spread it still further, if possible. He needed the collaboration of men for that great purpose.

And if Thebes was not the place where the first seeds of truth could be sown; if it clung to Amon, its patron-god, even in his downfall, there would perhaps be, somewhere down the Nile, an out-of-the-way spot where a new City could be founded — a City, the capital of a new State, which one day, possibly, could become the model of a new world. He would build that ideal State with the help of the few who, if they did not always understand him to perfection, at least seemed to love him. The cult of the One impersonal God would prevail there, and the standards of the enlightened few would be the official standards. The name of Amon and all it stood for would be unknown there from the start.

Thus Akhnaton decided to leave Thebes for good, and to build himself a new capital.

67-68

Part II

THE RELIGION OF THE DISK

CHAPTER IV

THE CITY OF GOD

In the sixth year of his reign — that is to say, when he was about seventeen or eighteen — Akhnaton sailed down the Nile to a place some 190 miles from the site of modern Cairo, and he laid there the foundations of his new capital, Akhetaton — the City of the Horizon of Aton — of which the ruins are known today by the name of Tell-el-Amarna.

He selected, on the eastern bank of the river, a spot where the limestone hills of the desert suddenly recede, enclosing a beautiful crescent-shaped bay, some three miles wide and five miles long. There is a little island in the middle of the Nile, just opposite. The place was lovely. Moreover, it was entirely free from religious or historic associations. In the very words of the king, it belonged “neither to a god nor to a goddess; neither to a prince nor to a princess.”¹ And he decided to build upon that virgin soil the City of his dreams.

The City was to occupy part of a sacred territory extending on both sides of the Nile “from the eastern hills to the western hills,” an area measuring roughly eight miles on seventeen. According to an inscription, the king appeared in stately pomp upon a great chariot of electrum drawn by a span of horses. “He was like Aton when He rises from the eastern horizon and fills the Two Lands with His love. And he started a goodly course to the City of the Horizon of Aton on this, the first occasion . . . to dedicate it as a monument to Aton, even as his Father, Ra-Horakhti-Aton, had given command. And he caused a great sacrifice to be offered.”²

After the customary offerings of food and drink, gold, incense and sweet-smelling flowers, Akhnaton proceeded

¹ “First foundation inscription,” quoted by Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 84.

² From the “Second foundation inscription,” quoted by Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 88.

successively to the south and to the north, and halted at the limits of the territory he wished to consecrate. And he swore a great oath that he would not extend the territory of the City beyond those limits.

“And His Majesty went southwards and halted on his chariot before his Father Ra-Horakhti Aton, at the (foot of the) southern hills, and Aton shone upon him in life and length of days, invigorating his body every day. Now this is the oath pronounced by the king:

“As my Father Aton liveth and as my heart is happy in the Queen and her children . . . this is my oath of truth which it is my desire to pronounce and of which I will not say: “It is false,” eternally, forever:

“The southern boundary-stone, which is on the eastern hills, is the boundary-stone of Akhetaton, namely the one by which I have made halt. I will not pass beyond it southwards forever and ever. Make the south-west boundary-stone opposite it on the western hills of Akhetaton exactly. The middle boundary-stone which is on the eastern hills is the boundary-stone of Akhetaton, namely that by which I have made halt on the eastern hills. I will not pass beyond it eastwards forever and ever. Make the middle boundary-stone which is to be on the western hills opposite it exactly. The northern boundary-stone which is on the eastern hills is the boundary-stone of Akhetaton, namely that by which I have made halt. I will not pass beyond it downstream (northwards) forever and ever. Make the northern boundary-stone which is to be on the western hills opposite it exactly.

“And Akhetaton extends from the southern boundary-stone as far as the northern boundary-stone measured between boundary-stone and boundary-stone on the eastern hills, (which measurement) amounts to 6 aters, $\frac{3}{4}$ khe, and 4 cubits. Likewise, from the southern boundary-stone to the northern boundary-stone on the western hills the measurement amounts to 6 aters, $\frac{3}{4}$ khe, and 4 cubits, exactly. And the area between those boundary-stones from the eastern hills to the western hills is the City of the Aton; mountains, deserts, meadows, islands, high-grounds, low-grounds, land, water, villages, embankments, men, beasts, groves, and all things which Aton my Father will bring into existence, forever and ever. . .”¹

Akhetaton was not only to be the new capital of Egypt, but the main centre from which the cult of Aton would

¹ “Second foundation inscription,” quoted by Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edition, 1922), pp. 89-90.

radiate far and wide — to the four ever-receding horizons north, south, east and west — and the model, on a small scale, of what the world at large would be if only the spirit of the new rational solar religion would prevail; an ideal abode of peace, beauty, of truth — the City of God. Akhnaton would make it as splendid as he could in the short time it would take him to build it, and continue to adorn it afterwards as long as he lived. And he founded at least two other cities, of lesser proportions and less sumptuous than Akhetaton, but destined in his mind to be, like it, radiating “seats of truth”: one in Syria, of which the name and exact location are unknown¹; and one in Nubia, on the eastern bank of the Nile, somewhere near the Third Cataract,² which he named Gem-Aton, like the temple he had first built in Thebes.

This fact is sufficient to show that, at least as early as the foundation of the City of the Horizon of Aton, in the sixth year of his reign, Akhnaton consciously endeavoured to spread the lofty cult of Cosmic Energy to all his empire, if he did not already dream of preaching it beyond the limits of Egyptian civilisation. The domain of a universal God could logically admit of no boundaries. And the solemn consecration of the territory of Akhetaton with all it contained and would ever contain from cliff to cliff, and of at least two similar holy cities, one at each end of his dominions, may be taken as a ritual act symbolising the Pharaoh’s ultimate intention of consecrating the whole earth to the life-giving Sun, its Father and Sustainer.

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According to the inscriptions upon the boundary-stones, the demarcation of the territory of Akhetaton took place “on the 13th day of the 4th month of the 2nd season,” in the sixth year of Akhnaton’s reign.

The king then returned to Thebes, where he lived until

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 166.

² James Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 263. Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 166.

his new capital was inhabitable. It is however probable that he came more than once to inspect the works that were now being carried on with feverish speed on the site of the sacred City. A tablet states that the oath and words of consecration pronounced by him in the sixth year of his reign were repeated in the eighth year “on the 8th day of the 1st month of the second season” . . . “And the breadth of Akhetaton,” said the king, “is from cliff to cliff; from the eastern horizon of heaven to the western horizon of heaven. It shall be for Aton, my Father; its hills, its deserts, all its fowl, all its people, all its cattle, all things which Aton produces, on which His rays shine, all things which are in Akhetaton, they will be for my Father, the living Aton, unto the temple of Aton in the City, forever and ever. They are all offered to His spirit. And may His rays be beauteous when they receive them.”¹

The time between the sixth and the eighth year was spent in preparations. At the Pharaoh’s command, hundreds of diggers and bricklayers, masons, carpenters, painters, sculptors, craftsman and artists of all sorts flocked to the site of the new capital. Stone quarries were opened in the neighbourhood, while Bek, “Chief of the sculptors on the great monuments of the king,” was sent to the south for red granite. Marble and alabaster, granite of different colours, ivory, gold and lapis lazuli, and cedar and various kinds of precious woods were brought from Upper Egypt and from Nubia, from Sinai and Syria, and even further still. The whole empire — nay, the whole of the known world — contributed to the great work undertaken for the glory of the universal God.

And the miracle took place. Within two years or so, temples, palaces, villas, cottages, gardens, lakes full of lotus-flowers, avenues bordered with lofty palm-trees sprang forth from the barren sands. Limited on the east by the desert and on the west by a strip of cultivated land, a mile wide, along the Nile, the town was generally about three-quarters of a mile (and, in some places, not more than eleven hundred yards) in breadth, though it stretched over a distance of five

¹ Quoted by Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 93.

miles from north to south. It was, therefore, definitely smaller than Thebes. But it was lovely. It had broad streets, “parks in which were kiosks, colonnaded pavillions and artificial lakes,”¹ and plenty of open spaces, shady groves and flowers. Its great temple of Aton was a magnificent building; its lesser temples, its shrines erected to the memory of the Pharaoh’s ancestors, could stand in parallel with any of the most beautiful religious monuments of Egypt; and the king’s new palace exceeded in splendour that of his parents in Thebes. And not only were the most costly materials thrown lavishly into the construction of the sacred capital, but “the whole place was planned with delicate taste and supreme elegance.”²

The main temple of Aton and the king’s palace lay in the northern part of the City. Beautiful pleasure-gardens with several artificial lakes — the “Precincts of Aton” — lay to the south. In the white cliffs of the desert that closed the landscape towards the east, were soon to be hewn tombs of the king, royal family and courtiers.

We have already alluded to the existence in architecture, sculpture, painting, and every form of art, of a new style of which the canons, as far as we can infer, may have influenced the decoration even of the earliest temple of Aton, in Thebes. That art, inspired and encouraged by Akhnaton himself,³ found its everlasting expression in the monuments, the wall-paintings, the statues of Akhetaton; especially in the great temple of Aton, in the decoration of the king’s palace and of the tombs in the eastern hills, and in the beautiful portrait-busts of the Pharaoh and of his queen which rank among the masterpieces of Egyptian sculpture.

In architecture, the break from tradition was perhaps less apparent at first sight than in the other arts. The temples, in Akhetaton, seen from outside, looked much like the classical Egyptian shrines of the time. When, for instance, after crossing its walled enclosure, one beheld the imposing facade of the great temple of Aton — a pillared portico behind which

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Short History of Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1934), p. 151.

² Arthur Weigall: *Short History of Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1934), p. 151.

³ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 180-181.

towered two huge pylons — one had probably the impression of entering a sacred building not much different from those erected in honour of the old gods in the City of Amon. The same five tall flag-staves, from the tops of which fluttered long crimson pennons, shot up against the deep blue sky above each pylon. The same monumental gateway formed the entrance of the temple proper. It was only after its shining doors had been flung open that the difference became evident. One found oneself in a broad paved courtyard flooded with sunshine, in the midst of which stood a high altar on a flight of steps. On either side there was a series of small chapels, brightly decorated. Then, a second gateway led into a second open court, from which one passed into a third, and then into a fourth one, half-filled with a magnificent pillared gallery. The columns were tall and thick enough to give that impression of greatness enduring for ever that one had in Karnak, but from their midst the open part of the court and the blazing sky above could always be seen. The rays of the Disk fell directly upon the golden hieroglyphics in praise of divine light and heat; the cool airy shade made the outer wall appear, by contrast, more luminous and the coloured paintings more bright under the dazzling midday Sun. From there, one passed into a fifth, a sixth, and finally a seventh court — all opened to the sky. The two last ones, surrounded by small chapels, had, like the first, an altar in their centre.

There was there nothing of the mystery and sacred awe that generally filled the temples of the traditional gods. There were no dimly-lit lamps hanging from gloomy ceilings; no precious images buried in the depth of pitch-dark sanctuaries like stolen treasures in a cave. There was no gradual passage from sunshine to shade, from shade to gloom, from gloom to complete darkness — the abode of an awe-inspiring hidden god. But a visit to the temple, even to the innermost altar, was but a natural transition from the all-pervading radiance of the fiery Disk, from the blazing heat of the world vivified by His beams, to the worship of the unknown invisible Essence behind that light, behind that heat — of the Power, of the Soul of the Sun.

At different times of the day, bread and wine and frankincense and beautiful flowers were offered upon the altars to that invisible God whose only image and symbol — the Sun — shone far above, the same in the temple and outside. And clouds of perfume, and waves of music went up to Him and disappeared, dissolved in the golden light of heaven. One was in presence of an entirely new cult; of an entirely new spirit.

Behind the great temple and within the same enclosure there was a smaller one, also faced by a pillared portico. On either side of its entrance, in front of each row of columns, stood a statue of the king and queen. There were shrines all over the City, among which four at least were dedicated to the Pharaoh's ancestors — one to his father, one to his grandfather, Thutmose the Fourth, one to his great-grandfather, Amenhotep the Second,¹ and one to the father of the latter, Thutmose the Third. We may suppose that there were more. For it is difficult to believe that Akhnaton would have honoured those particular ancestors of his without giving a place in his veneration to his remote predecessors of the IVth and Vth Dynasties, the Pyramid builders, in whose days the antique god Ra, and the usurper Amon, was the supreme god of Egypt and the sole patron of its divine kings, and whose contemporary art, as we shall soon see, seems to have influenced many of the traits of his own "new style," otherwise hard to account for.

As time passed new temples were built. Two, we know — one for the use of the king's mother and one for that of his young sister, Princess Baketaton — were erected some time before the visit of Queen Tiy to Akhetaton. There were minor shrines in diverse beauty-spots and also in the gardens that lay to the south of the capital, shrines with names evocative of joy and peace. One stood in the small island of "Aton-illustrious-in-festivals," in the midst of the Nile, and was called the "House-of-Rejoicing." Another, specially

¹ "An official named Any held the office of Steward of the House of Amenophis II and there is a representation of Akhnaton offering to Aton in 'the House of Thutmose IV in the City of the Horizon.'" Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 171. See also Wilkinson's *Modern Egypt*, Vol. II, p. 69; and Davies' *El Amarna*.

designed for the worship of God in the glory of sunset, and in which Queen Nefertiti presided over the sacred rites, was called the “House-of-putting-the-Disk-to-rest.” Big or small, they were all built in the same manner, with bright open courtyards and altars covered only by the sky. They were beautifully adorned with paintings and reliefs and statues, generally representing the royal couple (often the royal family) in the act of worship. They had nothing of the ostentatious austerity of a presbyterian church. But there was in them no idol of any sort to be considered as the receptacle of God. The one Symbol of the Religion of the Disk — the Sun, with downward rays ending in hands — appeared repeatedly in the pictures and on the reliefs. But it was there only to remind the worshipper that none but the unseen Power within the Sun, the Force symbolised by those “hands,” was worthy of adoration, and to tell him that no form, however perfect, could ever represent It.

* * *

The new movement in art inaugurated by Akhnaton found another masterful expression in the decoration of the royal palace and of the villas of the nobles, one of which — that of Nakht, the Pharaoh’s “vizier” — has been described at length by A. Weigall.¹ Most of the palaces and villas laid bare by the excavation “were built on the two main avenues of the City, known as the Street of the High-priest and the King’s Highway.”² If we judge by the description of the villa of Nakht, with its colonnaded entrance, its cool interior courts, its galleries, its richly adorned rooms, those two main avenues and their by-streets also, nay, the whole locality if not the whole town, with series of such buildings, must have been indeed “a place of surpassing beauty.”³

But the Pharaoh’s palace, as was natural, effaced in

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 183, and following.

² Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 183.

³ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 175.

splendour all the rest. Like generally all the mansions of the living in ancient Egypt, it was not intended to last more than a generation or two. The tomb, not the house, was the “eternal dwelling” to endure through ages. And that piece of archaic wisdom had so penetrated the sub-conscious mind of every Egyptian, including perhaps Akhnaton himself, that they acted according to it, spontaneously. But the living loved the comforts of life, and the ephemeral abode was, in all cases, as lovely as it could be; in Akhnaton’s case, perfectly beautiful and sometimes gorgeous.

His palace was a large, airy, brick structure, covering a length of half a mile. What remains of it is not sufficient to reconstruct in detail the plan of its series of halls, pillared courts, chambers, store-rooms, etc., destined evidently to accommodate, apart from the royal family, a considerable number of office-bearers of all sorts and a host of servants. But unearthed fragments of pavements and wall-paintings attest that it was magnificently decorated with scenes of natural life. The pictures expressed in form and colour that joy of breathing the daylight and that constant praise rendered to the “Lord of Life” by all living souls, which are the main themes of the young king’s famous hymns to Aton. There was a pavement representing a field full of high grasses and tall scarlet poppies, through which gambolled a calf; another pictured wild ducks waddling their way through swamps, their glossy bluish-green throats bulging out, their yellow feet stumbling in the mud with perfect naturalness; while grey and white pigeons were seen to flit across the blue of sky-like ceilings, light and airy like faraway clouds. There were birds and butterflies flying in the sunshine over watery expanses covered with pink and white lotuses. And fishes played hide-and-seek between the long winding stems. With shades of pale blue, gold and purple, their scales glittered as the rays of Him on high struck them through the water; the birds’ wings fluttered with joy, and the frisking young bull crushed the grass and poppies in an outburst of overwhelming life. The tender lilies opened themselves to the pleasure of the divine touch and let the warmth and light enter right into their golden hearts.

Never had Egyptian art been so true to life before, and never was it again to be so after Akhnaton's reign. It was more than a new technique — movement rendered, along with colour; expression stressed even above perfection of form — it was a profession of faith; it was the Religion of the Disk made vivid to the senses.

But of all the halls of the palace, the most sumptuous seems to have been that immense one — 428 feet on 234 — in which stood 542 pillars shaped like palm-trees, with capitals of massive gold. Fragments of lapis lazuli and many-coloured glazes, deep-set in the thick curbs of precious metal, marked the intervals between the leaves. The trunks of the columns were thickly gilded, and costly stones adorned their pedestals as well as their capitals. We must imagine the pavement, walls and ceiling completely covered with the most exquisite representations of animal and vegetable life, like those we have just mentioned.

This was probably the great reception hall in which foreign envoys and vassal princes were admitted on State occasions, in presence of the king and court. It is not sufficient to think of the dazzling effect of this forest of shining pillars, either in full daylight or at the time of sunset, when the curbs of gold must have glowed like red-hot embers, and the gorgeous capitals glistened with iridescent splendour. That vast hall, with all its incredible magnificence, formed but the setting in which was to appear, worthy of four thousand years of solar tradition (obscured, at times, but never broken) and of his own lofty religion — the culmination of it all — that Man, invested with limitless power and clothed in majesty; that god on earth: the King.

We must picture him wearing his most beautiful State ornaments: broad necklaces of gold and lapis lazuli, heavy gold earrings and bracelets, and snake-shaped armlets, all studded with precious stones, and rings where gems sparkled and where diamonds flashed light. We must picture him with the tall traditional tiara resting upon his head, with the golden cobra, symbol of kingship, rolled around it; elegantly dressed in the finest of fine white linen — woven air — so

transparent that in many places his smooth bronze skin showed through the regular pleats. Above him, at the back of the throne, a large golden hawk — another symbol of royalty — stretched out its shining wings, while on either side the fan-bearers lifted and lowered, with studied cadence, enormous fans of ostrich feathers fixed on long gilded poles.

On their entering the resplendent hall, the ambassadors from distant lands must have repeated to themselves the words that one finds over and over again in all the despatches of foreign kings to Akhnaton: “Verily, in the land of Egypt, gold is as common as dust.” And they could hardly believe their eyes. But when, followed by the fan-bearers, the Pharaoh slowly walked in, ascended the steps and seated himself upon the throne, all attention was at once focused on him. He was in the full bloom of youth — with hopes, illusions, dreams — and at the height of his power. He was lovely to look upon; a touch of feminine grace increased his indefinable charm. He was wise and, above all, he was in tune with the Essence of all things — not merely the king of Egypt, the head of the empire, whom they all expected to see (and whom many had seen already in the person of Amenhotep the Third), but Akhnaton, the Prophet and true Son of the Sun, whom the world was to behold only once. He passed along, before the prostrate courtiers, with supreme poise, and seated himself upon his throne of glory with godlike simplicity. The glittering of gold and gems that surrounded him was lost in the radiance of his own body, in the serene effulgence of Aton within him. His large, dark eyes were full of infinite kindness, full of intelligence, and full of peace. Heavenly light poured out of them. His whole body was surrounded by a halo of invisible rays, like the body of the Sun. One could feel them as he passed. One could feel them as he dominated the whole gathering from the height of his throne. They filled the immense hall and seemed to stretch endlessly. And all those who came within his light — provided they were not of the coarsest type of men — could never forget him.

* * *

There were beautiful gardens to the south of the City. Cart-loads of good black earth had been brought up from the banks of the Nile and spread out in thick layers over the barren desert. Canals and artificial lakes kept it for ever moist, and beds of flowers destined to exhale their fragrance as a permanent offering to the Sun, and trees both indigenous and foreign, destined to praise Him by their very loveliness, were planted there. The dry, yellow sands gave way to a paradise of fresh perfumes, of beauty and peace. Stumps and roots of trees and shrubs, and withered remains of water-lilies which once rested their large flat leaves and open flowers upon the surface of the lakes, have been discovered by modern excavators.¹

A detailed description of the “Precincts of Aton” (as the gardens were called), with their two great enclosures leading to each other, has been given by Arthur Weigall² and other authors.³ It is useless to repeat it here. Let us only recall that there was a little temple built on an island within one of the lakes; that there were summer-houses reflecting their delicately carved colonnades in tanks full of white and coloured lotuses; that there were arbours in which one could sit in the shade and admire the play of light upon the sunny surface of the waters, or watch a flight of birds in the deep blue sky. The gardens, where Akhnaton often used to come either to pray, either to sit and explain his Teaching to his favourite courtiers, or simply to be alone, were planned to convey an impression of quiet beauty. Their sight was to lead the soul to praise God in the loveliest manifestations of His power and to fill the heart with love for Him.

The whole City was built in the same spirit. It was a place where the enjoyment of the greatest material magnificence was to be allied with a full sense of seriousness — nay, of the sacredness — of life; with the consciousness of the highest spiritual values.

On one hand, the world’s experience, from the earliest

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 182.

² Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 181, and following.

³ Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 279.

days onwards, is that those two things seldom go together; and time and again the one has been stressed at the expense of the other in the course of history. On the other hand, it is true that man does and always did crave for both, and that any scheme of life (especially of collective life), in which one of the two is neglected, is felt to be imperfect; is, in fact, a recognition of weakness, an acquiescence in the practical impossibility of realising man's everlasting dream of plenitude.

Akhnaton was probably not ignorant of the difficulty of maintaining pace with one's times in the spiritual sphere. As we have seen, he was himself the child of an age of splendour, the scion of centuries of grand material achievements — the flower of Egypt and, one may add, of the whole Near East at the pinnacle of civilisation. He knew too well what depths of superstition, what ignorance of the very meaning of spiritual life went along with that worldly wealth and greatness. Whatever was precious in the traditional wisdom of the Egyptians belonged to an earlier and simpler age; and there are signs that seem to indicate that the young Pharaoh, to some extent, wished to revive an age-old cult — namely, the solar cult which had once thrived in the city of On — of which the sense had been long forgotten. But, however much the corruption of his brilliant times impressed him, he was too logical not to dissociate in his mind material comfort, beauty, luxury, etc., from the moral coarseness that so often accompanies them. It was difficult to see the two sides of life flourish simultaneously; but there was no reason why they should not do so; indeed, something told him that they should do so; that, as long as man has a visible body and lives on the material plane, there is no perfection unless they do thrive harmoniously. Himself a living example of opposite qualities admirably balanced, a man in whom, by nature, there was no excess, he wanted the whole of life — material, social, emotional, intellectual — to be a thing of beauty, religious life being the bloom and culmination of it all. He did not believe that wisdom lay in suppressing the natural cravings for worldly comfort and enjoyment, but rather in satisfying them, if possible, and at the same time in purifying them; in living intensely, but with innocence and

serenity; in feeling the lovely sensuous objects of this transient world — forms and colours, songs and caresses, the taste of good wine in a finely chiselled cup — the higher realities that these things merely foreshadow and symbolise.

He seems to have gone a step further. He seems to have held that the understanding of religious truth is impossible, if not to all individuals, at least to any group of individuals taken as a whole, without a minimum of material well-being. One aspect of his City which has hardly ever been stressed is that, besides being “a glimpse of heaven,” it was, partly at least, what we would call to-day an industrial town. Thousands of workers had gathered to build it; many of them remained after its completion. With the arrival of the court, more luxuries were needed, and therefore a greater supply of skilled labour. Apart from the usual paintings and carvings, different coloured glazes had come into fashion as an important element of house decoration. They were also widely used in the making of small artistic objects. We have seen how Akhnaton encouraged the new industry by ordering large quantities of coloured glazes for the ornamentation of his palace. Under the impulse given by him, glass factories sprang up here and there in Akhetaton and flourished — perhaps the most ancient centres of production of their kind on a broad scale. Glass vessels of great beauty were exported to distant places in exchange for other goods. Besides that, labourers of different crafts were employed to hew out of the limestone hills to the east of the City the tombs of the nobility, and to adorn them fittingly; so that, apart from the court and the officials, a large population of humble folk lived within the area specially consecrated to the Sun.

We do not know about their life as much as we do about that of the upper-class people, whose dwellings were more solid and whose career, moreover, is retraced upon the walls of their tomb-chambers. But we do know that the king had built for the diggers and other workers in the hills of the desert and in the nearby quarries, a “model settlement” which has been excavated in our times. And it is to be presumed that he did not do less for the labourers working in the City proper.

In the settlement near the eastern hills, says Sir Leonard Woolley, each labourer shared with his family a small house, comprising a front room, used both as a kitchen and as a parlour, bedrooms, and a cupboard at the back. There was accommodation for the beasts of burden that helped the men to transport the stone they had dug out. "Inside the houses, rough paintings on the mud walls hint at the efforts of the individual workman to decorate his surroundings or to express his piety; the charms and amulets picked up on the floor show which of all the many gods of Egypt were most in favour with working men; scattered tools and implements tell of the work of each or of his pursuits in leisure hours."¹

These few remarks are sufficient to suggest that, with all their monotonous simplicity, those workmen's houses of the early fourteenth century B.C., "the very pattern of mechanically devised industrial dwellings,"² were far more agreeable to live in than those in most of the "coolie lines" around the mines and factories of present-day India, where a whole family is often packed into one room, with walls and roof not of cool mud, but of corrugated iron, unbearable during the hot weather; far more agreeable to live in, also, than the slums of industrial England in the nineteenth century A.D. They represented no luxury, but a fairly good amount of comfort. They were the dwellings of people whose elementary needs for air, space, privacy and leisure were recognised.³

The amulets found in the labourers' rooms, and many a figure on the walls, show distinctly that the worship of the immemorial popular gods and goddesses was predominant among the humble folk, even within the sacred territory specially dedicated to the One Lord of all beings, Aton.⁴ The king, so eager to prohibit the public cults of Amon and of the

¹ Sir C. Leonard Woolley: *Digging up the Past* (Edit. 1937), p. 62.

² Sir C. Leonard Woolley: *Digging up the Past* (Edit. 1937), p. 61.

³ It has sometimes been suggested that this "Workmen's Village" was in reality a penal settlement. "It was surrounded with walls, in no way defensive, but high enough to keep people in, and there are marks of patrol roads all round it" (Pendlebury: *Tell-el-Amarna* [Edit. 1935], p. 58). If so, the "recognition of the elementary needs" of the people who lived there, is all the more remarkable.

⁴ Sir C. Leonard Woolley: *Digging up the Past* (Edit. 1937), p. 62; J. D. S. Pendlebury: *Tell-el-Amarna* (Edit. 1935), p. 58.

many deities, to have their temples closed and the plural word “gods” effaced from every inscription, seems never to have tried to bring the commoners to abandon their traditional beliefs.

One reason for that apparent indifference may well be that, as we have suggested in the preceding chapter, the Founder of the Religion of the Disk was much less of a staunch monotheist, in the narrow sense of the word, than both his modern admirers and detractors seem to think. He certainly himself believed in one God alone — one impersonal God, the Essence of all existence, personified in the Father of all life on our earth, the Sun — but he probably did not object to other people paying homage to deities of a more finite nature, as long as they did so sincerely and in a truly religious spirit. He had dispossessed and dismissed the priests who encouraged superstition in view of their own worldly ends and who strongly opposed his cherished plans of making the cult of the One God the State religion of Egypt. He had no quarrel either with the ignorant people or with their childish beliefs. Those beliefs, they would perhaps themselves outgrow with time, provided they could keep their hearts open to the beauty of the sunlit world and their minds receptive to the evidence of truth — provided they could feel and think. In the meantime, it mattered little what names and shapes they held sacred, by custom, as long as their beliefs led them to do no harm. We shall discuss later on the implications of Akhnaton’s famous motto, “Living in Truth,” but we can already safely say here that he seems always to have valued right living above anything else in a man. For one to live rightly, one’s sub-conscious mind, at least — one’s deeper self — has to grasp the truth, even if one’s conscious mind, blinded by external influences, denies it. And in the eyes of a lover of truth, and of a man of extraordinary intuition as Akhnaton was, it was surely the deeper self that mattered.

Another reason why the Pharaoh appears never to have tried to spread his religion among the commoners was perhaps that he felt it useless to force upon them a simple yet high philosophy which they would not understand, which

they were not prepared to live up to, and which they would soon distort. It was far more reasonable to increase their material well-being, so that they might begin to acquire that preliminary sense of the beauty of life, without which the Religion of the Disk loses all meaning; to give them a minimum of comfort and a minimum of leisure, that they might learn the pleasure of letting their eyes wander over an open landscape, while relaxed.

Akhnaton took several of his disciples outside the narrow circle of the highest nobility. Every time he found an individual whom he judged worthy to receive his message, not only did he teach him the great truths he had discovered, but he generally gave him his confidence in worldly affairs also, and promoted him to a high rank in the hierarchy of the State, as is shown in inscriptions in the tombs of some of his followers, for instance: "I was a man of low origin both on my father's and on my mother's side. But the king established me . . . he caused me to grow . . . by his bounty, when I was a man of no property. He gave me food and provisions every day, I who had been one that begged bread."¹ He was surely the last man not to appreciate the natural aristocracy of mind and character which exists, but is rare, in every stratum of society. But in his dealings with the people in general, he seems to have been guided by the conviction that a certain amount of material comfort and of leisure should precede any sort of attempt at their religious uplift. The model settlements he caused to be built, with houses containing at least three or four airy rooms each, for each family, seem to have been his main gift to the labourers of his age. And far from setting the formal adherence to his creed as a condition without which none could enjoy the advantages he offered — as so many modern theoreticians would have done, if they had his power — he let the "masses" believe what they were accustomed to, and worship whomever they pleased. Congenial conditions of life were in his eyes, along with good government, their primary need and their foremost right.

¹ Inscription in the tomb of May (Rock-tomb No. 14, at Tell-el-Amarna), quoted by Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 189.

And in this — apart from being, as in many other ways, surprisingly “modern” — he was consistent with that ideal of all-round perfection, spiritual and material, which he tried to realise in his sacred City.

* * *

At the time of the foundation of his new capital, Akhnaton had already recorded upon the boundary-stones his desire that his own tomb, that of the queen and of their children, that of Mnevis (the sacred bull of On), that of the high-priest of Aton and those of the priests and principal dignitaries, should be dug out in the hills to the east of the City.¹ Up till now, some twenty-five tombs have been discovered and excavated by modern archaeologists.² Their decoration is characteristic of the “new style” that flourished in Akhetaton; the inscriptions which accompany the paintings tell us a good deal about the Pharaoh’s followers; and it is upon the walls of those sepulchres that have been found written the two invaluable Hymns to Aton, composed by Akhnaton himself, which have come down to us — the main sources from which something definite is known about the Religion of the Disk.

The tombs were each one composed of several successive chambers, hewn out of the live rock, as it was the custom in Egypt, the innermost chamber being that in which the mummy was to lie. Massive pillars carved out of a single

¹ “There shall be made for me a sepulchre in the eastern hills; my burial shall be made therein, in the multitude of jubilees which Aton, my Father, hath ordained for me, and the burial of the queen shall be made there, in that multitude of years. And the burial of the king’s daughter shall be made there. If I die in any town of the north, south, east or west, I will be brought here, and my burial shall be made in Akhetaton. If the great queen Nefertiti, who liveth, die in any town of the north, south, east or west, she shall be brought here and buried in Akhetaton. If the king’s daughter Meritaton die in any town of the north, south, east or west, she shall be brought here and buried in Akhetaton. And the sepulchre of Mnevis shall be made in the eastern hills and he shall be buried there. The tombs of the high priest and of the Divine Father and of the priests of Aton shall be made in the eastern hills and they shall be buried therein. The tombs of the dignitaries and others shall be made in the eastern hills and they shall be buried therein. . . .” Inscription on the first boundary-stone, 13th day, 4th month, 2nd season, 6th year.

² Norman de Garis Davies: *The Rock of El Amarna*. Sir Flinders Petrie: *Tell-el-Amarna* (Edit. 1894). J. D. S. Pendlebury: *Tell-el-Amarna* (Edit. 1935), pp. 47-56.

block and shaped like lotus-buds sustained the heavy roofs. The walls were adorned with exquisite paintings representing the main episodes of the life of the deceased, with special emphasis upon their dealings with the king, and the favour they had received from him. There was no allusion of any sort to Osiris or to any of the gods who, according to the traditional beliefs of the land, were supposed to preside over the netherworld; none of the age-old magical formulas which the dead man was expected to repeat in order to protect himself against the dangers that awaited him at different stages of his journey to the great beyond; none of the ready-made declarations of innocence which he was supposed to recite, with a view to avoiding the consequences of his misdeeds on earth. The main prayer which those who had “hearkened to the king’s Teaching” addressed to the One God was that they might continue to see the beauty of the Sun — and to serve the king — in life beyond death. Some also asked to be remembered on earth by their family and friends.

Apart from these prayers and from occasional extracts from the king’s hymns, the inscriptions in the new sepulchres contained no reference at all to any religious beliefs. They simply stated the titles and gave an account of the career of courtiers who were to be buried there, thus completing the information suggested by the adjoining pictures.

We have just quoted an extract of what May, one of the City officials, says of himself on the walls of his tomb. There are other instances of dignitaries who stress that they owe all their elevation to the Pharaoh’s favour. Pnahesi (or Panehesi), the Ethiopian, apparently one of Akhnaton’s most beloved disciples, whose tomb seems to have been more magnificent than that of any other courtier, tells us plainly: “When I knew not the companionship of princes, I was made an intimate of the king.” He also says of his royal master that he “maketh princes and formeth the humble,” a statement confirmed by another inscription in the tomb of Huya, steward of Queen Tiy, which refers to the monarch “selecting his officials from the ranks of the yeomen.”¹ All

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 190.

this goes to stress what we have said above — namely that, though he surely did not scorn nobility of birth when allied with merit, Akhnaton always took merit first in consideration, in his choice of the men to whom he would entrust responsible posts, and grant wealth and honours as well as that sort of immortality conferred by the gift of a tomb built to last for ever.

How generously he lavished riches and distinctions upon those whom he judged worthy of his favour is suggested by the paintings and inscriptions in the tombs of Pentu, of Mahu, of Ay, of Merira, the high-priest of Aton, and other dignitaries who are represented receiving from him large rewards in gold. “His Majesty has doubled me his gifts in gold and silver.” . . . “How prosperous is he, my Lord, who hears thy Teaching of life,” states Ay, the “Master of the King’s horse,” who one day, after the ephemeral reign of Akhnaton’s two immediate successors, was himself to wear the Double Crown. “He has multiplied me his favours like the number of the sand,” says Mahu; “I am the head of the officials at the head of the people; my Lord has promoted me because I have carried out his Teaching and I hear his word without ceasing. . . .” Indeed, knowing as one does how readily the greater number of those men — including the most prominent among them — hastened to abandon the worship of the One God and to denounce all connection with their inspired Teacher as soon as his enemies came back to power, one is tempted to suppose that many professed to follow him mainly for the tangible marks of attachment that he would give them. However, there are inscriptions in which the courtiers pay to Akhnaton and his Teaching a homage that seems to come from the depth of their heart; the language, at least, in which it is expressed, is that of ardent devotion, such as, for instance, these words, addressed to the Sun:

“Thy rays are on Thy bright image, the Ruler of Truth, who proceeded from eternity. Thou givest to him Thy duration and Thy years; Thou hearkenest to all that is in his heart, because Thou lovest him. Thou makest him like the Aton, him Thy child, the King; Thou lookest on him, for he proceeded from

Thee. Thou hast placed him beside Thee for ever and ever, for he loves to gaze upon Thee. . . . Thou hast set him there till the swan shall turn black and the crow turn white, till the hills rise up to travel and the deeps rush into the rivers. . . . While Heaven is, he shall be.”¹

One really wonders how even such men as the author of those words of glowing faith in him seem to have done nothing to defend the young Pharaoh’s memory, during the terrible reaction that was one day to burst out against all he had stood for.

* * *

Apart from the information they give about the life of the king and courtiers, the paintings and reliefs in the tombs in the “eastern hills” are, along with the famous portrait-heads found in the studio of several artists in the City, the most illustrative productions of the “new art” of Akhetaton.

The conventions which had shackled the artist in his rendering of the human figure — and especially of royal personages — and which had limited the sources of his inspiration, have entirely disappeared in the new school. Here we find the Pharaoh and his queen portrayed in all the familiar attitudes of private life — eating, drinking, chatting, smelling flowers, playing with their children, etc. — with a naturalness never attained in Egyptian art before the “Tell-el-Amarna period,” and never surpassed in any art. And that is not all: more than one of those pictures and sculptures even present a definite exaggeration of certain features, both of the head and body, which sets them apart from nearly all the productions of the ancient world, and renders them somewhat akin to our modern “futurist” art in its strange aspects. One has only to look at some of the reliefs representing the king himself with an unusually developed skull, a protruding chin, and hips and thighs out of proportion with his slender body; one has only to think of the otherwise beautiful limestone head of one of the princesses in the Cairo museum, whose skull is elongated to an incredible extent, to

¹ Quoted by Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 115.

be convinced of the existence of such a tendency among the artists of Akhnaton's school.

Some modern authors¹ have endeavoured to present those strange features as the faithful reproduction of an ungainly countenance, by sculptors and painters trained by the king "living in truth" never to flatter their models, least of all himself and his family. But this view is contradicted by the existence of other portraits of the king and of the princesses — paintings, busts, and statues — in which none of these deformities are to be seen. There is the quartz head of one of the Pharaoh's little daughters at the museum of the Louvre, the head of a normal child of exquisite delicacy. There is the delightful painted relief picturing Akhnaton in his early youth as he smells a bunch of flowers that Nefertiti holds out to him — one of the best productions of the Amarna school; a work which, according to Professor H. R. Hall himself, possesses already a hellenic grace, and in which the king's figure "reminds one of a Hermes" and "could hardly have been bettered by a Greek"² (the greatest compliment a European critic can pay to the masterpiece of a non-European artist). There is the whole series of portrait-busts that represent Akhnaton not as a boy, but as a man, and that attest beyond doubt that he was lovely to look upon.

Akhnaton's physical appearance has been discussed nearly as often as his religious ideas, and sometimes commented upon with as much bitterness.³ Inasmuch as a body is the reflection of the soul that animates it — or the soul the projection of the body — it is not superfluous to try to visualise him as he once could be seen, when he trod the painted pavements of his palace. From his remains we know that he was a man of medium height; from pictorial evidence, we know that he had a regular oval face, a straight nose, thick,

¹ H. R. Hall: *Ancient History of the Near East* (Ninth Edit. 1936), p. 304. Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 103. James Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 294.

² H. R. Hall: *Ancient History of the Near East* (Ninth Edit. 1936), p. 305.

³ H. R. Hall: *Ancient History of the Near East* (Ninth Edit. 1936), p. 304-305. L. W. King and H. R. Hall: *Egypt and Western Asia*, pp. 100, 385. Stanley Cook, in the Preface to Baikie's *Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926). Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 103.

well-designed lips; and that his jet-black eyes were, in the words of Arthur Weigall, “eloquent of dreams.”¹ He had a long graceful neck, well-shaped arms and legs, and beautiful hands. His body, of which the top part is generally represented bare in the paintings and bas-reliefs, was neither stout nor thin. The pleated cloth he wore wrapped around the hips and tightly tied below the navel, seems to be responsible for the “protruding paunch” to which so many authors allude in their description of him. He has been depicted as having little of a virile appearance and, at first sight at least, this remark is not entirely without grounds. There was surely an indefinable charm all about his person; a gracefulness of deportment, an irresistible gentleness — something subtly feminine. But, at the same time, in those large, dark, loving eyes, whose mere glance was like a caress, one could read courage, determination, a manly depth of thought and will; those lips, with their delicate curve, always ready to move into a mysterious smile, expressed the serenity of unshakable strength. There was, in the Pharaoh’s countenance, a well-balanced blending of grace, of force, and of poise; of voluptuousness and of character — a living picture of the harmonious plenitude of his being. In other words, Akhnaton seems to have forestalled in real life, to a very great extent, that well-nigh impossible complete human type — young demi-god with the opposite perfections of both man and woman — which Leonardo da Vinci was to conceive and to strive throughout his career to fix in lines and colours, three thousand years later. And his body, no less than his personality, bore the stamp of that strange dual beauty.

The paintings and sculptures that represent him, or the members of his family, with the exaggerated features we have referred to above, are therefore to be taken not as faithful portraits, but as characteristic instances of a “style.” And that “style,” apart from any other considerations, contained a religious — perhaps also a political — symbolism. Its productions have no parallel in the immediate past, but they strangely resemble some archaic figures of the Fourth and

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 52.

Fifth Dynasties. Arthur Weigall has given, side by side with the copy of one or two of them, the reproduction of royal heads and of a statuette found by Sir Flinders Petrie, the former at Abydos, the latter at Diospolis,¹ and dating as far back as the days of the great Pyramid builders. The same receding forehead, protruding chin, elongated skull; the same overstressed hips and thighs are to be remarked in both cases, at a distance of eighteen hundred years or more. So that, indeed, from those quaint samples of the work of the new school of Tell-el-Amarna there is every probability that the distinguished archaeologist is right when he states that “Akhnaton’s art might thus be said to be a kind of renaissance — a return to the classical period of archaic days; the underlying motive of that return being the desire to lay emphasis upon the king’s character as a representative of that most ancient of all gods, Ra-Horakhti.”²

How closely that aspect of the new art was interwoven with the Religion of the Disk we can only understand after trying to define what place the king occupied in the creed which he preached. It will suffice here to say that the frequency with which those archaic renderings of him and of his family appear in the paintings and sculptures of his time, suggests what stress he himself put upon the great antiquity of his so-called “new” ideas. Akhnaton seems to have shared with many inspired religious leaders the conviction that, far from being an innovator, he was just the expounder of Truth, which is one and of all times, and of which the oldest civilisations had perhaps a more accurate glimpse than the latter ones.

Whatever, in the Amarna school, was not a deliberate attempt at imitating the archaic models, was of utmost grace and naturalness — true to life as never Egyptian art was again to be. We must remember that the young king was the soul of the whole movement. “It was he who released the artists from convention and bade their hands repeat what their eyes saw; and it was he who directed those eyes to the

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 64.

² Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 63.

beauties of nature around them. He and no other taught them to look at the world in the spirit of life; to infuse into the cold stone something of the ‘effulgence which comes from Aton.’”¹

* * *

In the beautiful City we have tried to describe — the dream and the work of one man — life was pleasant. We have already seen what amount of comfort and of freedom the humblest dwellers in the consecrated area enjoyed, in the model settlements built for them near the field of their labours. They probably saw very little of the pomp of the court and, with the exception of those who lived in the City itself, they hardly ever had the opportunity of witnessing the passage of a royal procession. Whether they had or not some sort of vague knowledge of the new creed proclaimed by the king, we cannot tell. They had perhaps heard that he worshipped the Sun alone and despised the other gods; that he was in conflict with the priests of Amon; that he had raised several men of poor extraction to high positions because of their readiness to share his faith; that, in the eyes of his God, Egyptians and foreigners were the same. But, whatever rumours may have reached them in their fields, their factories, or their quarries, that brought no change either in their beliefs or in their lives. As we have seen, they continued to worship in peace the age-old popular deities that they were accustomed to. And the Pharaoh was, to them, what every one of his predecessors had been to the past generations: a divine being, the father and defender of his subjects, the “good god.” And to catch a glimpse of him as he drove through the streets in his chariot, with his beautiful young queen by his side, was a joy that most of them must have keenly valued. Like the bulk of people of all times, they cared little what their sovereign personally believed or did as long as they enjoyed plenty. And Akhnaton’s unconventional habit of appearing in public in all simplicity added, no doubt, a great deal to his popularity — at least, until the

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 181.

disasters of the latter part of his reign created serious discontent, and gave unexpected ground to renewed priestly intrigues all over the land.

The nobles, and all those upon whom the Pharaoh had bestowed his special favour, dwelt in those elegant villas surrounded by gardens which modern excavation has made it possible to give the most attractive description in full details.¹ They were the bearers of all high offices, the companions and the followers of the king. They had the untold privilege of hearing his Teaching from his own lips. And those who formed the closer circle of his best beloved disciples could see him and talk to him freely.

They shared with him not only the pleasures and luxuries of court life, but also hours of thoughtful conversation and moments of silence and prayer in the brilliant halls of the palace or in the cool shade of pillared pavillions in the gardens, by the side of lakes covered with water-flowers. They were his intimates — his friends. If we judge by the way they speak of him in the inscriptions upon the walls of their tomb-chambers, some of them — such as Mahu, Pnahesi, Ramose — seem to have been fervently devoted to him. But as there are no records to tell us how far any of them stood for him against the current events that followed the close of his short reign, it is very difficult to say who was sincere and who was but a clever flatterer. Whatever it be, Akhnaton was pleased to put his confidence in them, and an atmosphere of peace, goodwill, and happiness appears to have existed in his immediate entourage.

However, the Religion of the Disk is so dominated by the personality of its Founder, so profoundly coloured by his reactions to nature and man, that nothing would help us more to grasp its spirit than the knowledge of Akhnaton's day-to-day life amidst the beautiful surroundings that he himself had created.

It is not always easy to reconstruct the life of practically contemporary figures about whom there is abundance of undoubtable evidence. Now and then a few unpublished letters,

¹ See, for instance, the description of the villa of Nakht, in Arthur Weigall's *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), pp. 183-184.

the sudden discovery, in somebody else's memoirs, of a precise reference to some action, which had formerly remained secret, alters entirely the picture one had of them. The knowledge of what a man — be he even a great king — did and said, felt and thought, thirty-three hundred years ago, during those apparently uneventful hours that history does not care to retrace, is therefore necessarily incomplete and liable to revision. Yet, to the extent it is possible to acquire it, it is too precious to be overlooked.

The main sources of information from which one can hope to know something of Akhnaton's daily occupations are the paintings and reliefs where he is represented over and over again, in the tombs of his courtiers. There, a great part of his official life is pictured inasmuch as it is connected with the career of the nobles to whom the sepulchres were destined. In Mahu's tomb, for instance, he is portrayed inspecting the defences of Akhetaton in company of Mahu himself, and — a noteworthy detail — followed by an unarmed bodyguard. Elsewhere we see him promoting Merira to the exalted position of high-priest of Aton, in the midst of great solemnity, and rewarding him for his faithfulness with necklaces of gold. Similar, though less stately scenes of distribution of rewards to officials are to be found, as we have already said, in many tombs, with the repeated assertion that the courtiers have won the king's favour by their constant "hearkening to his Teaching of life" and by their understanding of it. This presupposes that Akhnaton spent a fairly great amount of time instructing all those whom he deemed worthy to become his disciples.

On the other hand, from the evidence of the famous "Amarna Letters," we know that he was in correspondence with the neighbouring monarchs — Burnaburiash of Babylon, to whose son he betrothed one of his daughters; Dushratta of Mitanni, his cousin and perhaps also his brother-in-law; Shubbiluliuma, of the Hittites; and even the distant king of Assyria, Assur-Uballit, then only beginning to lead his semi-barbaric nation out of obscurity. We know that he received regular despatches from his vassals and governors of provinces, to whom he no less regularly sent his orders.

There is a picture that represents him coming forth in a gorgeous palanquin, carried upon the shoulders of eighteen men, to receive the tribute of the empire, during the twelfth year of his reign. Gold and ivory, rare fruits, ostrich feathers, and precious vases, products of the deserts and forests of the Far South and articles of Syrian workmanship, are presented to him by men of various races — the gifts of disparate subject countries to their common Lord.

From all this evidence one may presume that the king's days were equally filled by the discharge of his official duties, which were numerous, and by the explanation of his Teaching to a small circle of followers — apart, of course, from the regular performance of worship at sunrise, noon, and sunset, in the palace or in the temple.

Little is known, in its details, of the ritual that accompanied that worship. We can, however, suppose that it was much simpler than that which prevailed in the cult of the Egyptian gods, for here there was no image, no representation of the divine under any form save the Sun-disk with rays ending in hands which was a mere symbol, not an idol. Consequently, there were none of all the elaborate ceremonies, connected with the bathing and dressing and feeding of the god, that formed such an essential part of the ritual in the temples of Egypt and of all the ancient world, as they do still to-day in the Hindu temples of India. Here, the services consisted of a minimum of pre-ordained words, chants and gestures — those alone that were indispensable to translate the king's lofty intuitions of truth into a cult. The altars, that stood, as we have seen, in the open, were decked with beautiful flowers; and various offerings of food and drink, particularly bread, wine, and fruits, were placed upon them, symbolising the idea, at once scientific and religious, that the nourishment of the whole creation is produced through the Sun, and belongs to Him Who is the Soul of the Sun and of all the Universe. The king, reassuming the active priestly functions of the Pharaohs of old, would himself stretch out the kheper baton over the offerings and consecrate them. Then he would throw handfuls of incense into the fire, and as the coils of scented smoke slowly went up

into the sky in praise of Him in Whose light the flame of the sacrifice seemed pale, he would intone one of the hymns he had composed to the glory of the Sun — a different one according to the season, the day, and the hour. Musicians, male and female, among whom we know from a picture¹ that there was a choir of eight blind men, played upon their instruments and sang during the daily services. There were dancers, also, who through a harmony of symbolical postures and movements suggested the daily journey of the Sun, the death of the earth at His departure, the resurrection of all flesh at His dawning again. They danced especially on festive days, corresponding to notable positions of the Sun in His apparent course from constellation to constellation. The queen and princesses took part in every solemnity, the little girls occasionally rattling the sistrum, as we see them do in the funeral paintings of the time.

* * *

Besides his administrative duties; besides the State functions, and occasionally the State banquets over which he presided — like that one given in honour of Queen Tiy's visit to the new City, and represented upon the walls of the tomb of Huya — besides even the daily worship he offered publicly at the altar of the Sun, pictorial evidence reveals to us different episodes of Akhnaton's private life which lead us to infer, about him and his creed, more than one could expect at first sight.

In nearly every painting he is portrayed with his consort and often (as in the feasting scene just mentioned) with one or more of his six (or seven) children. And the attitudes in which he has allowed the artists to represent him, doubtless in a spirit of absolute fidelity to living life, are most eloquent in their naturalness.

We have already recalled the lovely painted relief of the Berlin museum in which the young Pharaoh is seen smelling

¹ In the tomb of Merira, the high-priest of Aton. Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 143.

a bunch of flowers that Nefertiti gracefully holds out to him with a smile. On the walls of the tomb of Huya he is pictured seated, admiring the performances of several pretty naked dancing-girls, while the queen, standing by his side, refills with wine his golden cup. In the tombs of Mahu and Aahmose he is painted in his chariot, with Nefertiti next to him, and actually kissing her while he drives. Princess Meritaton, his eldest daughter, stands in one of those pictures in front of her parents, and plays with the horses' tails while the king and queen look lovingly at each other, their lips ready to unite. Even in scenes depicting State solemnities, such as the reception of the tribute of the empire — scenes in which, one might think, there was little place for intimacy — Akhnaton and Nefertiti are represented side by side, hand in hand, and with their arms around each other's waist. And, contrarily to the age-old custom of Egyptian artists, the queen is nearly always pictured on the same scale as her husband.

One finds hardly less evidence of their great love in the written documents than in the paintings. Whatever be the inscription in which she is referred to, the queen is seldom named without some endearing epithet. She is “the mistress of the king's happiness”; the “Lady of grace”; “fair of countenance”; “endowed with favours”; “she at the hearing of whose voice the Pharaoh rejoices.” And one of the most current forms of oath used by the king on solemn occasions — the oath engraved upon the boundary-stones of the new City, and quoted in the beginning of this chapter — is: “As my heart is happy in the queen and her children . . .”

Many will say that expressions of love found in official documents are not always to be taken literally. But we believe that they should be taken so here, for they were written at the command of one who, all through his career, lived up to his ideal of integral truth with unfailing consistency. He, one of whose first actions as a king was to have the tomb of his father reopened and the name of Amon erased from therein, because he saw in it the symbol of a false religion; he, who ended by losing an empire rather than depart from his uncompromising sincerity of purpose, can-

not be expected, in any case, to make a show of feelings which he did not have.

One has, therefore, to accept without reservation the conclusion that forces itself upon one's mind through both pictorial and written evidence — namely, that Akhnaton loved his consort ardently.

As we have said before, he had not chosen her, but had been wedded to her when about ten years old or less. The marriage was, no doubt, the work of Queen Tiy; and if Nefertiti was, as Sir Flinders Petrie maintains, the daughter of Dushratta, king of Mitanni, it was perhaps chiefly prompted by political motives. But as it often happens in the case of child-marriages, the little prince and little princess soon grew tenderly attached to each other and, as years passed, they unconsciously stepped from affection to love. In the inscriptions on the boundary-stones of Akhetaton, which were erected between the official foundation of the City and the time the king and court came to settle in it — between the sixth year and the eighth year of the reign — one, and sometimes two of Akhnaton's daughters — Meritaton and Makitaton — are mentioned. The third one, Ankhsenpaton, was born, according to Weigall, just before the departure of her parents from Thebes. Three others at least — Neferuaton, Neferura, and Setepenra — (and perhaps four, if Weigall and other authors are right) were born in the new capital. All six (or all seven) were Nefertiti's children. And there is no allusion of any sort to other children, or to "secondary wives," in the existing documents concerning the royal family; so that, as far as history knows, Akhnaton, in contrast with most kings of antiquity, and of his own line, seems to have been contented all his life with the love of one woman, given to him to be his chief wife while still a child.

Not that he had, apparently, any prejudice against the customs of his times regarding marriage, still less against polygamy as a human fact. And it would be absurd to attribute to him the mentality of a modern European bourgeois on this much-debated subject of private morality. In this matter, as in many others, he seems to have been well in advance of our times — not to speak of more prudish ages.

And if he possessed but one wife, as repeated evidence suggests, this was not because he had any moral objection to polygamy, but simply because he loved that one woman with deep, complete, vital love.

If we judge him through the pictures his artists have left of him, Akhnaton was far from being one of those austere thinkers who shun pleasure as an obstacle to the development of the spirit or even as a meaningless waste of time and energy. He seems, on the contrary, to have believed in the value of life in its plenitude, and the paintings that represent him feasting, drinking, listening to sweet music, caressing his wife, or playing with his children, apart from their merit as faithful renderings of everyday realities, had possibly a definite didactic significance. In practically every one of them the lofty symbol of the Religion of the Disk — the Sun with downward rays ending in hands — radiates over the scene depicted, so as to recall the presence of the One invisible Reality in the very midst of it, and to emphasise the beauty, the seriousness, nay, the sacredness of all manifestations of life when experienced as they should be, in earnestness and in innocence, and considered with their proper meaning. Whether they stand together in adoration before His altar, or lie in each other's arms, the Sun embraces the young king and queen in His fiery emanation; His rays are upon them, holding the symbol ankh — life — to their lips. For life is prayer. One who puts all his being in what he feels or does — as he who “lived in truth” surely did — already grasps, through the joyful awareness of his body to beautiful, deep sensations, a super-sensuous, all-pervading secret order, source of beauty, which he may not be in a position to define, but which gives its meaning to the play of the nerves. And he is able above all to acquire, through the glorious exaltation of his senses in love, a positive, though inexpressible knowledge of the eternal rhythm of Life — to touch the core of Reality.

In allowing a few scenes of his private life to be thus exhibited to the eyes of his followers — and of posterity — was it Akhnaton's deliberate intention to teach us that pleasure, when enjoyed in religious earnestness, transcends itself in a

revelation of eternal truth? We shall never know. But one thing can be said for certain, and this is that the instance of that perfect man, on one hand so aware of his oneness with the Essence of all things, on the other so beautifully human in his refined *joie de vivre*, is itself a teaching, a whole philosophy. And in him one can see an expounder of precisely that wisdom which our world of to-day, tired of obsolete lies, is striving to realise, but cannot; a man who lived to the full the life of the body and of the spirit, seriously, innocently, in harmony with the universal Principle of light, joy, and fecundity which he worshipped in the Sun. Whether we imagine him burning incense to the majesty of the rising Orb, or listening to the love-songs of the day in midst of merriment and enjoying them with the detachment of an artist; whether we think of him entertaining his followers of the marvellous unity of light and heat, thirty-three hundred years before modern science, or abandoning himself to the thrill of human tenderness in a kiss of his loving young queen, the same beauty radiates from his person.

And it is that beauty which, before all, attracts us to him, and, through him, to the Religion of the Disk, that glorious projection of himself in union with the Cosmos.

* * *

As we have just seen, something of Akhnaton's intimate life, perhaps also something of his general philosophy, can be inferred from the pictures that have survived the ruin of his lovely City. Of his inner life, of his thoughts and feelings during those moments of blessed solitude that doubtless followed, with him as with all spiritual geniuses, hours of intense activity, there are no records whatsoever. There cannot be. And yet one feels that nothing would bring one, so as to say, in closer contact with him, than a glance at that particular aspect of his unwritten history.

It is natural to believe that the two hymns that have come down to us — and probably many more, which are lost — were composed by Akhnaton during the hours he was alone. It is therefore, it seems, in the general tone of those poems,

as well as in the evocation of the atmosphere in which they were conceived, that one can the best hope to form an idea of the king's mind when away from the crowd of his courtiers and even from the presence of his wife and children — when free from the duties of monarchy, from the obligations of his mission, from the pleasures of love and family life.

The hymns in their details will be discussed later on as the main basis of our knowledge of the Religion of the Disk. But we can already say here, in anticipation of a more complete study of them, that the dominant idea expressed in those songs is that of the beauty of the whole scheme of things as ordained by the Sun — by Him who causes the radiant days to follow the nights full of stars and the seasons to succeed each other. They also contain the belief in an all-pervading, unfailing Love, mysteriously inseparable from the Energy within the Sun-rays; of a Love that gives each speck of life — be it the germ in the bird's egg or the embryo asleep in the depth of a woman's womb — a start on the golden road to full development in health and happiness. They contain the bold certitude of the impartiality of that immanent love, poured out with light and heat, through the life-giving Disk, to all tribes, all nations, all races, all living species, indiscriminately; the assertion of the unity of life and of the brotherhood of all creatures as a consequence of the universal fatherhood of the Sun.

But remarkably enough for one who would consider those hymns as expressing true facts of nature and nothing more, there is, in them, not the slightest allusion to the dark side of the picture of the world; not a hint at the millions of cases in which the all-pervading love of the Father seems to fail; in which the innocent speck of life — young insect, bird, beast, or baby — is mercilessly crushed before it even had time to know the beauty of light, or grows up only to drag a miserable existence; not a single word about those cries of distress which, to any sensitive and thoughtful person, so often seem to interrupt — for what purpose, no man knows — the harmony of the universal chorus.

Nobody, with even a superficial knowledge of his life, can suppose in Akhnaton less sensitiveness to suffering, less love

for creatures or less intelligence than in the average man. And the only way to explain, therefore, this total omission of all idea of evil from the picture of the Universe given in the hymns (at least in the two which we know) is to admit that they were composed during special moments of the king's experience; during moments when the very sight of the world with its incoherent mixture of joy and pain, life and death — of the world at our scale — was lost to him in a state of bliss in which he grasped nothing but the essence of things, retaining of their contradictory appearances those alone that convey the idea of joy and order.

In other words, those poems do express true facts of nature, but at the same time they reveal a plane of consciousness which is not the ordinary plane. They suggest a picture of the world as perceived by one who has transcended the ordinary scale of vision; by one who has reached the stage where he actually feels the inherent goodness and beauty of the whole play of existence behind its transient failures, suffering and death — and ugliness; by one who, above the apparent disorder of phenomenal experience, greets the majesty of everlasting laws, expressions of harmony, glimpses of a Reality which is perfect.

Left to himself in the calm of his sumptuous apartments or in the fresh solitude of his gardens, it seems, if our inference be right, that Akhnaton easily raised his soul to that stage of consciousness characterised as bliss in the absence of a more enlightening description of it. Did he reach it systematically, as a result of any physical and mental discipline, or simply as a natural development of his extraordinary sensitiveness, or as the outcome both of a powerful inborn tendency and of wilful application? It is very difficult to say; and it matters little. What is important is that, in all probability, he was familiar with the genuine experience of super-consciousness. It was to that experience that he doubtless owed his astounding insight into scientific truths which could only be proved by the combined intellectual labour of thousands of men, spread over centuries. It seems also certain that, whatever might have been the Pharaoh's deliberate efforts and the inner discipline he underwent, if any, he must have been

from the start gifted with powers of intuition out of proportion to those of the ordinary man of science, not to speak of the ordinary layman, of any age.

He would have developed those powers anyhow. And, with his uncompromising logic as a complement to insight and inspiration; with the absolute sincerity of his nature and the charm of his person, he would still have been, even in a totally different social status, one of the few great men to whom divine honours can be rendered without sacrilege. As things stand, far from having to rise to perfection in spite of his material surroundings, he used a part of the inexhaustible wealth at his command to create for himself, in Akhetaton, the ideal abode in which he could pass without effort from life in truth and beauty to the contemplation of supreme Beauty and supreme Truth. Of his City in general, and more especially of his palace with its elegantly decorated chambers, comfortable, quiet and spotlessly clean, in which every detail of architecture, every item of furniture, every minute object was a work of art; with its terraces overlooking rich palm-groves and flower-beds and avenues bordered with villas, and the great temple of the Sun nearby, and the bluish line of the distant hills beyond the sandy desert; of his palace, we say, and of the shady pavilions near the lakes in the “Precincts of Aton,” and of the “Precincts of Aton” themselves — of all the places in which Akhnaton would choose in turn to spend his moments of solitude, one could repeat the words used by the French poet to depict an imaginary land of dream and escape:

“Là, tout est ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme et volupté. . . .”¹

Clad in fine immaculate linen in the midst of those mythical splendours that we can to-day but faintly recall, the inspired young Pharaoh, half-reclining upon his ivory couch, let his mind drift its natural way. Through a restful perspective of well-shaped pillars, his eyes gazed at a patch of blue sky. Subtle perfumes were floating in the air; the breeze brought him the fragrant breath of flowers; perhaps

¹ Beaudelaire: *L'Invitation au Voyage* (Fleurs du Mal).

the subdued harmony of a distant harp reached him now and then. There was peace all around him — peace in keeping with the silence of his heart and congenial to meditation. The tranquil beauty which his eyes met wherever they looked helped him to forget every possible disturbing thought of imperfection; to detach himself from those appearances which stand in the way of the soul in quest of ultimate truth.

Thus was, as far as we can hope to picture it, the life of the king in Akhetaton, the City of God, built by him to be an island of peace in this world of strife; to be the model, on a small scale, of what he would have desired the world to become under the beneficent influence of his Teaching of truth. We have seen also something of the life of the people there. It was surely not perfect, and Akhnaton knew himself that his new capital, in spite of all his efforts, did not come up to the full expectation of his dream. But it was his dream realised to the extent it could be during the short span of his career, among average men, without the pressure of violent proselytism, without, by the way, any form of creedal proselytism at all among the commoners. It was a beautiful creation, in spite of all unavoidable shortcomings. May, one of those men whom the Pharaoh had promoted to a high position on account of his faithfulness, describes it as follows in an inscription upon the walls of the tomb prepared for him in the cliffs of the desert:

“Akhetaton, great in loveliness, mistress of pleasant ceremonies, rich in possessions, with the offerings of Ra in her midst. . . . At the sight of her beauty one rejoices. She is lovely. To see her is like a glimpse of heaven. . . . When Aton rises in her midst, He fills her with His rays, embracing in His light His beloved Son, son of Eternity, who came forth from His substance and who offers the earth to Him Who placed him upon his throne, causing the earth to belong to Him Who made it. . . .”¹

¹ Inscription in the tomb of May (Rock Tomb 14 at Tell-el-Amarna). See Breasted’s *Ancient Records of Egypt* (Edit. 1906), Vol. II, p. 412; also Arthur Weigall’s *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 176.

CHAPTER V

THE WAY OF REASON

As remarks Sir Wallis Budge,¹ it is true that all we know for certain about Akhnaton's Teaching is found only in two hymns, one short and one long, the former copied several times, partly or in whole, in different courtier's tombs at Tell-el-Amarna, the latter found written only once on the walls of the tomb of Ay, "fan-bearer on the right side of the King, and Master of the King's House." These two songs in praise of the Sun are all that is left of a probably much more considerable religious literature, the rest having entirely perished in the systematic ruin of Akhetaton and the persecution of the Religion of the Disk under Tutankhamen and especially under Horemheb.

But we believe that, if one considers the hymns closely, and in the light of all that the reliefs, paintings and inscriptions tell us, directly or indirectly, about the king's personality and about his life, then one will find that they imply far more than what Budge appears to admit. One will find that the few enthusiastic admirers of the Religion of the Disk, whom the learned but somewhat prejudiced writer criticises so bitterly, have at least as sound reasons to revere Akhnaton's memory as he himself can have to minimise the young Pharaoh's importance in the history of thought.

Of the two known hymns, the shorter one is universally recognised as having been composed by the king himself. The long one is regarded as the king's work by all authors² except Sir Wallis Budge, who attributes it to Ay (or Ai), the courtier in whose tomb it was discovered. But the authorship of the

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), Preface, p. xv.

² Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 214. Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 136. H. R. Hall: *Ancient History of the Near East* (Ninth Edit. 1936), pp. 306-307.

song seems unmistakable from the text which precedes and explains it. This text, in Budge's own translation, runs as follows:

“A Hymn in praise of Her-aakhuti, the living one, exalted in the Eastern horizon in his name Shu who is in the Aten, who liveth for ever and ever, the living and great Aton, he who is in the Set-Festival, the Lord of the Circle, the Lord of the Disk, the Lord of heaven, the Lord of earth, the Lord of the House of Aten in Akhut-Aten, (of) the King of the South and the North, who liveth in Truth, Lord of the Two Lands (*i.e.*, Egypt), Nefer-kheperu-ra Ua-en-ra, the son of Ra, who liveth in Truth, Lord of Crowns, Aakhun-Aten, great in the period of his life, (and of) the great royal woman (or wife) whom he loveth, Lady of the Two Lands, Nefer-neferu-Aten, Nefertiti, who liveth in health and youth for ever and ever.”¹

In all this prelude there is no mention of Ay and no suggestion of any possible author save “the King of the South and the North, who liveth in Truth, etc. . . .” The next words are: “he saith,” and then comes the hymn proper: “Beautiful is Thy rising in the horizon of heaven, O Aten, etc. . . .” If the hymn be “(of) the king,” as stated in the forward of the text, and if there be no mention of any other author, there is, we believe, no reason to suppose, as Budge does, that “He,” in the expression “He saith,” designates the courtier Ay and not Akhnaton himself.

The first thing that strikes a modern mind in those very ancient songs is the idea, expressed in them, that the Sun is the ultimate origin to which can be traced all the particular features of our earth, be they meteorological, biological, geographical, or ethnical. To look upon our parent star as the Father of all life was not a new thing. Men had done so from the beginning of the world, and this was no doubt the conception at the root of that most ancient and, in former days, most widespread of all religions: Sun-worship. But here, especially in the long hymn, there is something more. Not only is the Sun hailed as the Source of all life — the indispensable agent of fertility and growth through His heat and light — but it is He who determines the succession of the

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism and Egyptian Monotheism (Edit. 1923), pp. 122-123.

seasons; He who causes both the rain to fall in the countries where it rains, and the Nile to overflow Egypt with its life-giving waters; He who is at the back of all differences of climate upon the globe, and subsequently, who is responsible for all differences of colour and features, of speech and of diet, among men of various countries. We read in the longer hymn¹:

“Thou settest every person in his place. Thou providest their daily food, every man having the portion allotted to him, (thou) dost compute the duration of his life. Their tongues are different in speech, their characteristics (or forms) and likewise their skins (in colour), giving distinguishing marks to the dwellers in foreign lands. Thou makest Hapi (the Nile) in the Tuat (Underworld), Thou bringest it when Thou wishest to make mortals to live, inasmuch as Thou hast made them for Thyself, their Lord who dost support them to the uttermost, O Thou Lord of every land, Thou shinest upon them, O Aten of the day, Thou great one of majesty. Thou makest the life of all remote lands. Thou settest a Nile in heaven which cometh down to them. It maketh a flood on the mountains, like the great green sea, it maketh to be watered their fields in their villages. How beneficent are Thy plans, O Lord of Eternity! A Nile in heaven art Thou for the dwellers in the foreign lands (or deserts) and for all the beasts of the desert that go upon their feet (or legs). Hapi (the Nile) cometh from the Tuat for the land of Egypt. Thy beams nourish every field; Thou risest (and) they live, they germinate for Thee. Thou makest the seasons to develop everything that Thou hast made. . . .”

We must realise how novel were, in the fourteenth century B.C., certain conceptions which seem commonplace to us; for instance, that of the identical origin of rain and rivers, both finally the product of the condensation of water that has been first evaporated through the action of the Sun; or the idea that the Nile, however precious it be to the Egyptians whom it feeds, is no more “divine” than other great rivers, and that far from having its origin in heaven, as the ancient dwellers in its Valley believed, it comes “from underground,” like the humblest streamlet, its series of mighty cataracts being not the last degrees of a gigantic celestial staircase, but simply breaks in level of the river’s course from its distant mountainous birthplace.

¹ Translation of Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), pp. 130-132.

We must not forget that many of the beliefs which we now regard as “mythology” and treat with the sympathetic smile of grown-up folk for a child’s belief in Father Christmas, were once held, by the people who shared them, as seriously as other articles of faith — no less and sometimes more absurd, but not yet obsolete — are held, even to-day, by our contemporaries. To proclaim, in Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt, that the Nile was a river like all rivers, was to issue a statement about as revolutionary (and shocking) as that of a man who, in medieval Europe, would have openly denied the Christian dogma of the Incarnation. But Akhnaton, like all sincere rationalists, cared little what reactions his beliefs or disbeliefs could start in other people, once he was himself sure that he was in possession of a tangible truth.

We cannot also fail to be impressed by that other idea, so clearly put forward in the passage we quoted, that the Sun, apart from being the condition and cause of life in general, is the ultimate regulator of each individual life — “setting every one in his place” — and also the differentiator of races and of their characteristics, features, complexion, language, etc., which are finally at the basis of all national feelings among men; in other words, that He is the maker of our globe’s history no less than of its geography.

The concept of nation, being closely entangled with a quantity of immediate human interests, is one of those which has been taking the longest time to be viewed objectively. In the days of the apogee of Egypt with which we are here concerned, a nation was that group of people who worshipped the same national gods, and especially who went to battle in the name of the same war-gods. The conception of a “God of all lands” in whose light all those local deities were but magnified men and women, if they were anything at all, was novel enough. The scientific idea that all differences among groups of men were the product of man’s physical environment — strictly geographical, and also economical — and that the physical environment was finally conditioned by the climate, that is to say, by the Sun, was amazingly in advance of Akhnaton’s times, and of many more recent times with which the general reader is more familiar. Far from merely

amounting to the exaltation of any particular sun-god, even of any sun-god “of all lands” above the traditional gods to whom each nation used to bow down, it was the plain, rational assertion that our parent star, origin and regulator of all life on this earth, is ultimately responsible for man’s collective creations — the national gods — as well as for man’s division into racial and linguistic groups; that, in one word, as a brilliant twentieth-century author¹ has put it, man is, before all, “a solar product” just as the other inhabitants of the same planet.

* * *

We have just referred to the visible Sun, the flaming Disk in the sky — Aton in the literal sense. And had Akhnaton worshipped nothing more than it, still his religion, with its most scientific view of the earth and of man purely as “solar products” would be something far in advance of most ancient and modern religions based upon dogmatic assumptions that bear little or no relation to elementary physical facts. But there is more in it.

As we have already seen in the preceding chapters, one of the names of the Sun the most widely used by Akhnaton in the inscriptions is “Ra-Horakhti of the Two Horizons, rejoicing in His Horizon, in His name ‘Shu-which-is-in-the-Disk,’” or “the living Horus of the Two Horizons, rejoicing in His Horizon in His name ‘Shu-which-is-in-the-Disk’” — the name under which both the hymns that have come down to us are addressed to Him.

“Shu,” as an ordinary noun, we must translate by “heat” or “heat and light,” for the word has these meanings.² In the Pyramid Texts, Shu is the name of a god symbolising the heat radiating from the body of Tem, or Tem-Ra, the creator of the solar Disk, in the indivisible trinity Tem-Shu-Tefnut — father, son and daughter; the Creator of the Sun-disk, the Heat and the Moisture; the Principle of fertility, and its indispensable agents. Whatever be therefore the interpretation

¹ Norman Douglas: *How about Europe?* (Edit. 1930), p. 173.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 80.

we give to the word, whether we take it as an ordinary noun or as a proper noun, we have to admit that “the king deified the heat of the Sun” — or the “heat and light,” as Sir Wallis Budge himself says — “and worshipped it as the one eternal, creative, fructifying and life-sustaining force.”¹

This permits us to assert with Sir Flinders Petrie that in the Religion of the Disk the object of worship was “the Radiant Energy of the Sun,”² of which heat and light are aspects.

A scarab of Akhnaton dating from the time when he had not yet changed his name, and found at Sadenga, in the Sudan, after stating his royal titles, reads: “Long live the Beautiful God, the great One of roarings (thunders?) . . . in the great and holy name of . . . Dweller in the Set-Festival like Ta-Thunen, the Lord of . . . the Aten (Disk) in heaven, stablished of face, gracious (or pleasant) in Anu (On).”³ The mention of Ta-Thunen, one of the deities that were to be proscribed by him at a later period is not more surprising than that of Horus, Wepwat, and other gods on the blocks of stone that belonged to the first temple of Aton in Thebes. And the other titles in the prayer are much the same as those found in the longer hymn to Aton: “Dweller in the (Disk), the Lord of Heaven . . .” The title “gracious in Anu” (or On, the sacred solar City of old times) confirms our conviction that the God to whom this prayer is addressed is none but the self-same Aton whom the king already worshipped before he rejected the name of Amenhotep. If this be so, the words “great One of roarings” are most interesting. Given the little we know of the scientific conception of Aton, they would point out, it seems, not to the assimilation of Akhnaton’s God to any “indigenous Sudani Thundergod,”⁴ as Budge believes, but to the equivalence of the

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 80.

² Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 214.

³ Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 105.

⁴ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 106.

“heat and light” — Shu — within the Disk, to sound in general and thunder in particular, and perhaps also to that unknown form of energy released every time there is thunder, to that force that the king could not name but of which he certainly felt the existence — electricity. They would imply, that is to say, in his mind, the equivalence of all forms of energy.

On the other hand, it is true to say that “the old Heliopolitan traditions made Tem-Ra, or Khepera, the creator of Aten (the Disk), but this view Amenhotep the Fourth rejected, and he asserted that the Disk was self-created and self-subsistent.”¹ This statement is all the more significant because it comes from a scholar who, far from being one of Akhnaton’s admirers, has never lost an opportunity to minimise the importance of his Teaching. Here, the enormous gap between the Religion of the Disk and the old Heliopolitan cult, its historic ancestor, is emphasised without the learned author seeming to suspect what a homage he is paying, indirectly, to the young Pharaoh’s genius. For if the object of the latter’s adoration were purely “the heat and light,” or energy within the Disk, then one fails to understand why he rejected the view of the priests of On about a god separate from the Disk and creator of it — a god of whom Shu (the heat and light) is an emanation, in the same manner as Shu’s female counterpart, Tefnut, the goddess of Moisture. And if, on the contrary, the object of his worship were the material Disk itself and nothing more, then why should he have called it “Shu-which-is-in-the-Disk”? Moreover, why should he say in the short hymn: “At Thy rising, all hands are lifted in adoration of Thy Ka”? And, again, in the long hymn, speaking this time of the worship of the Sun, not by men, but by birds: “The feathered fowl fly about over the marshes, praising Thy Ka with their wings”? In the case of a living being its “Ka” designates its double, or soul; that invisible element of it which survives death; its subtle essence as opposed to its coarser visible body. The “Ka” of the Sun would therefore be the Sun’s soul, so

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 80.

as to say; the subtle principle which is the essence of the Sun, and which would survive the material Disk, were it one day to decay and pass away — the eternal Sun, as opposed to the visible Sun.

We believe that the best way to account for this apparent ambiguity is to admit that Akhnaton worshipped the Radiant Energy of the Sun as the Principle of all existence on earth, but deliberately brushed aside the Heliopolitan distinction between the god, maker of the solar Disk, and the solar Disk itself, the distinction between creative energy and created matter. To him — and in this we cannot but admire one of the traits of his far-seeing genius — there was no such distinction. To him the Disk was self-created and self-sustaining, because it was, like all matter that falls under our senses, but a visible manifestation of Something more subtle, invisible, intangible, everlasting — its “Ka” or essence. And Shu, the heat and light, the energy of the Sun, was not the emanation from the body of a god different from it, but the manifestation of that One Thing which the visible flaming Disk was another manifestation. It was the Disk itself, and the Disk was it. Visible Matter was not the product of Energy, distinct from it, nor Energy the product of Matter, distinct from it; nor were any particular forms of Energy, such as heat and light, the products of any creative power distinct from them by nature. But, as was to be suggested thirty-three hundred years later by the inquiries of the modern scientists into the structure of the atom, Matter and Energy were inseparable, and both everlasting; they were one. To maintain the distinctions put forward in olden days by the priests of the Sun in On — the distinction between the creator of the Disk and the Disk itself, and also between both these and the Heat and Light within the Disk — was to deny, or at least to hide, the secret identity of the visible and invisible Sun, of the visible and invisible world, of Energy and Matter.

That identity, Akhnaton had become aware of through some mysterious inner experience of which history has not preserved any description, and by which he transcended the human to reach the cosmic scale of vision. It is probable that

he could not explain it, as the scientists of our age do, in terms of definite patterns of energy. But he knew it, none the less, to be the objective truth. And, anticipating in a tremendous intuition the rational conclusions of modern research, he based his religion upon the three ideas that summarise them, namely:

(1) The essential equivalence of all forms of energy, including that yet to-day unanalysed (and perhaps unanalysable) form which is life;

(2) The essential identity of matter and energy, each of the two being but the subtler or the coarser aspect of the other;

(3) The indestructible existence, without beginning, without end, of that One unknown Thing, which is Matter to the coarser and Energy to the finer senses.

* * *

The “Ka” of the Sun, mentioned in the hymns, must indeed be taken to mean the soul or essence of our parent star. And it seems certain that the immediate object to which the king’s followers were invited to offer their praise was not the material Disk alone, as some critics have supposed, nor the “Ka” of the Disk regarded as distinct from it, but the Disk with its “Ka,” regarded as one; the Sun, body and soul, visible and invisible, matter and energy; the dazzling Orb itself being, as we have just remarked, but what our senses can perceive, at our ordinary scale of vision, of the enormous store of Radiant Energy that gave birth to our planet and all it contains, and continues to keep it alive.

In the hymns, it is repeatedly stated that Aton is “one” and “alone.” It is said, for instance, in the short hymn, “Thou Thyself art alone, but there are millions of powers of life in Thee to make them (Thy creatures) live,”¹ and again in the other hymn, “O Thou One God, like unto Whom there is no other, Thou didst create the earth according to Thy heart (or will), Thou alone existing.”²

¹ Translation of Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 121.

² Translation of Sir Wallis Budge: *Ibid*, p. 129.

It is true that the worshippers of every great god in Egypt had from time immemorial declared that their god was “one”¹ even while they themselves admitted the existence of different gods. We find the expression “one” and “alone” in older anonymous hymns to Amon, to Ra, to Tem, and other deities, long before Akhnaton. And it is also true that “it was obvious that Aten, the solar Disk, was one alone and without counterpart or equal.”¹ But if we see, as it seems we should, in Akhnaton’s identification of the solar Disk with its “Ka” or essence the sign of his belief in the oneness of invisible Energy and visible Matter, then the words “one” and “alone,” when used by him, become more than casual utterances. They express the only knowable attribute of that supreme entity, Substance and Power at the same time, which is at the back of all existence; they qualify the essence of all suns — the universal “Ka” — not only the essence of our Sun. For these are the same. And whether Akhnaton personally knew or not of the existence of other suns besides the one that rules the life of our earth, it makes little difference. His religion bears from the start the character of the broadest and most permanent scientific truth, embracing, along with the reality of our solar system, that of all existing systems; nay, of all possible systems.

For we know to-day that the self-same earthly varieties of what we call matter go to compose the visible bodies of all distant worlds in space. We know that the heat and light that our Sun sends us through His beams, the “Shu-within-the-Disk” that Akhnaton adored, is the self-same Radiant Energy that burns and shines in the remotest nebulae. For us, born after the invention of the telescope and of the spectroscope, the ritual worship of our Sun, coupled with the modern belief in the essential identity of Matter and Energy, is a symbolical homage. Through Him, the visible Disk, Father and Mother of the Earth and our sister planets, our adoration goes to that ultimate Unknown, Father and Mother of all the worlds that spin round and round their

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism (Edit. 1923), p. 79.

respective suns, in fathomless infinity; Father and Mother of all the suns themselves that go their way, bound by inflexible inner laws, at countless light-years from one another; to that ultimate Unknown that contains movement, and heat and light, and finally life and consciousness within it: Cosmic Energy.

To Sir Wallis Budge and to many others it may seem “inconceivable” to attribute to a man born centuries before the invention of the telescope, anything approaching our grandiose vision of millions of suns and planets evolving through the unlimited abyss of interstellar void, in a divine dance without beginning or end. But who can tell how far man’s insight can take him, even without the precise intellectual knowledge of its objects? Who can tell if Akhnaton, gazing at the glory of his clear night sky full of stars, did not conceive the idea that each of those distant lights might well be a Sun, like ours, maker of worlds over which he daily rises and sets? And who can tell how far in Egypt astronomy had actually reached, even without the help of the telescope? Much of it — like much of all sciences in antiquity — was secret and has been lost. We therefore cannot assert that, in deifying the Radiant Energy of the Sun and the Disk itself, the inspired youth did not deliberately put forward the worship of that indefinable, unknown and perhaps unknowable Reality that modern science meets both in the atom and in the systems of starry space.

But as we have already said, whatever may have been the limitations imposed upon his knowledge of the physical universe by the technical conditions of scientific investigation in his time, it remains true that the cult which he evolved is that of the only Thing which modern science can hail as the ultimate Reality — as God, if science is ever able to speak of a God. It matters little whether he could or could not appreciate his own creation from the point of view of a modern scientist, even from that of a layman of to-day with a summary knowledge of the conclusions of science. And if, with Budge and others, one suggests that this was impossible, then all one can say is that the relation of his religion to the great facts of physical existence, discovered millenniums after

him, is all the more admirable, and his genius all the more staggering.

* * *

The only materials on which we can base our knowledge of the Religion of the Disk are too scanty for us to be able to say how far its Founder was aware of the structure of the physical universe as we have learnt to conceive it. It is interesting, however, to consider how exactly certain of Akhnaton's main utterances tally with those conclusions of modern thought now looked upon as definite scientific acquisitions.

One of the points on which he insists the most, in both of the hymns which have survived, is the all-importance of the beams of the Sun. Not only does he say: "Thou sendest forth Thy beams and every land is in festival,"¹ but also: "Breath of life is to see Thy beams,"² and also: "Thy beams envelop (*i.e.*, penetrate) everywhere, all the lands which Thou hast made" . . . "Thou art afar off, but Thy beams are upon the earth"³; and again: "The fishes in the river swim up to greet Thee; Thy beams are within the depth of the great sea. . . ."⁴ The rays of the Sun play an equally prominent part in the symbol of Akhnaton's religion: the Disk with downward beams ending in hands which hold the looped-cross ankh, sign of life. As we have seen, no other image but that one was allowed in the temples, and that was not intended to portray the object of worship (which was beyond any representation whatsoever), but to remind the worshippers of the main truth concerning it — namely, that the Essence of the Sun — the "heat and light" within the Disk — is not confined to the Disk itself, but is present and active, and beneficent (life-giving) wherever the rays of the Sun reach. The

¹ Short Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 119.

² Short Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 121.

³ Long Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 124.

⁴ Long Hymn, Translation of Griffith, quoted by Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 216.

symbol is found “in every sculpture,” a fact that marks the stress that the king put upon it. And it is “an utterly new type in Egypt, distinct from all previous sculptures.”¹

Here, and more so perhaps in the hymns, we find indeed, simply and forcibly expressed, the assertion that the Sun-rays are the Sun’s energy, everywhere present, everywhere active, and that it is through them that He manifests Himself — a truth that modern science has recognised and of which modern therapy is trying more and more to make a practical use. And it is, no doubt, in considering the Sun-rays, agents both of heat and light, that Akhnaton grasped intuitively the great scientific truth which gives the whole structure of his Teaching a solid foundation of intellectual certitude so rarely found in more popular religions — namely, that he realised the equivalence of heat and light and of all forms of energy. Rightly has Sir Flinders Petrie written in 1899: “No one — Sun-worshipper or philosopher — seems to have realised until within this century, the truth which was the basis of Akhnaton’s worship, that the rays of the Sun are the means of the Sun’s action, the source of all life, power and force in the universe. The abstraction of regarding the radiant energy as all-important was quite disregarded until recent views of the conservation of force, of heat as a mode of motion, and the identity of heat, light and electricity have made us familiar with the scientific conception which was the characteristic feature of Akhnaton’s new worship.”²

Another assertion within the hymns which tallies amazingly with the modern conception of the ultimate reality, is the one previously noted: “Thou Thyself art alone, but there are millions of powers of life in Thee, to make Thy creatures live.” It is the assertion:

1st, that there is finally no other reality but the One. (Thou art alone.)

2nd, that the One contains within It infinite possibilities of life and the tendency to bring them forth into actual existence. That is the only meaning we can ascribe to

¹ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 214.

² *Ibid.*

the words “millions of powers of life” or “millions of vitalities in Thee.” 3rd, that, consequently, “creation” is not the miraculous act through which an agent, distinct by nature from the created things, causes them to spring out of nothingness, but the gradual manifestation into actual existence of the different possibilities, latent within the One; in other words, that the One supreme reality is immanent in all things, and that it has been and is for ever producing all the endless variety of the universe out of Itself.

If we regard that One object of worship — that essence of the Sun, which is the essence of the solar system — as the same mysterious entity that modern science calls Energy and places at the root of all existence, material or immaterial, then what we have said of it and of the meaning of creation becomes clear. That idea of the infinity of beings as transient products of one fundamental agent, Power and Substance, Essence of life as well as of so-called inanimate existence; that conception of a world in which, strictly speaking, there is no place for pure passivity, but where the inanimate is just life, so as to say, at the lowest stage, is indeed the one suggested by the boldest generalisation of our times. We may call it metaphysical, in a way. But it is no airy metaphysics; no outcome of pure fancy; no dialectical invention. It fits in with the accumulated experience of men who have learnt to measure the infinitely small and the infinitely great, and to see the universe at different scales of vision. It should perhaps as yet be called an hypothesis rather than a fact. But it is the hypothesis that explains the facts which we know: it is the philosophical projection of the science of our times. And one can only marvel at the intuition of the adolescent king who grasped it thirty-three hundred years ago.

* * *

There is still more to be said. In the longer hymn, Akhnaton addresses the following words to his God: “Thou art in my heart; There is none who knoweth Thee excepting Thy Son, Nefer-kheperu-ra Ua-en-ra. Thou hast made him

wise to understand Thy plans and Thy power.”¹ Which means that, to him, the impersonal Essence of the Sun, Radiant Energy, which he adores as the One uncreated, everlasting, ever-active Principle of existence in general, is the self-same reality that he discovers at the root of his consciousness — the Essence of his own soul. And he adds to this utterance a still bolder and stranger one. Nobody, says he, knows that One Reality save he himself, “the Son of the Sun who came forth from His substance,” “like unto Him without ceasing,” as he no less boldly styles himself in other passages of the same hymn and of the shorter one.

The two statements are connected. The first, in spite of appearances, implies the second. The second, detached from the first, loses its real meaning.

The words “Thou art in my heart” can mean simply “I love Thee.” And were they addressed to a personal god they could hardly mean anything more. They can also be interpreted as “Thy Essence and my essence are one; Thou art in me.” And as they are, in this hymn, addressed to an impersonal, immanent Entity — Radiant Energy — that seems to be the main sense to give them. Their other meaning, *i.e.*, “I love Thee,” can and should be added, but only as the natural supplement of the more important idea. The main thing, for Akhnaton, appears indeed to have been to recognise, to realise, divinity in the Sun and in himself; and it was impossible, evidently, for him not to love it, once he knew it — once he had felt it.

Of the process that led him to that realisation we shall never know. He has not described it in any existing document, and it is doubtful whether he could have described it. The series of deductions by which Sir Wallis Budge endeavours to show us how the young Pharaoh came to believe in his own divinity² would surely not have sufficed to convince Akhnaton himself, were they not backed by some genuine experience of universal oneness, lived from within. It was to that experience that he implicitly referred, both

¹ Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 134.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 82. (Quoted in Chap. III, pp. 54-55.)

when he said: “Thou art in my heart” and “No one knoweth Thee save I, Thy Son.”

It is a well-known fact that all kings of Egypt were looked upon first as “sons of Ra” and later on — as the patron-god of Thebes, Amon, gradually rose to prominence and became the main god of the whole country — as “sons of Amon.” And this was no metaphor in the minds of the Egyptians, nor perhaps in the minds of the kings themselves. It was really believed that the god used to visit each queen destined to be a Pharaoh’s mother in the form of her human husband, and become, by her, the actual physical father of the future king. On many Pharaohs’ monuments is pictured the story of this divine conception. For instance, on the bas-reliefs of Queen Hatshepsut’s temple at Deir-el-Bahari one can see the god Amon, in the form of Thotmose the First — even Amenhotep the Third, Akhnaton’s father — the tolerant, easy-going Pharaoh, under whom the cult of Aton was first encouraged — allowed his mother, Queen Mutemuya, to be represented accompanying with Amon in the form of Thotmose the Fourth. Tradition was tradition. And who knows? He perhaps himself believed in the story of his divine origin as all Egypt did.

But Akhnaton never put forth any similar claim. He did, it is true, repeatedly declare himself “Son of the living Aton”; but not in the miraculous sense his fathers had claimed to be “sons of Amon.” No bas-relief, no painting, no evidence of any sort is to be found which could allow us to suppose that he regarded himself to be, physically, the son of aught but his earthly father, Amenhotep the Third. The idea of a miraculous conception is, in fact, incompatible with that of an impersonal God. And Akhnaton was too much of a rationalist not to avoid that contradiction. “Son of the living Aton,” *i.e.*, “Son of God,” he certainly did proclaim himself to be. But that was in an entirely different sense. His own divinity was, to him, a consequence of his unity with the One divine Power-Substance at the back of all

existence — an implication of his experience of a state of super-normal consciousness in which he felt his subtle self identical, in nature, with the universal Energy which he adored. In other words, we should see in this claim to divinity the expression of the innermost certitude of a self-realised soul who can say of the One ultimate Reality: “I am That,” of God: “I am He”; not merely the customary boast of a king of Egypt about his solar descent.

But the modern critical mind will ask: Why, then, that exclusive claim to the knowledge of Godhead? Why the strange sentence: “There is none who knoweth Thee excepting Thy Son, Nefer-kheperu-ra Ua-en-ra” (Beautiful Essence of the Sun, Only One of the Sun)? If the God Whom Akhnaton worshipped was Radiant Energy, the Principle of all life, present even in apparently inanimate matter, then how could he claim for himself the monopoly of wisdom? A personal God, still endowed with mysterious human feelings could, for some reason beyond mortal understanding, prefer one man to all others and reveal “His plans and His powers” to him alone. But surely an immanent God of the type of “the heat and light within the Disk” could not be accused of such partiality.

To understand the king’s statement we must not forget that he had in mind the knowledge concerning the ultimate One, not the presence of it. From the reality of Cosmic Energy at the root of all things, it would be rash to infer that the knowledge, *i.e.*, the clear consciousness of it, is universal. That clear consciousness of the Essence of existence within the individual seems, in fact, excluded not only from apparently inanimate matter (from which individuality itself does not yet emerge), but also from the plants and from the lower and even higher animals, including nearly all men. Every atom of matter contains the divine spark. Every living creature is possessed with some dim awareness of it. Many men, it may be, repeating without experience the words of experienced religious authorities, think themselves more fully conscious of its presence than they really are. Extremely few are able to realise that their essential identity with the ultimate Principle of all things is not a myth, and

that, in truth, “they are That.” To those alone belong the knowledge of God and the wisdom “to understand His plans and His power.” Akhnaton was undoubtedly one of them, and he was conscious of his knowledge.

But a glance at the inscriptions in the tombs of his followers — and at their careers — will convince anyone that they did not share his enlightenment. Of the “Teaching of life,” which they praise so emphatically, they say simply nothing which shows that they actually grasped it. And many of them put such stress upon the rewards they received from their inspired Master in gold and silver and official promotion, that one gets the impression that the lust of material advantages played a definite part in their conversion to the Religion of the Disk. Others, it is true, appear to look upon the king as a god; but even if they were sincere in doing so, that would be no proof that they were able to follow him in the path of knowledge. After all, the only test of a true disciple lies in his actions; and when, a few years after Akhnaton’s premature death, the priests of Amon started persecuting his memory, then none seem to have dared — or cared — to stand openly against the tide of events; none seem to have considered their king worth suffering for, once he was no longer there to distribute honours and gifts to them. They preferred a quiet old age, with perhaps new honours, under the restored rule of the national gods and of their priests, to the glory of sharing with their Master the double curse of a self-seeking gang and of a misled nation. At least, that is what seems to have been their state of mind. For had any serious resistance been opposed to the re-installation of the traditional religion, we believe that Tutankhamen’s scribes would not have failed to report how thoroughly it was crushed. And, in absence of any such report, we may doubt the fervour of the disciples who survived the young Teacher. Moreover, we know that few of those for whom Akhnaton had caused tombs to be dug out in the vicinity of his own even cared to make use of them — a tangible mark of indifference to him and to all that he stood for.

From these various signs we can infer, with a fair amount of safety, that among the crowd of courtiers who professed to

have welcomed his rational religion, and even in the midst of the inner circle of those on whom he had thought he could rely to “carry out his Teaching,” Akhnaton realised more and more, as years passed by, that he was all alone. He could not help remarking the gap which existed already during his lifetime between the life of his followers and the pure doctrine of reason, love and truth, which he preached to them. And that, no doubt, convinced him that they entirely lacked the foundation of genuine religion which he possessed: the experience of an overwhelming truth which lay in them, but transcended them. No one indeed could understand “the plans and power” of his God — the nature of life and its meaning — unless one had that experience; unless one was, like himself, aware of the oneness of his individual essence with that of the Sun and of the whole universe.

In the passage quoted above, the king does not use the name under which he is now immortal, Akhnaton, but that under which he was generally known in his days, at least to his foreign correspondents whose letters we possess; his nesu bat name,¹ Nefer-kheperu-ra, which means “Beautiful Essence of the Sun.” This may be a mere coincidence. It may also be a deliberate symbolical choice. “There is none who knoweth Thee excepting Thy Son, Nefer-kheperu-ra,” may well mean that one could not penetrate the nature of the object of the king’s worship, the solar and at the same time cosmic Energy — and know, therefore, what one was worshipping — unless one was conscious of being, one’s self, “the beautiful essence of the Sun,” one with Him, as Akhnaton was. Experience had taught him that it was not possible to transmit that consciousness; that, however much he would preach the existence of the One Power-Substance — of the Sun-disk, identical with the Energy within the Disk — it would remain a meaningless mystery to all men save those who had realised their own innermost identity

¹ A Pharaoh had several names: his “Horus name,” his “Nebti name,” his “Golden Horus name,” his “Nesu bat name,” his “Son of Ra name.” Sir Wallis Budge (*Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism*, Edit. 1923, p. 3) gives a list of those “strong names” in the case of Tutankhamen. The name by which a Pharaoh is generally known to history is his “Son of Ra” name.

with that One Thing, their natural filiation to It; who had become aware of their being “sons of the Sun, like unto Him without ceasing.”

He knew no man who, by his life, gave signs of possessing such enlightenment. He only knew for sure that he possessed it. And his strange words, which we have just recalled, can therefore be taken to mean, equally: “No one knows Thee save I, the only one who can call myself Thy Son,” and: “No one knows Thee save that man who, as I am, is aware of his identity with Thee within his individual limitations, and who thus can be called Thy Son.” The two interpretations are correct. The second is a consequence of Akhnaton’s conception of immanent divinity, felt by him in the Sun and in himself; and also the recognition of the impossibility to transmit the knowledge of that ultimate Reality: Cosmic Energy. The first is the recognition of his own unique position in the history of the world which he knew. In his days, within his surroundings, and even among the older religious teachers, if any, whose fame had come down to him, he could see no one conscious of the great truth which he had realised. He was, therefore, “the Only One of the Sun”; and he admitted it without false modesty.

But his very conception of Godhead logically excluded any miraculous personal revelation. And it is reasonable to admit that, had he met any man having the same awareness as he of his ultimate oneness with the Principle of all things, he would not have hesitated to salute in him a true “son of the Sun” or “son of God” — one of his rare equals.

* * *

We have seen, up till now, how Akhnaton’s Teaching, as known through the hymns, is based upon an inner experience of universal unity — which real spiritual seers seem to have shared in all times and all countries — and upon an intuition of genius of which the correctness, at least as far as the material universe is concerned, has been proved nowadays, by our men of science. The first gives the Religion of the Disk that sort of certitude that lies in the concordance of

reliable testimonies. The second gives it the intellectual certitude that forces us to accept a scientific hypothesis, when it explains facts. This can be said to sum up the positive value of the Teaching from a rational point of view.

But the Teaching is perhaps as remarkable for what is absent from it as for what it contains. As we have already tried to point out in the introductory chapter of this book, Akhnaton seems to have deliberately avoided the three things of which we find one or two at least linked up, throughout history, with every successful religion: a background of supernatural stories — *i.e.*, a mythology; miracles, and a theory concerning the destiny of the dead.

It suffices to compare his hymns to the Sun with those written previously or at about the same time, or even later, in Egypt and elsewhere, to feel all the difference. Hymns like those quoted by Sir Wallis Budge from the papyrus of Ani as “good typical examples of the songs of praise and thanksgiving addressed to the Sun-god by orthodox Egyptians under the XVIIIth Dynasty”¹ need, in order to be properly understood, the study of a whole elaborate symbolism. The association of the name of the god Tem with that of Horakhti, repeated allusions to the boats Seqtet and Matet, in which Ra sails through the sky; to Nut, the sky-goddess, mother of the Sun-god; to the Lake of Testes that rejoices at the god’s passage; to Sebau, the god’s enemy, “whose arms and hands are cut off,” and many other such mythological recollections, poetic as they may be, only render the hymns obscure to all save people well-versed in Egyptian religion. Those poems, like most of the religious literature of far more widespread creeds in our own times, bear the indelible stamp of a definite civilisation at a definite epoch. By the associations they evoke, by the pictures they recall through the magic of proper names and forgotten stories, it is the whole atmosphere of ancient Egypt that they bring back to us. If, as the historian does, one seeks in them nothing else but a faithful glimpse into the past, then all the better. But if one were to read them for one’s own religious

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 136, and following.

edification, the result would be disappointing. The Egyptian religion is now dead; the proper names, however well-sounding, would stir no longer devotional associations in anybody's heart; the hymns, like all the rest of the old cult of which they were a part, are simply out of date. And in the very time they were daily sung in Egypt, they were out of tune with the religious habits and the familiar conceptions even of the Sun-worshippers of other countries. A Syrian, a Babylonian, a Mykaenian, would have had to take the trouble to learn who was Nut and who was Sebau, and what were the boats Seqtet and Matet before he could follow the trend of inspiration in a hymn to Ra — just as to-day a Buddhist has to acquaint himself with much history, much legend, and much philosophy alien to his own before he can enjoy to the full the beauty of an Easter sermon in a Christian cathedral. Any mythology is of a limited appeal, whether in time or space.

But if we now turn to the hymns which Akhnaton has left us, we can see in them practically nothing which could not be grasped in the fourteenth century B.C. by a Syrian, by an Indian — nay, by a Chinese or by a man from the forests of Central Europe — as well as, or no worse than, by an Egyptian; nothing which is not to-day able to appeal to any man, without his needing any preparation other than a heart open to beauty. The only thing that would require explanation is, in the shorter hymn, a reference to “the House of the Benben Obelisk . . . in the City of Akhetaton, the Seat of Truth.”¹ We know that the Benben Obelisk was the immemorial symbol of the Sun, worshipped in On or Anu, the Heliopolis of the Greeks, the “City of the pillar.” According to the ancient tradition reflected in the Pyramid Texts, “the Spirit of the Sun visited the temple of the Sun from time to time, in the form of a Bennu bird, and alighted on the Ben-stone in the House of the Bennu in Anu.”² In recalling the Benben stone, Akhnaton, it would seem, wished to stress how deep were the roots of his exclusive cult of the Sun in the

¹ Shorter Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 119.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 63.

most revered tradition of Egypt. The worship of Aton, as we have seen, was evolved out of that of the god of On, the age-old sacred City of the Sun. And the “House of the Benben Obelisk” meant simply the main temple of the Sun in the king’s new capital, also a sacred City. But apart from that allusion there is, in the two hymns and in the prayer composed by Akhnaton and inscribed upon his coffin, and in the references to his Teaching in the courtier’s tombs, not a word which needs, on the part of the readers, any special knowledge of Egypt and of her beliefs, in order to be understood.

The very name of the Sun which comes back over and over again in every text of the time, whether composed by the king or by his followers, is neither Ra, nor Khepera, nor Tem, nor even Horus of the Two Horizons — a name mentioned once, in the introduction to the shorter hymn — but Aton, *i.e.*, the Disk, a noun designating the geometrical shape of the visible Sun — and which can be literally translated into any language.

The symbol of Godhead was neither a human figure nor an animal with a particular history at the back of it, nor a disk encircled by a serpent (a common representation of solar-gods in Egypt¹), but simply the solar-disk with downward rays ending in hands, bestowing life to the earth (“ankh,” the looped cross, which the hands hold out, is, as we have said, the hieroglyphic sign for “life”). This symbol “never became popular in the country”²; it was perhaps, like the rest of the Religion of the Disk, “too philosophical” for the Egyptians as for many other nations. But it was a truly rational symbol, free from any mythological connections and clear to any intelligent person.

The text of the hymns refers to no legends, to no stories, to no particular theology; only to the beauty and beneficence of our parent star, to its light “of several colours,” to its universal worship by men, beasts and the

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), pp. 80 and 81.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 81.

vegetable world; to the marvel of birth; to the joy of life; to the rhythm of day and night and of the seasons, determined by the Sun; and to the great idea that the heat and light within the solar-disk, the “Ka” or Soul of the Disk, and the Disk itself, are one, and that all creatures are one as the children of the one Sun — the one God. We find here nothing but conceptions that need, in order to be accepted, only common sense and sensitiveness to beauty; and in order to be understood in their full, not a theological but a rational — and also spiritual — preparation; not the knowledge of any mythology or even of any human history, but a scientific knowledge of the universe, coupled with a spirit of synthesis.

We can only here, once more, quote Sir Flinders Petrie, to whom the world owes so much in the whole field of Egyptology. “In this hymn,” says he, after having reproduced the text of the longer hymn, “all trace of polytheism and of anthropomorphism or theriomorphism has entirely disappeared. The power of the Sun to cause and regulate all existence is the great subject of praise; and careful reflection is shown in enumerating the mysteries of the power of the Aten exemplified in the animation of nature, reproduction, the variety of races, and the source of the Nile and watering by rain. It would tax anyone in our days to recount better than this the power and action of the rays of the Sun. And no conception that can be compared with this for scientific accuracy was reached for at least three thousand years after it.”¹

* * *

Another remarkable trait of the Religion of the Disk is that it seems to have been completely devoid of that belief in miracles which holds such a place in most of the more popular religions, both ancient and modern; a belief, nay, without which the fundamental dogmas of most great world-wide religions of to-day could not be accepted by their followers.

¹ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 218.

When we speak of “miracles” we mean any events, impossible according to the laws of nature, but of which one yet admits the occurrence, taking it to be the result of a special intervention of God, or of any other power, in the natural scheme of things. It must be noted that any conception of immanent Godhead — *i.e.*, any conception in which Godhead and Nature are not distinct from each other; in which the ultimate Power is not “outside” the universe, but bears to it the relation of the soul to the body it animates — excludes the idea of supernatural intervention on the part of God. And any rational view of the world, whether pantheistic, theistic or atheistic, excludes miracles altogether. It is therefore natural that Akhnaton never ascribed to the impersonal Energy behind the Disk (and behind all things) which he worshipped, the occasional tendency or even the capacity to break, in favour of human issues or at the request of human devotees, the immovable laws of action and reaction of which it is Itself the hidden Principle.

In reading the hymns, one has the impression that, to him, the order of nature and the mystery of life were quite marvellous enough in themselves, without man’s needing to seek, beyond them, in happenings that stagger him as unnatural (whether they really be so or not) an occasion to praise the power and wisdom of the Creator. We have already seen that he never attributed to himself a miraculous birth as other Pharaohs, formally at least, were accustomed to do. He could not see in what way even such an event as that could be more divine than the everyday mystery of a germ, nursed by the universal Life-force within the egg or within the womb, and becoming in course of time a young bird or a child.

Whether the king possessed or not the power of performing unusual deeds, in the manner of many religious teachers of all times, we do not know. In the praise of him by some of the most enthusiastic of his followers — praise of which a sample has been quoted in a preceding chapter — there is not the slightest hint that he did. It is, of course, not impossible that he did. If one is to believe a tradition persisting for

centuries after the downfall of Egypt, the technique of developing one's psychic powers beyond the ordinary credible limits was not uncommon among the priests of the Nile Valley. In it even lay, one may imagine, their unshakable hold over the minds of the people. And there would be nothing unnatural in supposing that a man who, up till the appointment of Merira, exercised in the new cult the functions of High-priest of the Sun, was able to take interest in such an art. Moreover, we know definitely that Akhnaton had assumed the age-old title borne by the High-priest of the Sun in On: *Urma* — the seer, or “the great one of visions”¹ — which, if taken in the literal sense, does imply some powers beyond the ordinary. But in the light of the evidence now available we should, it seems, admit that, even if he did, to any extent, possess the capacity of working feats of wonder, he made no use of it, preferring positive knowledge and the logical and beautiful expression of knowledge in his life and Teaching, to the easy task of impressing ignorant crowds. It is also quite plausible that he never endeavoured to cultivate the art of acquiring supra-normal command over the physical world, considering it as not essentially connected with spiritual development, and therefore as superfluous.

And not only does the Founder of the Religion of the Disk claim no miraculous powers for himself, but there is, in the fragments concerning his creed which have come down to us, not an allusion whatsoever to occurrences defying the laws of nature. The very idea of such seems to have been alien to the spirit of the king's Teaching.

* * *

Finally, Akhnaton appears to have given his followers no definite doctrine about death and the fate of the dead.² The custom of mummifying dead bodies, prevalent in Egypt

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 51. Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 111.

² “The Aten religion contained,” says Sir Wallis Budge, “none of the beautiful ideas on the future life, with which we are familiar from the hymns and other compositions in the Book of the Dead” (*History of Egypt*, Edit. 1902, Vol. IV, pp. 121-122). See also J. D. S. Pendlebury's *Tell-el-Amarna* (Edit. 1935), p. 157.

from time immemorial, was observed under him and in his own case. He therefore surely did not discourage it. But it is doubtful whether he subscribed to the essential ideas about the hereafter that the Egyptians associated with it. It is doubtful also whether the personal views he may have had about the mystery of death were ever preached by him as a part of his Teaching. For though the evidence on which all discussion of this subject is necessarily based is very scanty, there seem to be reasons for one to distinguish between his idea of the survival of the soul and that of his followers.

The only document which may be taken to express his own views is the prayer inscribed at the foot of his coffin, and probably composed by himself: "I breathe the sweet breath which comes forth from Thy mouth; I behold Thy beauty every day. It is my desire that I may hear Thy sweet voice, even in the North wind, that my limbs may be rejuvenated with life through love of Thee. Give me Thy hands holding Thy spirit, that I may receive it and live by it. Call Thou upon my name unto eternity, and it shall never fail."¹

It seems, from this prayer addressed to the One God, that Akhnaton believed in the survival of the individual soul after death. The "I" who speaks here is, or at least has all the appearances of being, a personal consciousness. But it is difficult to imagine personal consciousness beyond death without some sort of survival of the body. We all feel that we owe much of what we are to the characteristic constitution of our various organs. If nothing is to remain of our material self under any form, then the only sort of immortality we can expect, if any at all, is the impersonal immortality of that which is, in us, common to all beings; substantial everlastingness, rather than individual immortality. Akhnaton seems to have been aware of this, and not to have separated the survival of the individual from some sort of hazy corporeality. At least, that is what we would imagine to be implied in words such as: ". . . that my limbs may be rejuvenated with life through love of Thee."

No one can say whether those very same words also imply

¹ Quoted by Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 259.

that the Founder of the Religion of the Disk shared the age-old Egyptian belief in the resurrection of the dead. It may be he did. It may be he did not. It may be that, in his eyes, the “limbs” that constitute, in eternity, the agent of individualisation, were those not of the resurrected mummy but of some surviving “body” more subtle than the visible one. In Akhnaton’s conception, as it can be inferred from the hymns, there is, as we have seen, no clear-cut line of demarcation between the material and the immaterial — between the everlasting “Ka” of the Sun-disk and the Disk itself, and doubtless also between the immortal “ka” of a man — his subtler self — and that man’s body.

There is no mention of the rising of the dead anywhere in the solitary prayer, just quoted, which reveals to us practically all we know of Akhnaton’s own beliefs, or hopeful conjectures, on the subject of death. But one or two courtiers do express, in the inscriptions in their tombs, the wish that their “flesh might live upon the bones,” which seems to imply the hope of resurrection. As we have once already remarked, one of the most constant desires of nearly all the king’s followers was to continue to see the Sun after death — “to go out to see the Sun’s rays”; “to obtain a sight of the beauty of every recurring sunrise,” etc. . . . Many also prayed for more tangible happiness; for the unchanged favour of their royal Master in the world beyond the grave; for name and fame in this world of the living; even for a share of the consecrated food offered at the altar of the Sun, “a reception of that which has been offered in the temple”; “a drink offering in the temple of Aton”; “a libation,” spilt by the children of the deceased “at the entrance of his tomb.”¹

Arthur Weigall, in his admiration for the inspired young king, has endeavoured to present him as the most outstanding precursor of Christianity in the Pagan world. And he attributes to him, precisely for that reason, ideas of the hereafter little different from those of an honest church-going Englishman — except, of course, for the important fact

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), pp. 122-125.

that “we hear nothing of hell”¹ in his Teaching. Those ideas, whatever be their value, are much too precise, even in their necessary vagueness, to tally with the very vague references in the prayer we have mentioned, and somewhat too Christian-like to be ascribed to the world’s first rationalist. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Weigall quotes, in support of them, only extracts from the inscriptions in the courtiers’ tombs, and never the prayer which he himself holds to be “composed by Akhnaton.”² And there is a difference in tone and in spirit between that prayer and those inscriptions.

From the prayer, nothing precise about Akhnaton’s view of death can be pointed out, save perhaps, as we have said, that he believed in the survival of the individual under some much subtler state of corporeality (there is no mention of food or drink in his words) and that he considered the universal Energy within the Sun — the object of his worship — to be the principle of the new life, no less than of life under the form we know it. This seems to be the sense of “Give me Thy hands, holding Thy spirit, that I may receive it and live by it.” The words: “. . . that my limbs may be rejuvenated with life through love of Thee,” may also imply, along with the idea that consciousness is inseparable from corporeality under some form or another, that other idea that love of the supreme Reality — ultimately identical with the knowledge of It — is the condition of consciousness, in that life beyond death which Akhnaton expected for himself. Apart from these conjectures, which the text of the prayer suggests, we know nothing of his personal conception of the hereafter.

On the other hand, the hopes and wishes of the courtiers — to rise from the dead; to live and see the Sun; to enjoy food and drink offerings made to Him, and libations spilt by their descendants at their intention; to be remembered on earth and to see and serve the king in eternity — could be, more or less, the hopes and wishes expressed by any orthodox Egyptians of the time. There is nothing new in the beliefs

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 121.

² Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 248.

that they presuppose. The only new thing is that all the paraphernalia of threatening monsters and protecting gods that was generally associated with those same beliefs, all the awe that the dead would have to face in the land of shadows, and the magical formulas, declarations, incantations, etc., to propitiate the hostile powers of the netherworld, are completely absent from the inscriptions in the rock tombs of Tell-el-Amarna. “We look in vain for the figures of the old gods of Egypt, Ra, Horus, Ptah, Osiris, Isis, Anubis, and the cycles of the gods of the dead and of the Tuat (Underworld), and not a single ancient text, whether hymn, prayer, spell, incantation, litany from the ‘Book of the Dead’ in any of its recensions, is to be found there. To the Atenites, the tomb was a mere hiding-place for the dead body, not a model of the Tuat, as their ancestors thought. Their royal leader rejected all the old funerary Liturgies like the ‘Book of Opening the Mouth,’ and the ‘Liturgy of funerary offerings,’ and he treated with silent contempt such works as the ‘Book of the Two Ways,’ the ‘Book of the Dweller in the Tuat,’ and the ‘Book of Gates.’ Thus it would appear that he rejected en bloc all funerary rites and ceremonies and disapproved of all services of commemoration of the dead, which were so dear to the hearts of all Egyptians. The absence of figures of Osiris in the tombs of his officials, and of all mention of this god in the inscriptions found in them, suggests that he disbelieved in the Last Judgment and in the dogma of reward for the righteous and punishments for evildoers. If this were so, the Field of Reeds, the Field of Grasshoppers, the Field of Offerings in the Elysian Fields, and the Block of Slaughter with the headsman Shesmu, the five pits of the Tuat and the burning of the wicked were all ridiculous fictions to him.”¹

From this negative evidence it can be gathered that Akhnaton definitely rejected all that appeared to him as irrational in the Egyptian traditions regarding death. He surely did away with all the magic intertwined with them, and he may have had, about man’s liberty and responsibility

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism (Edit. 1923), pp. 94, 95.

in general, sufficient doubts to “disbelieve” in the Last Judgment and in the dogma of reward and punishment once and for ever. If his courtiers omitted so much of the conventional funerary symbolism in their tombs, it is because he saw in it something meaningless, perhaps even harmful, and forbade it. But the positive instance of his followers’ beliefs in immortality does not necessarily indicate, in a parallel manner, what were his personal views. Nothing proves that he subscribed to all the hopes which they express in their inscriptions. On the contrary, stripped as it was of all the traditional mythology of the netherworld, their idea of life beyond death may well have been much nearer to the conventional Egyptian views than his. We are inclined to believe it was, when we think of the courtiers asking to enjoy a part of “the food deposited on the altar every day,” and libations and such. Here it seems that the old faith in the necessity of funeral offerings lingers in the believers in the new rational religion. It is noticeable that, in Akhnaton’s own prayer, there is no mention of offerings whatsoever. The love he had for Aton, the One God, was sufficient to “rejuvenate his limbs with life.”

From all this one may infer that, whatever were his personal conjectures concerning the hereafter, Akhnaton did not make them an article of his Teaching, but allowed his disciples to solve the problem of death as they liked, provided the solutions they would choose were not, in his eyes, too flagrantly childish. The mythology of the netherworld, as the Egyptians had believed in it for centuries was, no doubt, to him, a network of “ridiculous fictions.” And as Sir Wallis Budge adds, he actually gave his followers “nothing to put in the place of these fictions,”¹ because there was, indeed, nothing to give them. And as a rationalist that he was, he seems to have been much less definite about all he said, or hinted, regarding the possibilities of the next world, than he had been in his assertions about the realities of this; much less categorical, also, in his attitude towards other people’s views, when these concerned that great beyond of which he

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism (Edit. 1923), p. 95.

had no more experience than they or any man ever had.

The fact, for instance, that some of his followers ask, in their tomb inscriptions, for food and drink, does not prove that he taught them anything positive about funeral offerings, nor that, forerunning Christ who, “after his resurrection asked for food,” he believed that “material food or its spiritual equivalent would be necessary to the soul’s welfare in the next world.”¹ But it does prove that he did not brand the old belief in the same uncompromising way as he had condemned that in a multitude of local gods or in the cult of images.

He appears simply never to have pronounced himself on the problem of the hereafter, perhaps because he deemed that problems of this world and this life should be solved first, perhaps also because he felt less sure of the solidity of his own conjectures about death and after death — of which he had no direct knowledge — than of that of his positive intuition of the ultimate Essence: heat-and-light within the Sun, and world-consciousness within himself. He cancelled, in the funeral traditions of the Egyptians as in the rest of their religion, all that which struck him as definitely meaningless or absurd. He tolerated only such remnants of the past as were but harmless customs — for instance, the habit of embalming the dead — or age-old beliefs which were as difficult to disprove as to justify and which, therefore, might have contained some spark of truth. In his Teaching, he seems neither to have asserted nor denied the current Egyptian dogma of the resurrection of the flesh. It may be that he associated it, in his mind, with the idea of individual survival which would imply, it seems, corporeality. But what corporeality after death meant to him, is not clear to us. The one thing, however, which can be said, is that his uncertain attitude towards the problem of death, and the open mind which he appears to have kept with regard to several ancient beliefs and customs about which, even to-day, one cannot easily pass a decisive opinion, are perfectly consistent with that rigorous rationalism that we remarked all through his

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 124.

doctrine, along with the inspiration that fills it. They are the signs of a truly scientific spirit.

* * *

It seems right to believe, with Budge, that the fact that he put “nothing in the place” of the old fictions about the next world had the result of turning the Egyptians away from Akhnaton and his Teaching; not, as the learned author says, because “being of African origin, they never understood or cared for philosophical abstractions,”¹ but because they were men and, like most men, foolish, and craved for illusions — better than nothing — in the absence of available knowledge.

We may add that the omission of any “mythology” and of miracle-stories from the Teaching had the same immediate effect. People always wished to be entertained, moved and astonished by marvellous tales, and made to believe them. And all the great successful religions, when based originally on purely philosophical principles — as Buddhism — have seen more and more miraculous narratives creep into their sacred literature as years passed on, and as they spread to further countries. Had the Religion of the Disk not been nipped in the bud, it is probable that the same thing would have happened with it, in course of time.

But, if the absence of what makes a religion popular condemned it, from the start, never to spread of its own impetus; if its Founder himself, doubtless feeling how far too rational his Teaching was for the needs of the mob, never tried to preach it, save to a few men chosen among the first of the land, this was not without an advantage. Popular religions of Akhnaton’s time, that long held sway over nations, have died out. And they could not possibly be revived, now or in the future, precisely because of the mythology and supernatural stories and particular views about death and funerary rites which overload them and hide the amount of truth that they did contain (as all religions do) and make them

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 96.

the products of definite geographical and historical environments, the property of particular civilisations. And nearer to us, in our own world, the greatest obstacle, perhaps, to the proselytism of the well-known international religions still alive, is that they too are irremediably linked up with a particular background of history and legend, stamped with a definite *couleur locale*; also that they appear inseparable from such supernatural events as the modern mind is no longer ready to accept. Islam cannot be preached to England or Germany detached from the marvellous stories that once stirred the admiration of the medieval Arab tent-dweller. Christianity cannot be preached to India and China detached from its Jewish and Greco-Roman associations; and in Europe itself — one of its oldest fields of expansion — Renan was already conscious that, if anything would one day make people sceptical and indifferent towards it, it would be those very miracles that once made its fortune.¹

But Akhnaton's Teaching, devoid of the three things that have assured the success of other doctrines, is also free from the germs of decay contained in them. Logically, it can be revived, now and in any age to come, in any place where rational thinking is more than an empty profession. The absence of miracles, as well as of any positive answer to the insoluble question of death, makes it a religion that the critical mind can prefer to many others. Its rationality, one of the most potent causes of its failure in Egypt, in the days of its Founder, could therefore one day become the main source of its appeal to the disinterested, truth-seeking intelligentsia of all the world. This hope, however premature it might still seem, in our times, is not unjustified, considering the nature of the Teaching and the history of man's religious evolution.

¹ Renan: *Life of Jesus* (Translation by William G. Hutchinson), pp. 162-163.

CHAPTER VI

THE WAY OF LOVE

We have seen how Akhnaton's two hymns to the Sun which have come down to us suggest an idea of Godhead which, as Sir Flinders Petrie has so effectively pointed out, tallies with "our modern scientific conceptions." But that is not all. The impersonal God whom the young king worshipped — the Energy of the Universe, made tangible in the power and glory of our parent star — is no less inspiring to the heart of the mystic in search of absolute love, than to the clear intellect of the rationalist in search of logical and experimental accuracy. He is the "Lord of Love" no less than the Lord of Truth.

In the shorter hymns we find such sentences as: "Thy love is mighty and great. . . . Thy light of several colours bewitcheth all faces"; "Thou fillest the Two Lands with Thy love,"¹ etc. . . . and again, in the longer hymn, among others, the passage we referred to in the preceding chapter: "Thy rays encompass all lands. . . . Thou bindest them with Thy love," and the well-known paragraph: "Thou makest offspring to take form in women, creating seed in men. Thou makest the son to live in the womb of his mother, causing him to be quiet, that he crieth not; Thou art a nurse in the womb, giving breath to vivify that which Thou hast made. When he droppeth from the womb on the day of his birth, he openeth his mouth in the (ordinary) manner and Thou providest his sustenance. The young bird in the egg speaketh in the shell; Thou giveth breath to him inside it to make him live. Thou makest for him his mature form so that he can crack the shell (being) inside the egg. He cometh forth from the egg; he chirpeth with all his might; when he hath come forth from it (the egg), he walketh on his two feet. . . ."

¹ Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 117.

O how many are the things which Thou hast made. . . .”¹ And a little further on, after the passage about the Nile and the rain and the variety of climates and races, follows another expression of devout admiration for the solicitude of the Creator: “How beneficent are Thy plans, O Lord of Eternity!”

As Arthur Weigall says, quoting the Christian Scriptures, never in history “had a man conceived a god who ‘so loved the world.’”² But there is, between the love of Aton for the world and the love of the personal God of the Gospel, all the difference that separates a link of impersonal necessity from one of human attachment.

We must not forget the nature of Aton — the Disk, identical to “Shu,” Heat-and-Light, *i.e.*, Energy-within-the-Disk — who is neither a god in the image of man, nor even an individual power of any description, but the ultimate impersonal Reality behind all existence. The love of such a God for the millions and millions of lives which He brought forth from Himself is something different from the love of an individual parent for his offspring. True, Akhnaton calls his God the “Father-and-Mother of all which He hath made.” But if our interpretation of Aton be the right one, then that double appellation, far from containing any anthropomorphic idea, most probably symbolises the two complementary aspects of the One ultimate Essence: the active, for ever urging new forms and new lives out of dim latent possibilities, and the passive, the sensitive receptacle of all those possibilities, matrix of actual existence; the One everlasting Power of differentiation, and the everlasting and ever-differentiated Oneness. The individual parent and the offspring, however closely linked, are separate bodies with a separate consciousness. The “Father-and-Mother” of the Universe and the Universe itself are not. The latter is the visible and diversified expression of the former invisible and indivisible One — the Energy within the Disk and within the universe, of which matter is but an aspect. The love of Aton

¹ Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), pp. 128-129.

² Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 105.

for the world is the stable unifying power that underlies all that is diverse and transient — all that is created. “Thou bindest them with Thy love” means: “Through their common relation to Thee, the One Essence of all things, they are one in their diversity — ‘bound to Thee,’ and bound together within their apparent separateness.” In another version of the longer hymn¹ we read: “Thou art Ra; Thou hast carried them all away captive; Thou bindest them by Thy love. . . .” The word “captive” would seem to indicate a link of complete dependence of the creatures upon the Creator. They are bound to Him as to the final condition of their existence.

In that link rests the secret of their link to one another. They are one in Him, because first of all they are one with Him, as children are one with a loving parent, and much more so.

* * *

But apart from this relation of fact between the ultimate Energy and all that exists, the hymns clearly point out to a relation of intention. In Aton’s love “for all He hath made,” there is something more than the bond of physical and logical unity which we have tried to analyse. There is not, of course, that personal love, which only a god in the image of man can feel for each of his creatures; but there is some immanent finality which operates, in each individual case, as if it were the sign of God’s special individual care; a tendency to well-being which nature encourages and helps; an untiring goodness, which strikes one at every step as underlying the whole scheme of things.

That seems to be the truth expressed in Akhnaton’s beautiful passages about the kindness of Aton to the child and to the young bird, mere instances of His solicitude for all creatures. The marvel of pre-natal existence — the patient evolution of a cell into a full-grown individual — is recalled, with all the finality inherent to it, in a few words: “Thou art

¹ Translation of Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1912), p. 324.

a nurse in the womb, giving breath to vivify that which Thou hast made. . . .” “Thou giveth breath to him (the young bird) inside the egg, to make him live. Thou makest for him his mature form so that he can crack the shell (being) inside the egg. . . .” God — *i.e.*, Nature, for Aton does not stand for any supernatural entity — does His best. He “gives breath” to every young living thing; He equips it with organs marvellously adjusted; He helps it to grow, before its birth, and feeds it afterwards, for some time at least, that it may have a chance to fulfil its purpose which is to live, to enjoy the sunshine and to be beautiful, in the full-bloom of health and happiness. And though it is not said in the hymns — that are songs of praise to the glory of the Creator, not codes of human behavior — one feels, from the very tone of the king’s words, the moral truth that they imply. One feels that, in his eyes, it is man’s duty to collaborate with the universal Parent, the life-giving Sun; to love all creatures and to help them to live; not merely to do no harm to them, but to see to their welfare, to the utmost of his capacity. Life — the life of any creature — which is, in itself, such a masterpiece of divine love, is not to be considered lightly. And the welfare of anything that lives, especially of any creature that is helpless, is to be the object of our personal care. God Himself has pointed out the way to us by the example of His untiring solicitude.

It is remarkable that Akhnaton seems to give no less importance to the young bird — standing for the whole animal world — than to the human baby. The admiration he expresses for the loving care of Him Who brings the embryo to maturity and “provideth its needs” is equal in both cases. And one has the impression that the “Heat-and-Light-within-the-Disk” — his God — knows nothing of the childish partiality of the man-made gods in favour of the human species. Those gods, conceived, as some of them may be, centuries after the inspired Pharaoh, appear indeed, in the light of his, as glorified deities — which, no doubt, some of them originally were — raised by the pride of their worshippers to the leadership of a mere extended tribe, mankind,

a species among many others in the endless variety of creation.

In the hymn from which we have quoted the above passage, there is another reference in which different countries are enumerated: “Thou didst create the world according to Thy desire, Syria, and Nubia and the land of Egypt. . . .” Commenting on the fact that the two tributary nations are named before Egypt, Arthur Weigall, following the pious trend of thought that characterises his whole book, says: “Akhnaton believed that his God was the Father of all mankind and that the Syrian and the Nubian were as much under His protection as the Egyptian. The religion of the Aton was to be a world religion. This is a greater advance in ethics than may be at first apparent; for the Aton thus becomes the first deity who was not tribal or not national ever conceived by mortal mind. This is the Christian’s understanding of God, though not the Hebrew conception of Jehovah. This is the spirit which sends the missionary to the uttermost parts of the earth; and it was such an attitude of mind which now led Akhnaton to build a temple to the Aton in Palestine, possibly at Jerusalem itself, and another far up in the Sudan.”¹

Before ascribing a definite date to the religious books of the East, especially the Vedas (which is not possible), it is difficult to say whether Aton was or not the first universal God “ever conceived by mortal mind.” But if, by his international spirit, by his belief in a God who was the Father of the foreigners as well as of the Egyptians, Akhnaton was in advance of the old Hebrew idea of Jehovah, then surely his conception of Aton, as free from every kind of human narrowness (loving the little birth and the little child, and all life alike), puts him no less in advance of Christianity itself — nay, in advance of any creed which makes man, and not life, the centre of its theory of creation and the basis of its scale of values. We personally believe that it is precisely this entire absence, not merely of nationalism and of imperialism, but also of any form of anthropomorphism (both

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 166.

moral and metaphysical) which raises the young Pharaoh far above so many later religious teachers and sets him, decidedly, ahead of our present times.

* * *

The impersonal Energy which radiates as heat and light in the life-giving Disk of the Sun — Aton — loves the world and all that lives upon it. In other words, Nature is indiscriminately, impartially kind. The tragedies that we witness every day — suffering and slaughter inflicted upon creatures, and every form of exploitation of man and beast — are man's doing, not Hers. God has given, to every young individual, health and the desire to enjoy the daylight. He intended it to live its span of years, not to die miserably. Even out of destruction and death He makes life spring out again, causing tender green shoots to appear on the branches of the mutilated trees, and new trees to grow out of the roots of those that were felled. To Him, life is an end in itself. And at every new attempt He makes to bring forth a living thing, again at its birth He lavishes upon it His gifts of health and beauty, possibilities of development into the perfection of its species, promises of happiness.

Such was the essential of Akhnaton's Teaching concerning the love of God. He seems, at least from the little we now possess of his religious poems, to have ignored evil entirely; and perhaps he actually did so, for not only in the hymns, but also in the numerous inscriptions which cover the walls of his followers' tombs, "the destructive qualities of the Sun were never referred to,"¹ not to speak of all the crimes against life that are allowed to be committed under His face all over the earth. That omission, as we have already said in a former chapter,² cannot be explained by supposing the king to have been blind to the existence of suffering as a fact. That would be absurd. True, the surroundings he had created for himself were exceedingly beautiful. But he knew

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 104.

² In Chapter IV, p. 102.

that the wide world extended far beyond them, and beyond his own beneficent influence. Moreover, there never was a town on earth where people were totally free from anger and greed, cruelty and cowardice, the sources of the evil actions that produce suffering. And Akhetaton, though the “seat of Truth,” was surely no exception, for men dwelt there. And the young Prophet of sunshine and joy must have known how limited was his control over other people’s bad instincts, even at a few yards from his peaceful palace. Yet, he sang the love of God, in spite of it all. He deeply felt that there was, at the birth of every new life, equipped for happiness, the triumph of an inexhaustible Power of love, which governs the universe. The newly-born creature might not be left to enjoy the full-bloom of life for which its body and soul were made. The possibility of enjoying it was, nevertheless, the result of the whole finality of its pre-natal development, the outcome of a divine solicitude. Health and happiness were its birthright, according to the decrees of the immense immanent Love that sustains all creation, the Soul of the universe — God.

Seen in the light of the young king’s super-conscious insight into the mystery of existence, the effects of human wickedness, with all their horror, appeared perhaps as but surface ripples, hardly perturbing the calm abyss of eternal Life and infinite Love. That is possible. However it be, he did not ask the reason why such ripples exist, because he knew there was no answer to the question. It would seem that he brushed aside the problem of evil deliberately (along with the problem of death), as something which the human mind, however exalted, cannot solve. And instead of seeking in vain an explanation where there was none, he absorbed himself in the contemplation of the One unpolluted — and unpollutable — Source of health, life and love: the Energy within the Sun.

* * *

No less than the love of God for the world, manifested in the untiring beneficence of our parent star, Akhnaton has

stressed, in the hymns, the love of all living creatures for their common Father, whose heat and light has brought them forth and sustains them, generation after generation.

All men love Him and bow down to Him, whatever be their other professed gods. “They live when Thou shinest upon them . . .” says the inspired author of the hymns; “their eyes, when Thou risest, turn their gaze upon Thee. . . .” “Every heart beateth high at the sight of Thee, for Thou risest as their Lord.”¹ And also: “All men’s hands are stretched out in praise of Thy rising” . . . “O Lord of every land, Thou shinest upon them; O Aten of the day, great in majesty,”² or, in the translation of Mr. Griffith, reproduced by Sir Flinders Petrie: “Thou art throughout their Lord, even in their weakness, O Lord of the land that risest for them, Aten of the day, revered in every distant country.”³

In fact, every nation in the neighbourhood of Egypt paid homage to the Sun under a different name. And however narrow might have been their conception of the God of Light, often brought down to the rank of a local god,⁴ and however debased might have been their forms of worship, still it was to Him that went their praise. They loved Him and revered Him without knowing Him.

And distant peoples and tribes of which the king of Egypt could not possibly have heard, also rendered divine honours to the same fiery Disk at His dawning and setting. It was a fact that, while Akhnaton’s poems were sung to His glory “in the hall of the House of the Benben Obelisk and in every temple in Akhetaton, the seat of truth,”⁵ the Aryan clans, slowly pouring into India, were exalting Him in the hymns of the Rig-Veda; wild tribes from the north of Europe and Asia sang the beauty of His hazy smile over endless snow-

¹ Shorter Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 118.

² Longer Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 131.

³ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 216.

⁴ Breasted: *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1912), pp. 13 and following; p. 312.

⁵ Shorter Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 117.

bound plains and dark forests; and at the eastern end of the earth, the primitive people of Japan — more than seven hundred years before their first recorded emperor — doubtless already hailed His rising out of the Pacific Ocean. And still farther to the east and to the south — beyond those virgin waves that it would have taken months and months to cross — men of undiscovered isles and continents praised Him, in speeches now long forgotten, with strange rites of which we shall never know.

And thus it was true that the whole world was full of His name. From the Nile to the Andes, and from the frozen beaches over which He sheds His midnight rays to the luxuriant isles that smile in His golden light, in the midst of phosphorescent seas, it was true that “all men’s hands” were “stretched out in praise of His rising.” Akhnaton probably did not know how big our planet is; nor had he any idea of the farthest lands of dawn and sunset bordering the two great oceans. Yet, with a sure insight of truth, he proclaimed his God: “Thou Aton of the day, revered in every distant land.” He was aware of the universality of Sun-worship, that oldest and most natural religion in the world, of which still to-day one could find concrete traces in the rites and customs and festivals of more intricate, more anthropomorphic — and less rational — cults. He was aware also that, if any religion could one day claim to conquer the earth and unite all enlightened mankind, it could be none but this one. The worldwide concert of man’s praise to the Sun, of which the dim echo resounded in his heart, clumsy, childish, discordant as it was, filled him with joy and glorious hopes. It was the first expression of the whole human race groping in quest of the real God. Its final expression — the religion of integral life, in which reason and inspiration, knowledge and devotion would go hand-in-hand — could be but the worship of the One Essence of all existence, Cosmic Energy, manifested in the heat and light of our parent star; the rational cult of the Sun, which he had forestalled in Akhetaton, his sacred City.

* * *

There is more. Aton is not the God of man alone. We have seen that He loves all creatures impartially and treats them with equal solicitude. It is shown in the hymns no less clearly that all creatures love and worship Him, each in the manner of its species. "Every creature that Thou hast made skippeth towards Thee . . ."; "All the beasts frisk about on their feet; all the feathered fowl rise up from their nests and flap their wings with joy, and circle around in praise of the Living Aten. . . ." ¹ "Beasts and cattle of all kinds settle down upon the pastures" . . . "the feathered fowl fly about over their marshes, their feathers (*i.e.*, their wings) praising Thy 'Ka'. . . ." ² "All the cattle rise up on their legs; creatures that fly and insects of all kinds spring into life when Thou risest up on them. . . ." ³ "The fishes in the river swim up to greet Thee." ⁴ And it is not only quadrupeds and birds, insects and fishes that take part in the general chorus of joy and praise that rises from the earth to the Sun; "shrubs and vegetables flourish" ⁵ when Thou risest upon them; "buds burst into flower, and the plants which grow on the waste lands send up shoots at Thy rising; they drink themselves drunk before Thy face." ⁶

There are two ideas, quite different from each other, expressed in these few quotations from the hymns: on one hand that all creatures rejoice at the sight of the Sun; on the other that they all worship the Sun. The first is a matter of everyday observation that many a sensitive soul would probably have stressed in a poem to the glory of the life-giving Disk; a commonplace truth which indeed has been emphasised in various antique songs of unknown date and authorship, no less than in many passages of modern literature, and which implies no special insight on the part of

¹ Shorter Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 121.

² In Griffith's version: "Their wings adoring Thy 'Ka.'"

³ Longer Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), pp. 126-127.

⁴ Longer Hymn, Translation of Griffith. Quoted by Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 215, and following.

⁵ Longer Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 126.

⁶ Shorter Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 121.

whoever grasps it; an obvious fact. The second idea implies the belief in the unity of all life and the brotherhood of creatures, and provides the basis of a whole religious and moral outlook.

Apart from Sir Flinders Petrie, who sees in the scientific foundation of the Religion of the Disk its greatest claim to our admiration, most authors among those who appreciate Akhnaton's Teaching seem to do so on account of his God being the God of all nations as opposed to the hosts of national and tribal deities worshipped all over the ancient world. The young Pharaoh's conception of the brotherhood of man as a consequence of the fatherhood of the one Sun; his internationalism; his kindness to all human beings, including rebels and traitors; his "conscientious objection to warfare"¹ — logical outcome of a lofty respect for human life — are the traits which appear to strike historians such as Breasted and Arthur Weigall, commentators such as the Rev. J. Baikie, and, in general, all people who can imagine no broader standards of love than those put forward in the Gospels.

But a closer reading of the hymns in a totally unprejudiced spirit would have revealed, it seems, a feeling of truly universal brotherhood much more comprehensive than that expressed, as far as we know, by any later religious teacher, west of India, with the noble exception of a few Greeks — such as Apollonius of Tyana — obviously influenced by Indian masters. The fatherhood of the Sun implied, in Akhnaton's eyes, the brotherhood of all sentient beings, human and non-human. The point deserves to be stressed.

As we have remarked, there are two distinct ideas in the hymns, with regard to living creatures. The joy of life, and the excitement that the appearing of daylight produces in all beings, from man to fish — even from man to plant — is one thing. The feeling it reveals, no doubt, in the author of the hymns, a heart open to universal understanding and to sympathy for all that lives. But that alone does not necessarily imply any religious doctrine about the unity of man and

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 200.

beast. In fact, saints full of the same tender love for dumb creatures have honoured, in course of time, religions according to the teachings of which man remains the special object of God's solicitude and the measure of all values; Saint Francis of Assisi, for instance, called all creatures his "brothers," and long before him a follower of the Prophet of Islam, Abu Hurairah, so tradition says, preferred to cut off a piece of his mantle rather than disturb a cat that had gone to sleep upon it. Had Akhnaton only spoken of the thrill that the rising Sun sends through all flesh; had even touching stories come down to us concerning his kindness to animals, yet we would not be able to say, on those grounds alone, what was the exact place of animals in the Religion of the Disk. Such evidence would have borne witness to the king's value as a man; but it would have added little to our knowledge of his Teaching.

Fortunately, he said more. Not only did he look upon the joyous demonstrations of the animal world at daybreak as marks of love for the Sun, but he also considered them as unmistakable expressions of adoration. Birds, said he, "flap their wings with joy, and circle round in praise of the living Aten." And that also is not all. One holding the general views inherited from the Bible by modern mankind — believing, that is to say, that there is a difference of nature, an unbreachable gap, between man and beast — would perhaps be inclined to concede that animals do pay some sort of homage to the material Sun-disk that shines above them, without looking up to any more subtle God, Creator and Animator of the Disk itself. But Akhnaton, following to the end the logical implications of an entirely different view of the universe, boldly asserts, in the longer hymn, that the God Whom beasts and birds worship is the self-same invisible, intangible Essence of all being, manifested in the Sun, Whom man reveres "in every distant country" — the "Ka," or Soul of the Sun; the Soul of the world. "The feathered fowl fly about over their marshes, their wings adoring Thy 'Ka.'"

Not that the young Pharaoh probably believed animals to be aware of the nature of that all-pervading supreme Reality

to which we have referred in the preceding chapter. He did not hold all men, also, or even the majority of men, to be conscious of what they really worshipped in the visible Sun. The sentence we have already quoted: “Thou art in my heart, and there is none who knoweth Thee save Thy Son, Nefer-kheperu-ra Ua-en-ra . . .” (Beautiful-essence-of-the-Sun, Only-one-of-the-Sun) is sufficient to show what an aristocratic conception he had of what is, properly speaking, “religion” — an experience of the Divine within one’s self, which very few men can ever hope to obtain to the full. But just as he believed that men, of whatever country and creed, all tend to the consciousness of the One Essence and worship It in the Sun, in spite of their ignorance, so he held that beasts and birds, even insects and fishes — all living beings — dimly tend to the same ultimate knowledge, and already worship the same Principle of universal life, Cosmic Energy, without being able to conceive its nature, or even to think of it. They are, like the majority of men (and probably to a lesser degree than the average man, though of course nobody knows) vaguely aware of Something fundamental and supreme, which they feel in the heat and light of the Sun; in the magic touch of His life-giving beams. And they worship It, without knowing what It is, with movements and noises, or movements alone, each one to the uttermost capacity of his individual nature and of his particular species. That seems to have been Akhnaton’s view of the relation of animals to God. They were, in his eyes, religious beings of the same nature as man; capable of prayer and adoration, in a vaguer manner (for want of speech) but perhaps with no less elementary emotional intensity. Otherwise — had he not meant that — the word “Ka” would have no sense in the above references.

* * *

Of plants, it is not said in the hymns whether or not, in their thrill at the touch of Aton’s golden beams, there enters any element of adoration. Yet, if the leap of the fish towards the surface of the water is considered as an act of “greeting”

the rising Sun, it seems hardly possible not to see in the water-lillies that “drink themselves drunk” (of His radiance) “before His face,” living creatures enjoying, at a lower level of consciousness, the maximum of ecstatic joy that their nature permits. The king’s words, “they drink themselves drunk,” seem to imply, in their case also, a sort of religious intoxication, a holy rapture, as the warm sun-rays enter the open flowers and reach down into their hearts.

In other words, far from setting up a definite line of demarcation between man and the living world outside man, and considering our species endowed with special rights by a god who made the rest of creatures for its use; far from forestalling, that is to say, the common view of later monotheistic creeds, from that of the Jews onwards, Akhnaton looked upon all sentient beings as children of the same Father — the Sun — and co-worshippers of the same ultimate God, Cosmic Energy, made visible and tangible in the Sun; as brothers, identical in nature, different only inasmuch as the consciousness of the supreme One is more or less developed in each individual. And just as all nations were united, in his eyes, by the fact that they all revere the “Father-and-Mother” of life in various tongues and with various inadequate rites, so were all living species united to one another and to man — and man to them — by the worship of the One Cosmic God.

For such was Aton, the God of all animals (and plants) as well as of all men; the God of all men, in fact, only because He was, primarily and essentially, the God of life in general — man being only a small part of the endless scheme of life. A learned historian wrote, as a criticism of Akhnaton’s Teaching, that the hymns contained hardly any more than an assertion of the pleasure to be alive, a “cat-like” enjoyment of the Sun.¹ A true follower of the inspired Pharaoh would answer: “So much the better”; for the value of the Religion of the Disk lies precisely in the fact that it is perhaps the only religion fit for cats and all beasts no less than for men, and supermen. Its bold views concerning the oneness of matter and energy may well be understood only by a few

¹ H. R. Hall: *Ancient History of the Near East* (Ninth Edit. 1936), p. 599.

human beings, even to-day. But its visible object of worship — the Sun — is, and indeed ever will be, the only manifestation of God which beasts, and birds, and fishes, and plants, and all possible forms of life can be expected to appreciate in their own way, no less than we do in ours, and to worship, if they are to worship anything. However simple be a creed, it can be at the most extended to all mankind — not beyond. Nor can any seer, any prophet, any deified hero receive the allegiance of creatures other than men. Nor can even any idol be worshipped by dumb beasts. But the Sun appeals to all, inspires all, is loved and worshipped by all, from the philosophising devotee of intangible Energy down to the cat, the cock, the fish, the sun-flower. And the young Founder of the Religion of the Disk himself — the perfect Man in whom shone both intellectual and religious genius — would have, no doubt, seen in the movement of the beautiful sensitive feline stretching out its velvet paws with pleasure as it winks at the Sun, and in the raising of his own hands in praise of Him, two parallel gestures of worship — two expressions of the universal love of finite, individual life for the unknown, infinite and impersonal Energy, Source of all life.

* * *

The love of God for the whole world and the love of the whole world for God are thus clearly expressed in the shorter and in the longer hymns. The love of creatures for one another, especially of man for creatures (his fellow-men and others), is not referred to. The hymns are poems in praise of the splendour, power and goodness of God, nothing more; they contain but statements of fact; and the love of man for his brothers of different races and different species is not a fact, even to-day. But it is the natural feeling of whoever realises, as Akhnaton did, that all creatures, from the superman down to the meanest particle of life in the depth of the ocean, have sprung into existence out of the same divine Source — the Sun; that they are sustained by the action of the same vivifying rays and that, each one in its own way, they all adore the only God, Whose face is the resplendent

Disk of our parent star. And in that respect, one can surely say that it is implied in the hymns — nay, that it is the very spirit of Akhnaton's Teaching.

The example of the young Pharaoh's life, whenever available, reveals better than any song the practical implications of his religion. And there is sound evidence that, in various important circumstances, his action, or his restraint from action, was prompted by nothing else but that universal love, natural to a true worshipper of the Sun, which also pervaded his everyday life.

We have spoken of his love for his consort and children, nearly always represented at his side, in paintings and bas-reliefs, in the most unconventional attitudes. We have also mentioned his generosity towards his followers, on whom the contemporary artists portray him lavishing every possible mark of favour. But pleasant and instructive as they are, those scenes of idyllic married happiness and of friendly patronage should not be mistaken for instances of universal love. They no doubt show us, in Akhnaton, a delicate soul, sensitive to the innocent joys of family life and of friendship; they may add to the particular charm he possesses even apart from his Teaching; they appeal to us especially because they make of him, in our eyes, a man like ourselves; they bestow upon him the attractiveness of living life; the eternal actuality of the feelings which they betray bridges the gaping gulf of time, and makes the Founder of the long-forgotten Religion of the Disk young and lovely for ever. But there is, after all, nothing in them which deserves our moral admiration, save perhaps the perfect frankness with which the king allowed them to be rendered. Many men have loved but one woman and have lived with her a peaceful domestic life, without sharing anything of Akhnaton's greatness. And all teachers are inclined to be kind to those who seem to show a keen interest in their message. As for the young Pharaoh's affection for his little daughters, it is but natural. And if one infers, from the fondness he displays towards them, that he probably liked children in general, that is also a trait which many fathers would have in common with him — fathers who, on the other hand, seem to have little experience of that

all-embracing love of which we have spoken in the above pages.

More enlightening is the interest that the king appears to have taken in the welfare of the labourers who dug out the tombs of the gentry from the live rock, and for whom he had built the “model settlement” excavated in modern times in the vicinity of the desert hills, east of Akhetaton. We have said already a few words about that settlement,¹ adding that similar ones were possibly built nearer the City or even within its boundaries, for the men working in its famous glass factories. The main point we observed about it was the relative material comfort and the leisure given to each worker (who felt prompted to decorate his rooms according to his taste, and found time to do so), and above all the fact that the place was entirely free from religious propaganda. That suggests that Akhnaton was sufficiently broadminded to see to his people’s happiness without expecting them, in exchange, to show in his Teaching an interest of which he knew they were incapable. He was no forerunner of the dreamers who prepared the French Revolution, and he probably did not believe in the dogma of equality among men any more than the world at large did in his days, or than sensible folk do at any epoch. He knew that the individuals who dwelt in the little four-roomed houses he had built for them, on each side of the long straight streets of the labour-colonies, had hardly anything in common with him save that they were, like all creatures, happy to see the daylight and that, even in the midst of their intricate superstitions, they unconsciously gave praise to the One God, Source of life, health and joy. Yet he loved them — not with the busy possessive zeal of a missionary in a hurry to bring numbers of people to accept his doctrine, but with the disinterested benevolence of a true lover of creatures, who has no aim but the well-being of those to whom he does good, and who knows that most men cannot rise above an ideal of very concrete happiness. He loved them sincerely and wisely, fully conscious both of the weaknesses that separated them from him (and that called for his toleration) and of their

¹ In Chapter IV, p. 82.

oneness with him, in spite of all, through the common Father of Life (that called for his active interest in their welfare).

Another instance of Akhnaton's impartial love for human beings is to be found in his attitude towards foreigners — nay, towards rebels, enemies of his country and of his power — and finally in his behaviour towards his personal enemies.

What one could call the young king's "internationalism" and his "pacifism" are perhaps, of all the remarkable aspects of his mental outlook, the ones that appeal the most to many modern historians. And it does indeed stir anybody's interest to find such traits as these (which only since yesterday are beginning to gain among us some popularity) developed, and that, to the extent we shall see, in a youth of the early fourteenth century B.C.

It has been observed¹ that Syria and Kush (Nubia) are named before Egypt in the reference quoted above from the longer hymn. The detail is significant. But quite apart from it, the tone of the whole passage is in striking contrast with that of earlier Egyptian hymns addressed to the Sun-god considered as a local god,² and especially with that of such poems as the famous Hymn of Victory composed by a priest of Amon under Thotmose the Third, both in honour of the great god of Thebes and of the conqueror of Syria, and characteristic of the spirit of imperial Egypt. And the history of the king's dealings with foreigners, both friends and foes, fully confirms the impression left by his words.

The presence among his dearest disciples of a man like Pnahesi (or Panehsi), an Ethiopian — others say a Negro³ — shows that he was free from any racial prejudice in his estimation of individuals, although he was the very last man to ignore the natural, God-ordained separation of races, nay, although he considered it as an essential aspect of that

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 164.

² Breasted: *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*, pp. 13-14; also p. 312.

³ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 92.

diversity within order, which characterises Aton's creation.¹ But more eloquent than all is the impartial view he seems to have taken of the rights of foreign countries.

The loss of the Egyptian empire is the object of a further chapter. We cannot here expatiate on it in detail. But we can recall the substance of the astounding tale which the well-known Tell-el-Amarna Letters — Akhnaton's correspondence with foreign kings, and especially with his vassals and governors in Syria and Palestine — tell the modern reader. When his Asiatic dominions were seething with ferments of revolt; when his loyal supporters and his officials, guardians of the "rights" of Egypt in conquered territory, were sending him desperate messages and begging for speedy help, the Founder of the Religion of the Disk deliberately withdrew from doing anything to keep Syria under his sway. When an Amorite princeling, Aziru, son of Abdashirta — what we would call to-day a Syrian "nationalist" — had managed to gather the majority of Syrian chiefs around him, and was attacking the few who had remained on the side of the imperial power, and forcing the Egyptian garrisons to surrender one after the other, then, far from trying to quell the rebellion, the king of Egypt did not stir. And when that same princeling, whom he had summoned to Egypt, appeared at last before him, Akhnaton, instead of having him summarily dealt with (as any imperial ruler would have done), received him kindly and sent him back as the practically independent master of Syria. Aziru was guilty of having had one of the most faithful supporters of Egyptian rule treacherously put to death. The Pharaoh loved the man, by name Ribaddi, who had in vain served him and died for him — so much so that he had even sent, once, a small detachment of mercenaries to his rescue, the only soldiers ever allowed, during his reign, to cross the Egyptian border. And he had written the murderer a long, stern letter, expressing plainly how highly indignant he was at the news

¹ Thou settest every man in his place . . .
 Their tongues are diverse in speech,
 Their shape likewise, and the colour of their skins; for, as a Divider, Thou dividest the strange peoples.
 (Longer Hymn.)

of his deed. Still, he seems to have borne no grudge and entertained no desires of vengeance against him. He seems indeed to have been able to enter his spirit and to understand the ultimate motive of his action — the dream of all Syria united under the rule of Aziru's own people, the Amorites — and to have forgiven him without much effort, as one forgives a crime of which one can penetrate the psychology entirely. Such an attitude is so unusual that it bewilders the mind of the student of history.

In fact, the whole story of Akhnaton's dealings with his vassal States is amazing from beginning to end. It clashes with all one knows of the established relations between subject people of any race and at any epoch, and their natural overlord (*i.e.*, the embodiment of the power that holds them by the right of war). It cannot be explained as the result either of incapacity or of negligence on the part of a king whose administration at home appears to have been firm, and whose sense of responsibility is out of question. It can only be regarded, as we shall stress later on, as one of those material tragedies — and moral triumphs — that follow the application of the noblest principles to the conduct of the affairs of a barbaric world. It shows that Akhnaton was not the man able to keep what Thutmose the First and Thutmose the Third had conquered. But it shows, also, that the reason why he could not keep it is that he was hundreds of years in advance of his times — and of our times. For the principle which guided him, in his systematic refusal to help his loyal vassals in their struggle against the “nationalist” elements of Syria, seems to have been that of the right of the Syrians, as a people distinct from the Egyptians, to dispose of themselves and solve their own problems. He saw clearly that some of them were in favour of Egyptian domination; the majority, however, seemed to be against it. The best course for him — whose unprejudiced sympathy extended equally to all mankind — was to let them fight out the question of their future status without interfering. The interest of Egypt, of his supporters, of himself (who had all to gain from the conservation of his empire and of his prestige, and all to lose by their loss) mattered little, if opposed to that idea of

the right of all nations to live free under the same life-giving Sun, the Father of all. And it is because he loved all men impartially in his universal God of life and love that Akhnaton believed in that right, as in something fundamental.

There is still more. While so many people, even to-day, try to defend the maintenance of a status quo resulting from old wars of aggression, it is, no doubt, staggering to think of a young man proclaiming — and that, not in words, but by his deeds — the brotherhood of all nations and their right to freedom, thirty-three hundred years ago. But one might argue that Akhnaton was, as his detractors call him, a “religious fanatic,” and that such people have no feelings but for what touches their cherished doctrines.¹ The final test of his love for all men lies in his attitude towards the bitterest enemies of his Teaching, the priests of Amon.

We know that he closed the temples of their god; that he abolished his cult, and that the enormous revenues which his predecessors formerly lavished upon it he henceforth used for the glorification of the One God, for the embellishment of Akhetaton, and for different works of public utility. We also know that he confiscated the scandalous wealth of the priests and did away with their influence. But, apart from that, he caused no harm to be done to them.

Sir Wallis Budge, who seems bent on finding fault with all that Akhnaton did, compares him with the Fatimide Khalif Al-Hakim, who reigned in Cairo two thousand five hundred years later, and tells us that “it would be rash to assume that persons who incurred the king’s displeasure in a serious degree were not removed by the methods that have been well known at Oriental courts from time immemorial.”² But he himself admits, after recalling Al-Hakim’s wholesale massacres of his enemies, that “we have no knowledge that such atrocities were committed in Akhetaton,”³ so that the

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 106.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), pp. 107, 108.

³ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 107.

fact of Akhnaton being an “Oriental” king seems to be the only basis on which the twentieth-century historian puts forth his damaging assumption — a very flimsy basis indeed. James Baikie has singled out Budge’s comment as a characteristic example of what prejudice can bring a serious writer to say, once it has got the best of his good sense.¹ We add that, had any act of violence taken place, at Akhnaton’s command or with his consent, against the opponents of his rational creed, the scribes in the pay of the priests of Amon would surely not have failed to give us a graphic account of it, once the national gods had been restored under Tutankhamen. The absence of any such account suffices to lead one to believe that, beyond dispossessing them of their excessive riches, Akhnaton never harmed the men who hated him the most, though he had every power to do so. His behaviour — in contrast with that of those very same men, who pursued him with their bitter curses even after he lay in his grave — suggests that, in his eyes, the awareness of the universal fatherhood of the Sun implied a broad humanity; a sincere love extended, in practical life, to all men, including one’s foes; including those who, in their ignorance, scorn the real God in favour of dead formulas and spurious symbols.

* * *

It implied more. As we have said, it implied love towards all creatures, our brothers, which the Sun has brought into life not for our use, but for each one of them to flourish in health and beauty, and to praise Him to the utmost capacity of its species. Even the plants are created for a higher purpose inherent in their nature — ultimately, for the glorification of the One universal Energy — not for us. It is said in the longer hymn: “Thy beams nourish every field; Thou risest and they live; they germinate for Thee.”²

One would like to possess more positive evidence of Akhnaton’s personal attitude towards animals and plants in

¹ James Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 260.

² The Longer Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 132.

everyday life. There can be no doubt that he loved them; a man who would have looked upon them just as an interesting, perhaps admirable, but yet inferior creation, deprived of a soul of the same nature as our own, would have been incapable of writing the two hymns of which the authorship is ascribed, with practical certainty, to the young Founder of the Religion of the Disk. A painting in which he is portrayed, as usually, in the midst of his family,¹ shows one of the little princesses fondly stroking the head of a tame gazelle which her sister is holding in her arms — a scene which would suggest, to say the least, that pets were welcome in the palace and that the king's children were actually brought up to love dumb creatures. Budge, moreover, tells us that “not only was the king no warrior, he was not even a lover of the chase,”² a statement which is confirmed by the fact that not a single hunting scene, not a single inscription set up in commemoration of a successful chase — as there are so many, exalting the courage and skill of other Pharaohs — has yet been discovered in the amount of pictorial and written evidence dating from his reign. And, while waiting for some more decisive proof before giving the question a final answer, one may wonder if, along with so many other things, traditionally looked upon as normal or even commendable, the action of pursuing and killing beautiful wild beasts and birds for the sake of sport was not forbidden by him who sang the joy of life in all nature, or at least if he had not expressed for that sort of amusement a sufficient repulsion for his courtiers to refrain from indulging in it, throughout his reign. Such a disgust on his part would be fully in keeping with the spirit of the Religion of the Disk as revealed to us in the hymns.

The absence of records, or the state in which the existing documents have reached us, makes it difficult for one to say anything more about the application to the king's daily life of that principle of truly universal love and brotherhood, surely implied in what we know of his religion. The paintings

¹ In the tomb of Merira II.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 92.

that portray him eating and drinking have not come down to us sufficiently well preserved for one to assert, without his imagination playing a great part in the guess, which were the items of the royal menu. And imagination always involves the habits and tastes of the author who hazards the guess. The “broiled bone,”¹ for instance, and the “joints of meat”² in honour of Queen Tiy, represented on the walls of the tomb of Huya, can as well be anything else but a “bone” and “joints of meat.” In fact, it is not easy at all to decide what the artist actually intended them to suggest.

The same thing can be said of the piles of offerings heaped upon the altar of the Sun in many a picture where the king and queen are portrayed worshipping. It is hard to make out what they represent, without a great amount of imagination. No scenes actually picturing animal sacrifices have so far been discovered, and the mere presence of bulls garlanded with flowers among the crowd that comes forth to receive the Pharaoh at the entrance of the temple of Aton, on the walls of the tomb of Merira, the High-priest, does not suffice to indicate — let alone to prove — that those creatures were destined to be slain in some solemn oblation. Nor can the fact that living victims, “both animal and human,”³ were offered to Ra in the temples built by the kings of the Fifth Dynasty throw any light on the ritual of the Religion of the Disk as regards sacrifices. Akhnaton did, in many ways, aim at a revival of very old ideas concerning the Sun, and the well-known connection of his cult with that in the most ancient centre of solar worship — the sacred city of Anu, or On — goes to support that view, no less than the strange archaisms in art that we have pointed out, quoting Arthur Weigall. But that does not mean that he accepted the old ritual as it had once been in use. We know that, merely by forbidding to make any image of his God, he suppressed a number of rites that had been essential in the cult of all the

¹ James Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 283.

² Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), pp. 154-155.

³ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 62.

old gods of Egypt. What, exactly, he did away with, and what he kept of the past is not known. The only indication of living creatures being offered to Aton is to be found in the first inscription commemorating the foundation of Akhetaton. There, along with bread, beer, wine, herbs, fruits, flowers, incense and gold, geese, etc., are mentioned among the items offered at the ceremony which solemnised the consecration of the City's territory. Curiously enough, in the second foundation inscription the enumeration is omitted.

It is stated also — on the same boundary-tablets of Akhetaton — that the “hills, deserts, fowl, people, cattle, all things which Aton produced and on which His rays shine” are consecrated to Him by the king, the Founder of the City; that “they are all offered to His spirit.”¹ Were the geese and other living creatures enumerated in the first inscription selected simply so that the animal as well as the vegetable and mineral world might be represented in the ceremony, and “offered to the spirit of the Sun” in the same manner as the whole territory of the future City with all its inhabitants? Or were they actually destroyed according to the age-old custom? And if the traditional rites of sacrifice were observed on that solemn occasion, were they also a part of the daily worship of Aton in the new capital? One can answer neither of these questions with absolute certainty. Arthur Weigall believes that “the ceremonial side of the religion does not seem to have been complex. The priests, of whom there were very few, offered sacrifices consisting mostly of vegetables, fruits and flowers, to the Aton, and at those ceremonies the king and his family often officiated. They sang psalms and offered prayers, and with much sweet music gave praise to the great Father of joy, and love.”² While Sir Wallis Budge tells us plainly that “we know nothing of the forms and ceremonies of the Aton worship,”³ but that “hymns and songs and choruses must have filled

¹ Quoted by A. Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 93.

² Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 108.

³ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 91.

the temple daily”¹ — the only thing that can be asserted about the external side of the Religion of the Disk, without much risk of being mistaken.²

* * *

But even if one supposes that, at least up to the period of the foundation of Akhetaton — that is to say, while the religion of Aton had perhaps retained more points of resemblance with the old solar cult of Heliopolis than it did later on — and, maybe also afterwards, on certain occasions, some oblations of living creatures were made, in the traditional manner, to the Father of Life, that would throw very little light on Akhnaton’s personal attitude towards beasts and birds. It would, anyhow, in no way disprove the belief in the brotherhood of all creatures which we have attributed to him on the basis of the hymns he composed.

Blood sacrifices, so common in the ancient world (and still in present-day India, among the Shakta section of the Hindus), shock the modern man not because they imply a murderous violence — worse cruelties take place to-day, everywhere, in the name of food, dress, amusement and scientific research — but because the modern man fails to put himself in the place of those who once offered them. He cannot realise what they represented to the minds of those people; he does not understand their meaning. We know that many interpretations of sacrifice can be given, some of which are purely practical, but some of which also, on the contrary, involve an idea of disinterested gift to God; a useless gift of what belongs to Him already, one might say, but

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 92.

² Sir Wallis Budge writes, however, in his *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1902), Vol. IV, p. 122: “. . . in its courts” (*i.e.*, in the courts of the temple of Aton) “were altars on which incense was burnt and offerings were laid, and it is possible that the idea of the altars was suggested to the architect Bek, the son of Men, by the altar which the great Queen Hatshepset had erected in her temple at Dêr-al-Bahari. It is an interesting fact that no sacrifices of any kind were offered up, either on the queen’s altar or on the altars of her successors, and it must be noted that the queen says in her inscription on her altar that she built it for her father, Ra-Harmachis, and that Ra-Harmachis was the one ancient god of the Egyptians whom Amen-hotep IV delighted to honour.”

still a gift which the worshipper offers in a spirit of sole devotion. Viewed in that particular light, a blood sacrifice, notwithstanding the gruesome action it supposes, is infinitely less repulsive than the equally or more cruel things that the modern man tolerates or encourages: butchery, hunting, harpooning of whales, and scientific experiments at the expense of sentient creatures. It does not stress the difference between man and beast, nor does it imply the childish and barbaric dogma that beasts have been created for man to exploit at his convenience. It does not sever the tie of brotherhood between the offerer and the victim. In fact, in the early days of history — and among certain Shakta sects of Hindus, still not long ago — men were chosen as victims, and rightly so, no less than beasts. The oblation of life to the interest of mankind — not to God — the standing feature of an order in which religion is free from blood sacrifices without society being innocent of the blood of beasts, is definitely the denial of the sacred unity of life and of the duty of universal love, a permanent insult to the divine Source of all life.

Whatever may have been the ritual in the temples of Akhetaton, there is one fact which invites us to believe that Akhnaton strongly stressed, in his Teaching and by his behaviour, that all living creatures are our brothers through the Sun, our common Father. This is the definite mention, in the inscription on the first boundary-stone of the sacred City, of the solemn burial of the bull Mnevis (or Mreuris) in a tomb in the eastern hills, near the king's own sepulchre and those of his nobles. "And the sepulchre of Mnevis shall be made in the eastern hills, and he shall be buried therein."

Mnevis was the sacred bull symbolising the Sun incarnate in the eyes of the priests of On. By giving him a worthy place of rest in the cemetery of his new capital, the Pharaoh, no doubt, wished to point out the filiation of his cult to that which was perhaps the oldest form of Sun-worship in Egypt, and thereby to impress in its favour a nation naturally inclined to cling to tradition. But there surely was more than that in his gesture. Akhnaton, who cared so little for success, would not, it seems, have done anything simply for the sake

of policy. There must have been some deeper religious significance attached to the honours rendered to the old bull, apart from his being the holy animal of On. The Religion of the Disk was, after all, something quite distinct from the archaic cult of the Sun in On, though it had its roots in it.

What was this religious significance is nowhere stated. But if we bear in mind the spirit of the hymns, in which man, beast, bird, fish and plant are shown in turn to be the objects of the One God's impartial solicitude, and, each one to the capacity of its nature, His worshippers, then it seems quite possible that Akhnaton desired to honour the bull Mnevis less as the sacred bull of On, traditional symbol of vigour and fertility, than as an individual beast standing for Animality in general, the mother of Humanity; standing for the sacred realm of Life, of which human reason is only a late aspect and the clear knowledge of truth the ultimate flower. By the special treatment he gave him, he might well have wished to remind his followers both of the kindness that man should show to all living beings — his brothers — and of the respect he should feel for the great forces of life at play within their dumb consciousness, more frankly and more innocently than in his own.

The inscriptions dating from the time of the great reaction against Akhnaton's work emphasise the decay in which the shrines of the gods and their estates had fallen, during his reign, through neglect. "The sanctuaries were overthrown and the sacred sites had become thoroughfares for the people," states the well-known stele of Tutankhamen in Cairo.¹ It is remarkable that not a word is said about what happened to the sacred beasts — crocodiles, ibis, ichneumons, cats, etc. — that formed such a striking feature in the cult of the local gods. A real "religious fanatic," enemy of the gods and of all that was connected with them, would probably have had those animals destroyed as living idols. But Akhnaton did nothing of the kind, or his enemies would not have omitted to mention it with pious indignation. Not only had

¹ Quoted by Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 5.

he had no quarrel with the living beings which human veneration had set apart as sacred, but perhaps even did he believe that, in the superstition to which they owed such unusual attention, there lay a solid kernel of truth. Whatever might have been the primitive state of religion with which their worship was linked, in the eyes of the mob, they perhaps appeared, in his eyes, as reminders of that great truth, centre of the real religion expounded in his own hymns, namely of the oneness of all life and of the brotherhood of man and beast, united in the common worship of their common Maker, Father and Mother — “the Heat which-is-in-the-Disk.” The silence of Amon’s scribes on their fate during the young Pharaoh’s reign inclines us to believe that they did appear as such to him, and that, thanks to his orders, they lacked neither the food nor the care that they were accustomed to enjoy.

This instance, along with the general tone of the hymns, strengthens our conviction that there was a religious meaning in the royal honours given to the Bull of On — the Beast of the Sun, that stood for all the sacred animals, perhaps as the most ancient, surely as the most exalted of them all; a religious meaning which was none other than that which we have tried to make clear.

If that be so — if our interpretation, that is to say, be the right one — then one should consider Akhnaton not merely as the oldest exponent of the rationalism of our age, the first man (at least west of India) to stress the scientific basis of true universal religion, but also as the forerunner of a world far more beautiful and better than our own; as the first prophet of a new order in which not only would there be no distinction between one’s countrymen and foreigners (and no germs of war), but in which the same loving kindness would extend alike to man and to all living creatures.

In fact, we firmly hold that, unless and until man learns to love his dumb brothers as himself, and to respect them, as children and worshippers of the same Father of all life, he will not be able to live at peace with his own species. He must deserve peace before he can enjoy it. And no society which tolerates the shameful exploitation of sentient

creatures that cannot retaliate, deserves to remain, itself, unmolested by its stronger, shrewder, and better-equipped human neighbours.

If, as we believe, and as the logical implications of his religion suggest, Akhnaton's "internationalism" and "pacifism" were but a consequence of the broader and more fundamental principle of the brotherhood of living creatures; if his love towards all men proceeded from a deeper love towards all life, then one must hail in him perhaps the most ancient exponent of integral truth — at least the oldest one west of India — and, at the same time, one whose spirit the modern world seems still unable to understand; one from whom the yet unborn generations would do well to learn the way of life.

CHAPTER VII

THE WAY OF BEAUTY

We have tried up till now to show, in the Religion of the Disk, the rare combination of rationalism and love which one seeks in vain in most revealed faiths of later times. And we have seen, in its youthful Founder, that alliance of intellectual genius and of saintliness, perhaps still more rarely witnessed at any epoch in the same individual. A closer study of the hymns and of whatever other evidence is available will further stress that, in him, both the lofty rational thinker and the lover of all life were expressions of the all-round artist, and that the keynote of that particular form of Sun-worship which he evolved — on the basis of half-forgotten memories of an antique cult, as old as the world, and of intuitive anticipations of modern thought — lay in an intense sense of beauty.

The hymns are, before all, songs of praise exalting the beauty of the visible Sun, the splendour of light. “Thou art sparkling; Thou art beautiful and mighty. . . . Thy light of diverse colours bewitcheth all faces”; “Thou vivifiest hearts with Thy beauties which are life,”¹ it is said in the shorter hymn. And in the longer hymn, common are the sentences in the same trend that magnify the Disk in heaven as lovely to look upon: “Thy rising is beautiful in the horizon of heaven, O Aten, ordainer of life.”² . . . “Thou fillest every land with Thy beauty,”³ . . . “Thou art beautiful and great and sparkling and exalted above every land.” . . . “Thou art afar off; but Thy beams are upon the earth; Thou art in

¹ Shorter Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), pp. 117-119.

² Longer Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 123.

³ Longer Hymn, Translation of Griffith, quoted by Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 215.

their faces; they admire Thy goings”¹ . . . “creatures live through Thee, while their eyes are upon Thy beauty.”

And not only are such expressions applied to the Sun Himself, but the whole picture of the world pulsating with life and joy under His daily touch — men, bathed and clothed in clean garments, raising their hands in adoration to Him; birds circling round with thrills of joy in the clear morning sky; beasts running and skipping about in fields flooded with light; fishes, whose golden scales shine through the sunlit water as they leap up from the depth, before the rising God; and the tender lilies that open themselves to His fiery kiss and “drink themselves drunk” of warmth, of light, of impalpable effulgences, in the marshes where they bloom — that entire picture, we say, is the inspired vision of an artist which, more than anything else, Akhnaton was.

No less than the perfection of the One God, the hymns exalt the joy of life and the loveliness of the visible world. Life is sweet, in fact, because there is so much beauty all round us. It is a pleasure to have eyes and to behold graceful forms and delicate colours — the green trees and water-reeds, the rich brown earth, the reddish-yellow desert, the blue hills in the distance and, above all, the deep, transparent, boundless, radiant sky, with the flaming Orb — God’s face — “rising, shining, departing afar off and returning”²; to witness the glory of dawn and sunset. It is a pleasure to see happy four-legged creatures stretch out their bodies in the light. It is a pleasure to see a flight of birds sail through the calm, vibrating infinity. It is a pleasure to listen to the noises of life: the song of the crickets, children’s laughter, and the music of the wind in the high trees. It is a pleasure to be alive, for there is beauty in the child, in the beast, in the bird, in the trees — in all that lives; beauty in land, water and sky — in all that is. The emphasis that the young Pharaoh puts on the ravishment of the senses at the sight of daylight — and of all that daylight beautifies — is perhaps equalled only in the masterpieces of Greek literature, centuries later;

¹ Longer Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 124.

² Longer Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 133.

it forestalls the words so often repeated by the chorus in classical tragedies: “It is sweet to behold the Sun.”

* * *

One can say of Akhnaton’s whole life that it was an attempt to establish on this earth, here and now, the reign of perfection. His City, as we have seen previously, was to be the City of God, the model of that ideal world which he visualised in his heart and which seems to us, still to-day, so far, far away, so unreal, so impossible. And it was “a place of surpassing beauty,”¹ planned “with delicate taste and supreme elegance.”²

We have already spoken³ of its temples with their successive pillared courts open to the sky; of its fair villas surrounded with palm-groves and flower-beds; of the king’s palace, that exceeded in splendour that in which Amenhotep the Third had spent in Thebes his luxurious days; and of the peaceful gardens — “Precincts of Aton” — that lay to the south, with their colonnaded pavilions, their verdant arbours, their artificial lakes full of lotuses. The very choice of its site, in the eastern half of a broad plain cut in two by the Nile and encircled in a double horizon of mountain-ridges, had been an act of good taste. From the flat roofs of Akhetaton one could see the river shining, to the west, beyond groves and gardens and stretches of green fields. And from the opposite bank onwards, the plain — a narrow ribbon of fertile earth and a wide expanse of desert — unrolled its changing succession of pale or dark colours, finally lost in pink or blue mist, up to the distant hills behind which the Sun would set. To the east, the same broad panorama of rich vegetation, sand and sky extended up to the chalky white cliffs, honeycombed with tombs, that limited the horizon — the hills of rest. At dawn, the western mountains were the first to shine at the touch of the Lord of Rays. And at dusk, the cliffs in the east were the last to reflect the crimson after-

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922) p. 175.

² Arthur Weigall: *Short History of Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1934), p. 151.

³ In Chapter IV.

glow. Thus the glory of Ra-Horakhti of the Two Horizons was manifested to all the dwellers in His City, as day after day dawned and faded away over the beautiful bay where the place was built. The landscape itself was a hymn and a teaching.

The elegant architecture of the houses and villas, of the palace and temples — the sober outlines of light-coloured brick against a clear sky; the harmonious perspectives of pillared porticos and inner halls, with deep contrasts of light and shadow; the imposing profile of the pylons with their flag-staves bearing fluttering pennons of purple; and the airy splendour of the sacred courts with their single altar smoking under the bright sunshine, on a flight of steps — that architecture, we say, was in tune with its natural setting. And the fresh, shady gardens in the neighbourhood of the desert seemed all the more fresh and delightful; and the reddish-yellow sands in the background all the more austere, all the more endless and barren — full of sunshine alone; full of infinite peace. The City was not, as are so many others, a monument of man's domination over nature, and of his pride. It was but a beautiful detail added to the immense landscape, as a permanent offering to the Soul of all beings, the Sun; a monument of worship lying between the silent sands, the majestic River and the radiant sky.

* * *

But it is not only in the emphasis he put in his hymns on the beauty of the Sun-disk; not only in the choice of an inspiring site and in the building of “as fair a city as the world had ever seen”¹ that Akhnaton proves himself an artist in the full sense of the word. The arts held a large place both in his cult and in his life. As far as one can tell from the paintings and reliefs that depict him in familiar attitudes, his days were works of beauty.

As already said, we know hardly anything about the ceremonial of the Religion of the Disk; but we do know that

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 176.

music and singing — and dancing — were an essential part of it. It is written in the shorter hymn that “singing men and singing women and chorus men produce joyful sounds in the Hall of the House of the Benben Obelisk, and in every temple of Akhetaton, the seat of Truth.” In a painting in the tomb of the high-priest Merira, that represents a visit of the king and queen to the main temple of Aton, probably on a festive occasion, one can see a group of blind musicians singing to the accompaniment of a seven-stringed harp. And this is not the only pictorial evidence of musical instruments used in the temples to glorify the One God. Moreover, from the famous stele¹ in which Tutankhamen describes the state of Egypt under the “heretic” Pharaoh, it appears that Akhnaton also maintained a large number of dancers in connection with the service of Aton.²

We know, too, that the places of worship which he dedicated, be it in Thebes during the first years of his reign, be it in his sacred City, were richly adorned with frescoes and bas-reliefs and statues, some fragments of which have been found. The temple built as Queen Tiy’s private house of worship, on the occasion of her coming to Akhetaton, and named “Shade of the Sun,” contained statues of the king himself, of Amenhotep the Third, and of the dowager-queen, between the columns that stood on either side of its main court.³ There were statues of the royal couple — or perhaps of Akhnaton with one of his daughters⁴ — in front of each column at the entrance of the pillared portico which led into the smaller temple of Aton, behind the main one. And it is highly probable that, in the shrines dedicated to the memory of the king’s father and to that of his ancestors, Thotmose the Fourth, Amenhotep the Second, etc., statues of those monarchs were to be seen as well as diverse representations of them in colour and relief.

This shows that, rigorously monotheistic as it surely was,

¹ In the Cairo Museum.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 92.

³ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 158.

⁴ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 174.

the Religion of the Disk remained a religion strongly appealing to the senses; one that readily put to contribution all manner of artistic skill, and gave occasion to the greatest display of beauty. Men and women attached to the temples praised the "Lord and Origin of life" in solos and choruses, and on the harp. Sistrums were rattled and drums beaten at certain solemn moments during the ceremonies. And, no doubt also to the accompaniment of music, sacred dancers expressed, in symbolical attitudes and harmoniously suggestive movements, the succession of the seasons or the daily course of the Sun. Akhnaton, so vehemently opposed to any graven or painted representation of God, did not object in the least to the presence in temples of statues of human beings whom he wished to honour, or of fanciful figures, semi-animal, semi-human, such as that remarkable sphinx en relief in his own likeness, familiar to all students of the Tell-el-Amarna art. Any image of God, already sacrilegious in itself by its necessary inadequacy, could tempt the worshipper to forget the Unnameable and Limitless, and to carry his homage to the concrete shape. It was a lie and a danger. While in the portraits in colour or in stone of people destined to be exalted, but not adored, there lay no such falsehood and no such snare. The Pharaoh not only tolerated them, but seems to have encouraged his sculptors to produce them, for the embellishment of the "Houses of Aton." Perhaps, also, did he expect to strengthen the faith of his followers by maintaining them in contact with the long tradition of Egyptian Sun-worship, of which the upstart cult of Amon was, in his eyes, a distortion, and his own Teaching the culmination. That worship had been linked, in the minds of the people, with a religious reverence for the monarch and his line; the fact was not one to be disdained.

Be it so or otherwise, Akhnaton evidently looked upon melodious sounds and rhythmic movements, and colours and forms pleasing to the eye, as powerful means of edification; and he closely associated his rational cult with all the arts. Nothing was more alien to his spirit than that austere puritanism, enemy of dance and music, which so many

zealous reformers of various creeds put forward centuries after him, apparently with the purpose of turning the hearts of the faithful away from the world back to God. To him, the visible beauty of the world was god-like; the refined joys of the senses were uplifting to the soul. And the latter-day idea of the opposition of “the world” to God would have seemed to him impious and absurd.

What perhaps characterises Akhnaton the best, besides his uncompromising truthfulness, is the atmosphere of serene beauty in which he seems to have moved in daily life. We have sufficiently stressed the quiet splendour of his material surroundings, the place of the arts in his leisure, and his constant contact with nature, not to have to insist on those points here too elaborately. Yet we cannot help recalling the sets of reliefs in the tomb of Huya which represent the royal family and the dowager-queen feasting, while two string bands play alternately. One of the musical groups consists of “four female performers, the one playing on a harp, the second and third on a lute, and the fourth on a lyre,” while in the other can be distinguished “a large standing lyre, about six feet in height, having eight strings and being played with both hands.”¹ Nor can we refrain from quoting Arthur Weigall’s charming description of another representation of Akhnaton in the privacy of his palace — a picture indeed more eloquent than those of the banquet in honour of Queen Tiy and similar such, for it portrays the king not on any special occasion (on which an unusually lavish display of artistic decorum and extra entertainments might be expected), but simply sitting with his consort and children — and no courtiers — on an ordinary day like any other. “The royal family is shown inside a beautiful pavilion, the roof of which is supported by wooden pillars painted with many colours and having capitals carved in high relief to represent wild geese suspended by their legs and above them branches of flowers. The pillars are hung with garlands of flowers, and from the ceiling there droop festoons of flowers and trailing branches of vines. The roof of the pavilion on the outside is

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), pp. 156-157.

edged by an endless line of gleaming cobras, probably wrought in bronze. Inside this fair arbour stand a group of naked girls playing upon the harp, the lute and the lyre, and no doubt singing to that accompaniment the artless love-songs of the period. Servants are shown attending to the jars of wine which stand at the side of the enclosure. The king is seen leaning back upon the cushions of an armchair. . . . In the fingers of his left hand he idly dandles a few flowers, while with his right hand he languidly holds out a delicate bowl in order that the wine in it may be replenished. This is done by the queen who is standing before him, all solicitous for his comfort. She pours the wine from a vessel, causing it to pass through a strainer before flowing into the bowl. Three little princesses stand nearby: one of them laden with bouquets of flowers, another holding out some sweetmeat upon a dish, and a third talking to her father.”¹

Here we have one more instance of Akhnaton’s love of every form of sensuous beauty. Both the loveliness of nature and the fine arts were to him a part and parcel of ordinary life no less than of the temple services. They produced something like a rhythmic accompaniment to the simple gestures that we repeat every day; a background on which the most monotonous actions took on a decorous beauty. The sweet-smelling freshness of those pillars festooned with flowers and green leaves, the sight of fair figures and harmonious movements, the soft music, the elegant shape of the cup as well as the taste of the good rich wine, all combined to raise that most ordinary act of quenching his thirst to the level of a higher enjoyment involving the whole being — a moment of beauty. Life was to be a succession of such moments to anyone who, like him, lived it in a spirit of sincerity, of innocence and of understanding; to anyone, that is to say, who knew the value of simple things — of a fiery reflection upon the wall, of a sweet voice, of a child’s smile — as well as of the so-called great ones, and who could constantly feel, as he did, the presence of the divine Disk, with His rays stretched over the world, “encompassing all lands which He hath

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), pp. 145-146.

made,” beautifying, dignifying, sanctifying the humblest manifestations of everyday existence.

The things which, in our age of specialized activities might appear as trifles when connected with the life of a philosopher and of a prophet, did not seem so to him. From the pictures we have of him, it is visible that he brought in the care of his person, and particularly of his dress, an eagerness that numbers of later saintly teachers would have disdained. Not only was he scrupulously clean — as was all the aristocracy of Egypt — but he knew what to wear, and how to wear it. The exquisite painted relief in the Berlin Museum, in which one sees him smelling a bunch of flowers, and the picture in the tomb of Merira which shows him burning perfumes at the altar of the Sun,¹ speak eloquently of the supreme elegance of his attire. Save on very special occasions, he seems to have discarded the abundant display of jewels customary to other Pharaohs, and in those two pictures, as in many others, he is portrayed wearing none at all. His only ornaments are the soft pleats of his garment itself — a simple white skirt of fine linen, that hangs gracefully from the waist, with a long purple sash. And the garment seems to have no other function but to underline the natural grace of the body.

Commenting upon the portrait in the Berlin Museum just referred to, Professor H. R. Hall rightly remarks that there is in it a delicacy only to be found in the best productions of Greek sculpture.² We may add, turning our attention from that one among many masterpieces of the Tell-el-Amarna school to the model who inspired it, that Akhnaton’s passionate love of tangible beauty, of sunshine and of healthy joy, such as it is expressed both in his poems, in his cult and in his person, makes him, perhaps, the first illustrious individual embodiment of that very ideal of art and life which the Hellenes were to put forward, as a nation, a thousand years after him. We can say more: his ideal of integral, harmonised perfection, in which the physical side of things was not

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 143.

² H. R. Hall: *Ancient History of the Near East* (Ninth Edit. 1936), p. 305.

to be under-estimated — in which even such details as the pleats of a drapery had their importance — contrasts with the contempt of the body shown, not only by the early Christians, but by some of the most prominent Neo-platonists,¹ and also, strange as it may seem, by the bitterest and most determined champion of Hellenic culture against growing Christianity, Emperor Julian.² It may be declared, without fear of anachronism, that however great they were, those men were far less “Greek” — in the classical sense of the word — than the young king of the Nile Valley who died two hundred years before the Achaeans besieged Troy.

* * *

A lover of sensuous beauty Akhnaton was indeed, and to the utmost. But he did not stop there. From the happy awareness of colour, line and movement, of touch, of sound, of fragrance, he lifted himself, as we know, to the subtler plane of abstract relations and finally to the realisation of the all-pervading oneness of the supreme entity: the Power within the Sun.

We need not here expatiate on the great principles on which his creed was based, principles of which modern science has confirmed the amazing accuracy: the ultimate equivalence of all forms of energy, and the ultimate identity of Energy and Matter. As most if not all ideas of genius, these appear to have resulted from some direct insight into truth, which it is not possible to account for either by the data of external experience available at the time, or by the ordinary means of discursive reasoning. And what the hymns tell us plainly, and what the pictures suggest to us of Akhnaton’s extreme sensitiveness to beauty, makes us think of the fundamental connection between scientific enlightenment and artistic inspiration, put forward so forcefully, nowadays, in autobiographical essays, by eminent creative scientists.³ The knowledge which the Pharaoh expressed by

¹ See *The Life of Plotinus*, by his disciple Porphyry.

² Gibbon: *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. II (Everyman’s Library), p. 349.

³ For instance, by H. Poincaré, *Science et Méthode* (Chap. III, pp. 50-59); *La Science et l’Hypothèse*, p. 186.

calling the “Lord of Rays” also “Great One of roarings” (or thunders) and by identifying the “Heat-and-light-within-the-Disk” with the Disk itself, came to him, it would seem, as all great ideas do to their discoverers, namely, through some spontaneous intuition following a long period of subconscious preparation. And if, in most cases, the aesthetic element plays a notable part in the discovery of truth; if a particular solution of a mathematical problem, or a particular explanation of physical data, seems to draw the mind to it by its very simplicity and elegance, then we can all the more safely conjecture that the young author of the Hymns and inspirer of the Tell-el-Amarna school of art was urged to put forth his hypothesis of universal oneness partly, if not solely, for the beauty of the endless horizons it opened to his vision; for the impressive harmony it brought into his conception of things.

His preparation was that very quest for the perfect that appears to have possessed him all his life, the “perfect” being, in his eyes, primarily, that which would totally satisfy his aesthetic sense: flawless beauty. And the consciousness of the unity of all forms of energy in the intangible Soul of the Sun — of the unity of all appearances in the One Reality — seems to have come to him as the sharp, direct feeling of a perfect pattern, half-hidden by the necessary limitations of material existence. It was the vision of an immense orderly scheme, remarkable by its stately simplicity; the product of his own mind, no doubt, but destined, one day, to prove objective. It was, actually, the vision of the permanent underlying beauty of the Universe, to which an all-round artist could alone have access.

Thus Akhnaton loved the world of forms because it is beautiful, and, through it, soon grasped and loved the eternal beauty of the unseen world of essences. The splendour of the Disk that rises and sets led him to the worship of the “Ka” of the Disk, the supreme Essence. When, a thousand years later, Plato put forward, in immortal language, his famous dialectic of love — the glorious ascension of the enraptured soul from beautiful forms to beautiful Ideas, everlasting prototypes of all that appears for a while in the phenomenal

play — he expressed nothing else but that which the youthful Founder of the Religion of the Disk had once realised, lived and taught.

* * *

Not only does the king's insight into the nature of the physical world seem to spring mainly from an innate yearning for the beautiful, but his belief in the oneness of life — that truth at the back of his whole scale of values — has apparently the same origin.

The hymns tell the beauty of the Sun and the joy of all creatures at His sight. The works of the Tell-el-Amarna school — of those artists whom Akhnaton had “taught to look at the world in the spirit of life”¹ — show us what the beauty of creatures meant both to the disciples and to the Master. The happy scenes of animal and plant life, such as, for instance, those depicted on the pavements of the king's palace,² have more than a decorative value. They preach the love of living beings for the sake of that beauty which shines in even the meanest among them. They remind us what a masterpiece of the supreme Artist is a quadruped, or a butterfly; a poppy; even a blade of grass; and they prompt us to love the graceful innocent things which only wish to live and enjoy the daylight: the young calf frisking in the sunshine, the wild geese, the fish that leap up from the depth to greet the Sun, the spotless lilies. At the sight of those representations, the modern man recalls the passage which Coleridge puts in the mouth of his “Ancient Mariner,” gazing at the water-snakes:

“O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare . . .”

Those were the words of a poet who, in the midst of the tragically man-ridden world that we know too well, found in his heart a glimpse of eternal truth. But here, in the scattered evidence which enables one to rediscover the spirit

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 181.

² Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 178.

of the Religion of the Disk, we have that same truth expressed under the inspiration of one who endeavoured to remodel the world on the basis of it, and who lost an empire for its sake.

For, as we have already stressed, Akhnaton's conscientious objection to war which brought both the end of Egyptian domination in Syria and, indirectly, the downfall of the cult of Aton in Egypt, seems to have been but one aspect of his objection to the infliction of suffering in general. And in the light of all that we know of him through his poems, we may, it seems, safely say that the main source of his love for living beings, from man to plant, and the main reason for him to wish to spare them, lay in his intense awareness of the beauty of life as such. He saw in every sentient creature, patiently brought forth from an obscure germ by the action of divine Heat and Light and graced with all the loveliness of its species, a work of art far too precious to be destroyed or spoilt for the sake of sport or vain glory — even for the sake of “national interest.” And that is apparently why we find, during his reign, neither records of chase nor accounts of battle.

It would seem that he had little time for such “grim beauty” as painters and poets have sometimes tried to bring out of scenes of horror. And that confirms our view that visible beauty, however important in his eyes, was not all to him. Beyond it — and through it — he sought that permanent harmony between fact and thought, action and ideal, existence and essence; that subtler beauty which cannot be discovered from a superficial view of things, and which is the essence of goodness. A scene of horror can only be beautiful seen in its outlines or from a distance. Once one stoops to examine the details that go to make it, one finds that it implies too much ugliness to be described as such. Nothing which presupposes the distortion of living forms through pain can be styled as beautiful, for in healthy sentient life lies the actual masterpiece of universal Energy and the supreme beauty.

Here we may remark that, for Akhnaton as for the greatest artist among Greek philosophers, more than ten centuries

after him, the Beautiful and the Good were closely interrelated, if not identical. But instead of saying, as Plato was to do, that “the Beautiful is the radiance of the Good,” it seems, from the idea that we can form of him, that the young Prophet of the Sun would have said that the Good is that which is consistently beautiful. Strictly speaking, it is correct to assert, with several modern authors, that there is no reference to morality in Akhnaton’s Teaching and that, to him, that which is was right.¹ On the other hand, it would be unfair to the Religion of the Disk not to admit that, though it put forth no list of commandments and prohibitions, it had nevertheless a close connection with action. And the practical side of it appears to have rested entirely upon an aesthetic basis. Moral values were, it seems, to Akhnaton, but the highest among aesthetic values. In other words, beauty was, in his eyes, the ultimate criterion of moral as well as of intellectual truth,² and the safest guide to the discovery of both.

* * *

We can thus characterise the Religion of the Disk as a religion of beauty. Whatever it be in addition to that, springs from that fundamental aspect of it. In particular, its three negative features which we have pointed out in a previous chapter — namely, the absence in it of any mythology whatsoever; the absence of any account of supernatural happenings; and the absence of any explicit theory of the next world, marks of rationality to be found in very few other religions if in any at all — seem partly ascribable to a consistently “pagan” spirit. Mythological symbolism was superfluous; the facts of the physical world were beautiful enough to stand at the background of any solemn cult and to inspire any sensitive soul. Nature was beautiful enough, without man craving for the supernatural. And this life, here and now, was beautiful enough for one to live it with all one’s concentrated interest, drawing from it its daily joys and its daily teachings, without seeking to pierce the mystery of the

¹ Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 120.

² See above, p. 170.

great beyond. At the most, as we have seen, we find, in the prayer on Akhnaton's coffin and in the inscriptions in the tombs of his followers, the idea of a prolongation of individual existence in a blissful state of subtler materiality in which one would still enjoy the sight of the Sun. That is all. The Founder of the Aton cult could not imagine anything more beautiful than the resplendent fact of our parent star. That was the visible expression of the One God. To contemplate it was paradise. To understand the nature of its radiance and its relation to ourselves and to all things was to experience everlasting life. To worship It in truth (*i.e.*, in the proper spirit) was to attain the goal of man — the goal of life. And through the overwhelming appeal of sensuous beauty, that goal was within our reach, and paradise was here. It was perhaps beyond the grave also; but it was here already, on this side of the eternal gates. For, to Akhnaton, bliss seems to have been nothing else but the state in which the fact of unmixed beauty fills one's consciousness — as when one beholds the Sun in the manner he did.

There is, no doubt, as we have said, much more in the hymns than a mere physical enjoyment of the Sun. But a thrill of well-being — intensely physical indeed — at the contact of light, of warmth and of happy living nature; a feeling of plenitude at the sight of the loveliness of the visible world is surely there, at the root of all subsequent idealism. The repeated praise of the sweetness of sunshine; the choice of expressions that suggest, in the most various creatures, an exaltation of all their being at the appearing of the Sun; the predominant idea of universal fecundity, expressed in different pictures of appealing beauty; all go to confirm, in those poems, that essentially pagan joy which we have mentioned above. We use here the word “pagan” in its noblest sense, suggesting thereby how much the inspired king stands, in our eyes, as an upholder of that ideal of healthy, joyful, sensuous perfection — and also of clear rational thinking — towards which Greece and the whole Mediterranean world have strived, long after him, in their days of glory; how much he appears to us, nay, as the historic forerunner of classical Hellas, at least as we imagine it.

He is, we have said, nearer to the Greek ideal, rooted in the depth of his aesthetic nature, than many of those who have claimed, in course of centuries, an unflinching allegiance to Hellenism. What is remarkable is that, from that very sensitiveness to beauty, he seems to have received the impulse that carried him far beyond the stage of experience that corresponds, historically, to Hellenism; far beyond that also, attained, in the name of Christianity and of modern humanitarianism, by people only too aware of the limitations of classical pagan culture.

The love implied in his songs is not that unjustified interest in our species before all others, preached by most of the creeds which have transcended the national and mainly ritualistic religions of antiquity. It springs from the consciousness of the brotherhood of all beings to whom the Sun gives life and loveliness. It is the truly universal love in the light of which the superstition of the chosen species appears as puerile and barbaric as that of the chosen nation; the love for the beast, the fish, the plant, no less than for man, clearly put forward by none of the living religions of the world save a few of those evolved in India or derived from Indian teachings. But while, in those doctrines, such love seems based upon metaphysical considerations or upon moral principles, it appears to be, in the Religion of the Disk, the immediate spontaneous outcome of an overwhelming sense of the beauty of life. If indeed, as for Akhnaton, beauty be the final measure of all values, then surely man is not the centre of the universe and the focus of all desirable activity; for the other children of the life-giving God are as lovely as he, if not more, in their absolute innocence.

* * *

Thus the aesthetic attitude towards life which the modern man, badly acquainted as he generally is with a remoter past, is inclined to style as "hellenic," can lead a true worshipper of beauty — as it did, in fact, lead Akhnaton — to that truly universal love which neither Greek nor Christian consciousness seems to have realised, save occasionally.

Ever since the bitter struggle between the eminently artistic and rational spirit of Hellenism and eminently humanitarian Christianity, in the early centuries of the most widely accepted western era, the best minds of the West, from the author of the “Stromata” onwards, have been yearning for the synthesis which would unite the excellences of the complementary wisdoms. Possibly also, in other areas of culture, the need of a similar synthesis has been experienced between old thought-currents, each one expressing separately the everlasting ideals of aesthetic perfection, of intellectual efficiency and of kindness that knows no limits.

The Religion of the Disk, with its joyous intoxication of sunshine and tangible beauty, finally leading to a most rational outlook on the universe and to the love of all forms of life, seems to provide an answer to the age-long yearning for something that would satisfy all sides of our nature at the same time. The inspiration that fills it is perhaps of the only sort that can lift us to heaven without detaching us from this lovely and lovable earth. And whatever be one’s opinion of him on other points, one has to admit that we do find combined in its Founder — indissolubly blended into one blissful awareness of dancing harmony, in the midst of full-blooming life — the best of the ideal Athenian, more than a thousand years before Plato, and the best of the ideal Indian, some nine centuries before the Buddha.

CHAPTER VIII

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE RELIGION OF THE DISK

One of the most frequent criticisms brought against the Religion of the Disk by modern authors is that it is devoid of the sense of righteousness. Sir Wallis Budge writes plainly that “no consciousness of sin is expressed in any Aten text now known, and the hymns to Aten contain no petition for spiritual enlightenment, understanding or wisdom.”¹ In another passage, after comparing Aton to Varuna as described in the Rig-Veda, he adds: “But Varuna possessed one attribute which, so far as we know, is wanting in the Aten: he spied out sin, and judged the sinner.”² And J. H. Breasted, though, contrarily to Budge, he on the whole admires the Teaching, tells us that “our surviving sources for the Aton faith do not disclose a very spiritual conception of the deity, nor any attribution to him of ethical qualities beyond those which Ra had long been supposed to possess. Our sources do not show us that the king had perceptibly risen from a discernment of the beneficence to a conception of the righteousness in the character of God, nor of His demand for this in the character of men.”³ There is hardly anyone but Sir Flinders Petrie and A. Weigall who seem fully to appreciate the “great change” which marks Akhnaton’s reign “in ethics also,”⁴ and to recognise the practical value of the Teaching put forward in the hymns, in the tomb inscriptions of Tell-el-Amarna, and

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 115.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 114.

³ J. H. Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 120. Similar criticism is made by J. D. S. Pendlebury in *Tell-el-Amarna* (Edit. 1935), pp. 156-157 and p. 160.

⁴ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 218. Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 152.

in the luminous instance of Akhnaton's life as a ruler and as a man.

Yet even Weigall, when comparing the Religion of the Disk with Christianity, is prompted to state that "this comparison must of necessity be unfavourable to the Pharaoh's creed, revealing, as it does, its shortcomings."¹ This opinion, so entirely different from ours, springs eventually from that idea, more strongly expressed by other authors, that the consciousness of evil is lacking in the Religion of Aton.

It is a fact that in the existing documents relating to the Teaching, there is no exhaustive list of commandments and prohibitions, no precise rules — no rules at all — for the guidance of the disciple's life, such as one finds in the sacred books of most religions. There is no mention of a distributive Justice, and it is possible, even probable, that Akhnaton disbelieved "in the dogma of rewards for the righteous and punishments for the evil-doers."² There is, indeed, nowhere the slightest hint at the existence of a positive Power of evil, age-old Antagonist of a beneficent God and master of deceit, as the Satan of the Bible; nowhere the slightest awareness of what later ethical religions have styled as "sin" — *i.e.*, the transgression of God's orders. Akhnaton's God gave no orders. He is an "amoral" God. We must remember that He is not a man; nor a being superior to man who made man in his likeness. He is the immanent Power within all things; the Source of life — not a person; the One indefinable Principle that burns in heat, shines in light, roars and sings in sound, moves through matter as electricity; the Principle that exists at the root of the ultimate unity of existence. Can such a God be reduced to our petty standards? Can He be "good" or "bad" at our scale? — be "moral" or "immoral"? No immanent God can be. To no God who bears to the physical universe the intimate relation which Akhnaton's "Shu-within-the-Disk" bears to it, can be ascribed a moral personality. His consciousness, if any, is not a personal one. His love for His creatures is as indiscriminate as the

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 127.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 95.

warmth of the Sun-beams, that radiate both over the good and over the wicked. The idea of a distributive Justice is a human idea — not God’s concern. Morality is in us; not in Him.

* * *

Should then a follower of Akhnaton take the easy course of doing just what he pleases?

The Founder of the Religion of the Disk insisted upon “life in truth.” “There is in his Teaching, as it is fragmentarily preserved in his hymns and in the tomb-inscriptions of his nobles, a constant emphasis upon ‘truth’ such as is not found before or since,” says Breasted.¹ He called himself “Ankh-em-Maat” — “the One-who-lives-in-Truth.” But what is truth? “Maat,” writes that learned scholar in hieroglyphics whom we have many times quoted, Sir Wallis Budge, “means what is straight, true, real, law, both physical and moral, the truth, reality, etc.”² By “living in truth” the king, adds he, “can hardly have meant ‘living in or by the law,’ for he was a law to himself. But he may have meant that in Atenism he had found the truth or the ‘real’ thing, and that all else, in religion, was a phantom, a sham. Aten lived in maat, or in truth and reality, and the king, having the essence of Aten in him, did the same.”³

If this interpretation of maat be the right one, then it appears that a man’s behaviour should be, in Akhnaton’s eyes, inspired by the knowledge of the few facts and the acceptance of the few supreme values which form, as we have seen, the solid background of the Aton faith. These facts were the oneness of the ultimate essence, and the unity of all life, its manifold and ever-changing expression; the fatherhood of the Sun and, through Him, of the Power within Him — Cosmic Energy — and the subsequent brotherhood of all living creatures, not of man alone; the unity of the visible and of the invisible world, of the physical — the material —

¹ J. H. Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 120.

² Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 86.

³ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), pp. 86-87.

and of the more subtle, as put forward in the identity of the fiery Disk with the Heat and Light within it. In other words, they were the few general truths which modern research is gradually confirming, and which would still satisfy, it seems, the thinking men of the remotest ages to come. The Religion was the only true religion, and “all but it was a phantom, a sham,” in the sense that it was not a particular creed, with undeniable religious appeal but, also, with necessary limitations destined to become more and more apparent as centuries would pass; not a religion among many, but the framework from which no teaching could seriously depart if it was to be absolutely universal, and to stand victoriously the test of time. It set forth no commandments; it had no catalogue of “dos” and “don’ts.” Yet it could be, and was, a guide to behaviour, for the reason that our behaviour is the outcome of what we are — that is to say, of what we know and of what we love. The Religion of the Disk was based upon the intuitive knowledge of this harmonious universe, dominated (at our scale at least) by the Sun, our “Father and Mother,” and upon the love of its beauty. He who possessed these needed no commandments in order to live according to the Master’s standards — in harmony with the beautiful world, in harmony with life, with his own deeper nature; “in truth.”

The visible universe obeys laws — those great cosmic laws, of whatever nature they be, that bring into it that majestic order of which the trained human mind can catch a glimpse; the laws that rule the course of the stars and the play of matter. The invisible world, likewise, has its laws of action and reaction, no less true. He who wishes to “live in truth” should not only think of those divine unwritten laws “both physical and moral,” and act rationally, in small things as well as in great ones, but strive to reflect, at his scale, the beauty of the sunlit earth and the impartial kindness of the Power within the Sun. He should love all creatures as himself — as He loves them, Whose rays cause them to live. He should do no harm to them under any pretext; injury to the humblest beast or bird, on the part of a rational being who should know better, is an insult to the Lord of life, a

sacrilege. But that is not enough; he should help them to live and to be happy; to enjoy the light and heat of the common Father and render praise to Him, each one in the manner of its species. He can only be fully rational — in tune with the higher ends of his nature — if he be actively loving, and beneficent to all that lives, as Akhnaton himself, judged by the spirit of his beautiful hymns, appears to have been.

One must remark that this faithfulness to a divine pattern, this feeling of the beauty and importance of life, this active, impartial beneficence were not ordered by the young king as befitting a true follower of his Teaching. They were part and parcel of the personality of whoever was fit to be a disciple. And the Teaching was wasted upon those who, by nature, did not possess a sufficient sensitiveness and a sufficient intelligence to be already inclined that way, in their better moments at least. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Akhnaton seems to have actually preached his doctrine only to a very few people. By the nature of the worship it involved, the Religion of the Disk was, as we have said, suitable to all creatures, from the superman down to the sunflower. But in its practical implications it supposed such a degree of inborn refinement that, far from being applicable to all men, it was, and probably will always remain, a Teaching for the elite. Its morality, essentially aesthetic, and therefore aristocratic, was too free and too generous for the many to understand — a reason why the Aton faith has so often been characterised in our times as entirely “amoral.”

There appears to be some ambiguity about the word “morality.” What commonly passes off as such would be better described as obedience to the rules of some definite society at a definite stage of development; to police regulations in the broader sense. According to that popular conception, what one does is more important than what one is; what one is only matters inasmuch as it cannot but determine what one thinks and feels, and ultimately what one does, when left to one’s self. And what one has to do or not to do is decided by the requirements of the community to which one belongs. In all successful religions, the list of “moral” commandments and prohibitions is intimately

linked up with the idea of community, of society; and its practical stability depends upon its susceptibility of receiving various interpretations as the conception of society changes with time and place. Its aim is mainly to make each one of the faithful the worthy member of a human group, or of several broadening human groups — family, tribe or caste, nation, race, humanity.

In the Religion of the Disk, there was no such conception of gregarious obligations. It was not a religion fitting the members of any particular group at any particular epoch; it was the Teaching suited to the fully-conscious individual, in love with the beauty of the Sun and aware, through Him, of his personal relationship to the whole of living creation. The fully-conscious individual — of which the Founder of the religion is himself a luminous prototype — has transcended the bondage of all arbitrary communities. He is actually the member of no group, save of the totality of sentient individuals of all races and species. He owes allegiance to the Father of life alone. He fulfils the “duties” that other men recognise towards their narrow groups, but not for the same reasons nor in the same spirit as they; whenever those duties do not clash with the broader and more fundamental obligation of love towards all life, he fulfils them, in the very name of that deeper obligation. In other cases he does not look upon them as duties. The natural law of his being is the only law of his conduct. And his conduct is consistent with a norm of inner beauty never approached by any group-regulations, precisely because his being has attained the elegance of natural honesty, natural courage and natural kindness. He can do what he pleases, and remain an exponent of reason and of love; nay, indeed, it is only by acting thus, according to his own law, that he is able to remain so; for love and reason are at the root of his being, and he is aware of it.

Breasted says, in his comment on the meaning of “life in truth,” that for Akhnaton “what was right, and its propriety was evident by its very existence.”¹ Surely the learned historian does not intend to say that, to the young

¹ J. H. Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 120.

Pharaoh — who himself acted so differently from others in his private and public life — all that it was the custom to do was right, simply because people did it; still less that, in his eyes, all that a man did was right, just because it had been possible for him to do it. This would be absurd. The king's life-long struggle against organised superstition, and his strange attitude in front of the political "realities" of his age, prove sufficiently that he did not accept any established tradition as a criterion of right and wrong. And his indignant letter to Aziru, on the murder of one of his most faithful vassals, preserved to posterity in his diplomatic correspondence, shows well that no action became justified, in his eyes, on the sole ground of being a *fait accompli*. To him, all that was, in the ordinary sense — all that had happened, or that generally used to happen — was not necessarily right. But what was absolutely, in the religious sense; that is to say, what was always and everywhere; what was, in the estimation of the higher consciousness, more subtle, more acute, more farseeing than the ordinary — the consciousness of cosmic truth, physical and moral — that was right, and that alone.

* * *

From the previous remarks we should, it seems, conclude that though it comprised no particular series of commandments and prohibitions as most other religions do, the Aton faith was far from being without any definite moral implications. That these concerned what one was to be, more than what one was to do; that they pointed out to the spirit in which one was to act, more than to one's action itself, only stresses all the more their truly ethical character. For if there be a fundamental difference between genuine morality and glorified police regulations, it lies no doubt in the flexibility and freedom of moral actions, compared with those ruled by written law or by custom. A really moral action — or abstention — is a work of art in which the whole personality of the agent is involved, a creation stamped with individuality. The action resulting from mere obedience to precise imperatives

is not. Anybody can blindly move according to well-formulated dictates. It is not up to everyone to reflect the serene beauty of the Father of Life; to radiate love — to live in truth. The actual saints of all religions have consciously or unconsciously striven to do so, while average men have always been impressed by the letter of moral injunctions rather than by their spirit.

The real difference between the Religion of the Disk and most other faiths is that, while the latter have provided strict rules of conduct for every person who wishes to adhere to them, Akhnaton's Teaching has not. It merely created an aesthetic atmosphere in which the sensitive soul could easily lift itself towards the everlastingly beautiful, that is both the true and the good. It set forth an object of inspiration — life; and an object of worship — the Sun, source of life — such as whoever loved these with all his senses, with all his heart and all his intellect, would automatically be the most virtuous of men. But it did not go down into details, and tell the disciple what to do or not to do in every particular circumstance of his life. That was left to his own ability for grasping moral truth: that is to say, finally, to a sort of aesthetic intuition. The Aton faith was, as we have already said, an aristocratic one. It ignored the average man with his blunt senses, his awareness to immediate gains and losses, his naturally narrow outlook. It ignored the precise, trivial, compelling necessities of organised society. Those alone could be Akhnaton's disciples who needed not explicit "dos" and "don'ts" in order to be truthful, courageous and kind; those who can be described as "the saints" in opposition to the rank-and-file "sinners"; the elite, in opposition to the general herd of mediocre liars and cowards, too weak even to be consistently bad.

This brings us back to one of our remarks in a previous chapter — namely, that the Religion of the Disk was an expression of the very essence of true religion in the most harmonious language of reason and beauty, rather than a particular creed. We can say of its ethical side something similar to that which we have said of its philosophy: it was, as put forward in the famous royal motto, "living in Truth,"

the essence of moral life, independent of man-made codes of morals, and freed from the fear of hell-fire no less than from that of human sanctions. Akhnaton gave out no commandments, just as he proclaimed no dogmas. The few who were able to enter the spirit of his Teaching needed none. And those who lacked that sort of aesthetic sense which alone enables one to grasp vital cosmic values, would not have been actually “living in truth” even if, with the help of a moral code, they had been doing all that a true disciple of the young king should do — any more than a man with no taste can become an artist just by following all the technical rules of an art.

* * *

If anything can rouse in a man that yearning to live in harmony with eternal values that dominate him, it is surely not the tedious observance of duties imposed upon him, once and for all, by law or by custom. But it may be the glowing example of a superior individual. All the great teachers of the world — the founders of lastingly successful religions — seem to have been far greater by the personal example they have set than by the precepts they have left, however sublime these be.

The absence of explicit precepts, easily applicable to every circumstance of life, was perhaps (just as the other negative features which we have mentioned in a previous chapter) one of the traits of profound rationality which prevented the Aton faith from remaining an organised religion. While the example of its Founder stands for ever to inspire all those who believe that ceremonial alone should be organised, real religion being essentially personal — and unorganisable. The ethics of the Religion of the Disk were based, we said, upon cosmic values (not merely social ones). One should add that they were based upon cosmic values as realised by one exceptional man. The historic figure of Akhnaton dominated them even still more, perhaps, than it did the other aspects of the Teaching, all of which are inseparable from it. The one duty which the disciples

readily accepted was to imitate him whom they called the “Bright Image of the Sun,” the “Son of the Living Aton, like unto Him forever.” And that would be, it seems, the only duty to propose to any man who might wish, in the future, to revive the thirty-three-hundred-year-old religion of love and reason, and make the young Prophet of the Sun, once more, a living force in our world. By imitating him we mean not servilely copying his actions, but imbibing the spirit in which he lived; developing in one’s self the characteristic features of his personality: uncompromising truthfulness, perfect sincerity, allied to the rare courage to stick to what one knows to be right, even at the cost of the highest worldly interests; and along with that, loving kindness, extended to all creatures.

In the tomb of Ay, one of his nobles, one finds in an inscription the words: “He” (Akhnaton) “put truth into me, and my abomination is to lie.” It is difficult to say, in the light of Ay’s subsequent career, how far this assertion was genuine on his part. But it does express the ideal attitude of a disciple of the young king. All wrong, in Akhnaton’s eyes, was but a lie under some form or another; a denial of the positive law of eternal life, which is love; a denial of man’s deeper self, which is in tune with the Cosmos, not at war with it. The follower of the Religion of the Disk had really but to seek the truth of his deeper self, and to live up to it in full sincerity. The example of the Master showed him how beautiful could be the life of a man who did so.

* * *

The importance of Akhnaton himself as a living illustration of his Teaching cannot be overestimated. He was, it seems, fully conscious of it when, in his hymns, he gave to posterity such sentences as the following: “I am Thy Son, satisfying Thee, exalting Thy name. Thy strength and Thy power are established in my heart; Thou art the living Disk; eternity is Thine emanation (or attribute). . . .” “He” (*i.e.*, Aton, the One God) “hath brought forth His honoured Son, Ua-en-ra (the Only One of the Sun) like His own form, never

ceasing so to do. The Son of Ra supporteth His beauties”¹; or when he wrote the significant passage already quoted: “Thou art in my heart. There is no other who knoweth Thee except Thy Son Nefer-kheperu-ra Ua-en-ra (Beautiful Essence of the Sun, Only One of the Sun). Thou hast made him wise to understand Thy plans and Thy power”²; or the following words, still more strange at first sight: “Every man who (standeth on his) feet since Thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, Thou hast raised up for Thy Son who came forth from Thy body, the King of the South and the North, Living in Truth, Lord of Crowns, Aakhun-Aten, great in the duration of his life (and for) the Royal Wife, great in majesty, Lady of the Two Lands, Nefer-neferu-Aten Nefertiti, living (and) young for ever and ever.”³

These bold statements of his relationship to God cannot be understood in their proper sense unless one replaces them in their context, that is to say, in the whole system of ideas at the basis of the Religion of the Disk; especially unless one connects them with that hardly less bold assertion that the “Heat-and-light-within-the-Disk” and the Disk itself — Energy and Matter — are one. This having been proved correct as a result of modern scientific speculations (correct, at least, in the manner of an hypothesis which does actually account for the known facts) cannot be called “dogma.” Yet, religiously speaking, as we have previously tried to explain,⁴ it argues the substantial unity of God (an impersonal God, of course) and Nature, visible and invisible; the existence of the same unchangeable Thing — divine Energy — at the bottom of all things visible and invisible, material and immaterial, which change everlastingly. In other words, for as much as one is able to infer from the hymns — his only surviving works — Akhnaton’s Teaching seems to have been founded on an implicit if not explicit pantheistic monism.

¹ Shorter Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 120.

² Longer Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 134.

³ Longer Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 135.

⁴ In Chapter V.

As we have already endeavoured to make clear in a former chapter,¹ the young king's claim to be the Son of God (without his pretending, as other Pharaohs, to have been miraculously conceived from any particular deity) was nothing but the expression of the total consciousness he had of the presence of the ultimate Essence of all things within him; the assertion, repeated at various epochs, by the author of the Chandogya Upanishad and by the fully "realised" souls of all the world, that he "was That."

What we wish to stress here is that, though he found nowhere around him anyone who possessed, like him, the knowledge of the Unchangeable within the transient, of Godhead within nature and within man, he was aware that this direct, sensuous, so as to say, experience of oneness was the goal of created life. And he was aware that he himself, who had reached it, stood apart from the average man — as far apart from him, indeed, as he from the crowd of still less awakened sentient beings, if not further; apart from him, and yet linked up with him, as each definitely superior species is linked up with the less conscious ones that precede and condition its coming into being. He was a man — physically conceived and born as all men — and yet more than a man. He was, not merely in name but in fact, the Beautiful-Essence-of-the-Sun, since he felt that Essence, that indefinable Energy, running through his nerves; the Only-One-of-the-Sun, since he alone was aware of the real nature of the fiery Disk, while other creatures, though worshipping It, knew It but dimly or not at all; Akhnaton — the Joy of the Sun — since every new step towards more complete consciousness brought new joy (experience had taught him that), and since the Soul of the Sun, which is the Soul of the Universe — the One without second² — became fully conscious of Itself within him; the Son of God, Who was alone to know His Father. As the visible Disk and the invisible, intangible "Heat and Light," the Energy within it, were one, so was he one with that same all-pervading Radiant Energy experienced within him. And he knew it. His

¹ Chapter V, pp. 119-120.

² "Ekam adityam" in the Sanskrit Scriptures.

nerves knew it. His body — an atom of matter finally tracing its origin to our parent star (like all matter on earth) — was aware of the Power within its depth; of its soul, which is none but the Sun's own Essence, which is God. God and created nature were one in him, Akhnaton, precisely because he was not, by a miraculous birth, set apart from nature, but was a man naturally conceived and born and reared. They were all the more one because he was, also, a man who, with both his exceptional intellectual gifts and his clear insight into eternal truth beyond the reach of pure intellect, lived to the full the happy natural life of all creatures. On the other hand, he could and he did live the natural life of the body and of the mind in perfect beauty and "in truth," only because he fully knew the higher meaning of it; because he was a "realised soul," a perfect Individual — a Son of God.

* * *

Now, perhaps, we can venture to explain what appears to be the strangest of those assertions of Akhnaton's divinity, to which scholars hardly ever refer in their comments on his religion save, at most, like Sir Wallis Budge, in a spirit of biased criticism which misses the point. The statement we are thinking of is the last one quoted in a preceding paragraph: "Every man who (standeth on his) feet, since Thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, Thou hast raised up for Thy Son who came forth from Thy body, the King of the South and the North, living in Truth, etc. . . . and for the Royal Wife, great in majesty, Lady of the Two Lands, Nefer-neferu-Aten Nefertiti, living and young for ever and ever."¹

Taken literally, this would seem to indicate that Akhnaton believed all men to have been born and to have lived for himself and for his consort, from the dawn of the human race onwards, which is obviously not what he intended to say. But if, as we have tried to show above, the young Pharaoh was aware at the same time of his divinity as a

¹ Longer Hymn, Translation of Sir Wallis Budge, *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 135.

fully conscious centre of Cosmic Energy and of his humanity as one who had human parents; and if, in his eyes, to reach that total consciousness of the divine within one's self was to exhaust the highest possibilities of our species (becoming one's self, so as to say, the culmination of it), then the amazing passage appears in a new light. It has a meaning, and a lofty one, too. It signifies that since the time, far-gone indeed, when God did "lay the foundation of the earth," the whole scheme of life has been steadily tending towards the creation of its supreme type: the God-conscious and therefore godlike human being — the Son of God. It means that every individual man was born with latent possibilities of Godhead which he would generally not feel at all, or feel more or less dimly; which he would perhaps try to express, in art and life, but which the fully conscious superman alone — the cosmic Individual, God and himself in one — was destined to carry to their utmost realisation. And that Individual, aware of his real nature and "living in Truth"; that eternal Man in whose heart were "established" the "strength and the power" of the living Disk, was himself, the "King of the South and the North, Lord of Crowns" — Akhnaton of Egypt, son of Amenhotep Neb-maat-ra, a very definite figure in time and space. He knew none who had, in his days or before, attained to a similar consciousness of their identity with the Soul of the Sun. And we, who have heard the names of several very ancient sages said to have realised Godhead within themselves, know not if they actually flourished before or after him, for their lives are not dated. It may be that some of them indeed preceded him in time. It may be that many more, of whom nobody has heard, preceded them. It may be also that Akhnaton was, in fact, the first man to realise "in his heart," to the full, the presence of that same hidden Energy which radiates in the Sun-disk — that he was the forerunner, in a way, of a new species, superior to man. He is, at least, the first such one whose life can be followed step by step, with historical certitude, and dated with an approximation of but a few years.

That idea that he was the culmination of an evolution

which had begun with the “foundation of the world” was perhaps at the root of the public honours the young king seems to have rendered to his ancestors. We know that, among those to whom he erected shrines in his newly-founded sacred City, Akhetaton, were the great warrior-like Pharaohs of his dynasty, Thutmose the Third and Amenhotep the Second, the builders of the Egyptian empire — staunch worshippers of the national gods, above all of Amon, to whom they consecrated the spoils of their conquests. No man could have been more alien than they to the gentle king who preached the doctrine of one nation, the earth, united in the love of one God, the Sun. And yet, they had their shrines, “each of which had its steward and its officials”¹ in the City of the One God. Arthur Weigall tells us that it was Akhnaton’s desire to show, in this manner, “the continuity of his descent from the Pharaohs of the elder days and to demonstrate his real claim to that title of ‘Son of the Sun,’ which had been held by the sovereigns of Egypt ever since the Fifth Dynasty, and which was of such vital importance in the new religion.”²

But in the light of our comments on the true meaning of that title (which the Founder of the Aton faith would have claimed anyhow, because he had every right to claim it, even apart from his royal birth), it would seem that those temples to the memory of the dead Pharaohs were erected in quite a different spirit. An unbroken filiation to royal ancestors of a “solar line” two or more millenniums old could not add much weight to the claim to divinity of one who had experienced, through his nerves, the presence in him of the Soul of the Sun. While, on the other hand, if “all men” had gradually developed their possibilities only in order that he might finally appear, in the full-bloom of his individual Godhead — if they had all been “raised up” for him, as he says himself — then surely his own immediate forefathers were, in a still much more direct and effective manner, responsible for his coming. Whatever might have been the

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 171.

² Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), pp. 171-172.

gap between them and him — between their world and his, between their gods and his — yet it remained a fact that they and not others had given him that body in the depth of which was rooted his true solar consciousness (not that of historical or legendary connections with any particular deity, but that of vital identity with the Radiant Energy of the One Sun — the One God). They deserved their shrines, not for justifying any dynastic claims of his, but simply for being the human progenitors that had given birth to him, the godlike Individual, the Sun in flesh and blood.

* * *

One more point, however, clearly referred to in the passage quoted a few pages above¹ from the Longer Hymn, seems to need explanation, and that is the place given by Akhnaton himself to “the Royal Wife . . . Nefer-neferu-Aten Nefertiti” in the Religion of the Disk.

There can be no doubt that the person here mentioned is actually the Pharaoh’s consort, the beautiful young queen whose portrait-busts in the Berlin Museum are perhaps the most widely admired of all the masterpieces of Egyptian sculpture. Her titles — “great in majesty, Lady of the Two Lands, living and young for ever and ever” — only confirm her identity. And no explanation of any kind can be put forward to account for this allusion to her, save that the Founder of the Aton cult wished to say that which he said, *i.e.*, that he believed the evolution of man to have culminated in himself (the only man he knew to be God-conscious) and in her. The question is therefore: on what grounds was she, in his eyes, entitled to such an exalted position in the hierarchy of creatures that “every man who standeth on his feet” since God “did lay the foundation of the earth,” had been “raised up” for her, no less than for him? In other words, of what significance was she in his Teaching, and in what light should she be looked upon by those who wish to be his followers?

¹ p. 197.

From all available written and pictorial evidence it appears, as we have already seen,¹ that Akhnaton and Nefertiti loved each other dearly. If the young king had taken no “secondary wives,” as had been the custom with his fathers, it was simply because, in this one queen of his and in the children her love had given him, “his heart was happy,” as he himself declares in so many inscriptions. The extraordinary importance he seems here to give his consort may be just a proof of how deeply he felt all that he owed to her. From what one knows of his earnest and sensitive nature, one may infer that he understood better than any other man the supreme value both of tenderness and of pleasure. It is difficult — and it would be perhaps indiscreet — to attempt to say more. Akhnaton is one of those rare characters so admirably balanced and beautiful that they should be felt rather than discussed. And average imagination, which dissociates the spiritual from the physical and the emotional planes instead of comprehending them in their organic continuity, will probably always remain unable to conceive what that sacred intimacy with his queen (faintly reflected in a few attitudes upon the bas-reliefs of the time) actually meant to him, whose body and soul were in tune with each other and with the silent music of Life. The young Pharaoh knew how profoundly the woman who loved him and whom he loved was one with him. And just as he had ordered her features to be represented upon the monuments along with his, and on the same scale, so did he bring in her name and titles, along with his, in the bold statement that he was the Man for whom “all men” had been “raised up” from the beginning of the world. He could not conceive of himself apart from her. We may think that he would have been anyhow the perfect individual whom he was. But he probably believed that, without her, something vital would have been missing in his life. He had needed the warmth of love she had given him, and all the knowledge he and she had acquired together, in their love, to become complete. And therefore, in none of his highest claims did he consider himself alone. He was “he and she.” In him, the perfect

¹ In Chapter IV, pp. 98-100.

Individual reflected and expressed the godlike Couple, for ever one, in divine union on all planes.

This is one interpretation of the meaning of the place given to Nefertiti in the above quotation. There is another. The “Lady of the Two Lands” may perhaps be considered here not only as the Wife, inseparable from Akhnaton himself — “one flesh” with the conscious flesh of the Sun — but also as his best disciple, the model and prototype of all those who wish to follow him. And “all men,” it may be suggested were “raised up” for her in the sense that her approach to eternal truth, through the simplicity of a loving heart, corresponded to an essential stage which they all had to reach before being able to experience within themselves the immanent Soul of the Sun.

Very little, it is true, is known of the extent to which she “understood” her lord’s religion. When the king instituted Merira as high-priest of the Disk, he is supposed to have addressed him as his “servant who hearkeneth to the Teaching” and with “all the works of whom” he was satisfied. At least, those are the sentences put into his mouth in the inscription on the walls of Merira’s tomb. Other courtiers similarly claim to have understood the Pharaoh’s “Teaching of Life”; to “hearken to his words,” etc. We shall never know how far such statements, even when attributed to the king himself, expressed his actual opinion of his nobles or were merely boasts on the part of officials competing with one another in loyal zeal. But from the little history tells us and permits us to guess about what happened in Egypt only a few years after Akhnaton’s death, one can safely say that most of the Pharaoh’s followers (including the high-priest Merira) were not the fervent disciples that they had consistently pretended to be during his lifetime. On the other hand, without the protestations of faith in him and in his Teaching which one reads on the walls of their tombs; without, indeed, any outward claim, it is possible, even probable, that Nefertiti had imbibed more of the spirit of the Religion of the Disk than any of them. That she was the “Royal Wife,” his beloved, was perhaps a reason, but could surely not have been a sufficient reason for the young king

to have her standing at his side and officiating with him in most if not all the ceremonies in honour of his God, had she not shown an earnest attachment to the new faith, and had she not grasped the essentials of it through the path of devotion if not also through that of knowledge. And the fact that, in spite of her being a woman, he committed to her charge the temple of the Setting Sun — the “House-of-putting-the-Aton-to-rest” — argues at the same time his utter disregard for custom and his recognition of the queen’s genuine zeal for his Teaching.

Not enough is known of Nefertiti for one to say if she was or not a disciple as “intellectual” as some others might have been — one who could have explained the Teaching rationally, or even written philosophical comments upon it. But she certainly was one who accepted it wholeheartedly and put it at the centre of her life, both because she deeply felt its beauty and because she deeply loved its inspired Promoter. Devotion had doubtless led her to the very gates of knowledge, if not to knowledge itself.

And, in stating that from the beginning of the world “all men” had been “raised up” for himself and for her, Akhnaton has perhaps simply wished to stress how far advanced in the human evolution is the real Disciple — the devotee who gets a glimpse of ultimate truth through his (or her) absolute love for a God-conscious being and for the Sun, God’s visible Face, if not for the divine impersonal Energy that resplends, though in a different manner, in both of these. Of those who had attained the higher stage of complete consciousness of their identity with the Essence of the Sun, he knew none but himself. He has said so: “Thou art in my heart and there is none who knoweth Thee save Thy Son, Neferkheperu-ra Ua-en-ra. . . .” But he knew at least one whose sincerity and wholeheartedness contrasted with the lip-homages of most of his followers, the superficiality or actual indifference of many of which he was probably beginning to become aware; one who, through intense devotion, had transcended herself and was, even without having his direct knowledge of the supreme “Heat-and-light-within-the-Disk,” nearer to him and nearer to It than any other. And that one was his consort —

the same individual whose love had perhaps played its part in the awakening of his own deeper consciousness.

It is possible that by declaring “all men” to have been “raised up” for her as for himself, he was alluding to her devotion as typical of a true disciple’s; of one, that is to say, who is on the way to attain the goal of man that he had attained. It is also possible that he simply meant that she was inseparable from himself, the God-conscious Man. But we believe that, still more probably, the two interpretations can be put forth at the same time as complementary. The former may, in a way, be the consequence of the latter in the particular case of Queen Nefertiti who was first Akhnaton’s consort and then only his devout disciple. The latter, in turn, is not independent of the former, in the sense that the beautiful “Lady of the Two Lands” was perhaps such a perfect wife precisely because she was her lord’s disciple and collaborator — one with him on all planes, as we have said. And that oneness on all planes with a God-conscious Teacher is perhaps the highest stage which can be reached by all those to whom is not given, here and now, the direct experience of Godhead within life. The world is therefore “raised up” for the few who reach it, as well as for the fewer still who, like Akhnaton, go further beyond.

* * *

We can now try to sum up the essential features of the Teaching which we have termed the “Religion of the Disk,” and which Akhnaton regarded as the universal religion, and preached as such.

Based upon its Founder’s intuition — we should say, it seems, on his direct awareness — of the equivalence of all forms of Energy, of the identity of Energy and of what appears to the senses as matter, and of his own substantial oneness with that same Energy that is at the root of all existence, it represents, philosophically, as we have stated, a variety of pantheistic monism hardly different (if different at all) from that of the Indian seers who, some centuries later, wrote the Upanishads. It stands apart from other

purely speculative systems, inasmuch as it was a cult as well as a philosophy. In it, the immanent Soul of the Sun (and of the Cosmos), “Heat-and-Light which is in the Disk” — Radiant Energy — was the object of a stately public worship comprising music and dancing¹ and the singing of hymns, along with the ritual offering of food, drink, flowers, and incense. The only visible form, however, which the worshipper was allowed to consider, apart from the resplendent Face of our Parent star in heaven, was the image of the Sun-disk with rays ending in hands, symbolising the power radiating from the Sun down to the earth on which we live.

Akhnaton himself occupied a prominent place in the religion² as the “Son of the Sun” or “Son of God,” that word designating not a man miraculously conceived (the young king never put forth that irrational claim), but the Man who, while conceived and born like all creatures, had exhausted the highest possibilities of human nature by becoming directly conscious of the presence of the Soul, or Essence of the Sun — immanent Cosmic Energy — within his nerves.

Queen Nefertiti, both as the Wife who was a part of himself and as the true Disciple who had wholeheartedly accepted him and his Teaching, through love, was second only to him. And it is probable that, had the Religion of the Disk survived, it would have centred round these two figures — especially round its Founder, looked upon (and rightly, too, in the sense which we have made clear) as divine. Along with the intellectual worship of universal Energy, it would have become the devotional cult of the Perfect Individual — the only one to deserve, by his own right, the name of “Son of the Sun.” And any imaginable attempt to revive it would, it seems, if successful, result in the same; so inseparable is the Teacher from his Teaching.

The philosophical conclusions which can be drawn from

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 92.

² “Taken together they (the tombs of El Amarna) only reveal one personality, one family, one home, one career, and one mode of worship. This is the figure, family, palace and occupations of the king, and the worship of the Sun — which also was his. . . .” — Norman de Garis Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna*, pp. 18-19.

the hymns (and from minor sources¹) — the equivalence of heat, light, sound, electricity and all manifestations of energy, and the substantial identity of energy and matter — have been, as we have said, confirmed by the general tendency of modern science to resolve matter into atoms, atoms into centres of power, and qualitatively different kinds of power into outward expressions of quantitative differences (in length of wave, etc.). They can therefore to-day be called positive knowledge, though they were, originally, the result of one man's apparently unaccountable intuition. It is to them that Sir Flinders Petrie refers when he calls the Religion of the Disk a religion which could have been “invented to satisfy our modern scientific conceptions.”²

The idea of his own oneness with the supreme immanent Reality — solar Energy, *i.e.*, Cosmic Energy — was the result of Akhnaton's inner experience — an experience as compelling and, to the person who lived it, by no means more “irrational” than any sensuous apprehension of facts, and shared by all those whom we call “realised” or “God-conscious” souls.

That other all-important idea of the unity of all life and brotherhood of all living creatures is based, at the same time, upon the general substantial pantheism of the Religion of the Disk; upon the fatherhood of our parent star, nourisher of all beings — a fact; and upon the response of even the meanest of living things to His beneficent heat and light — another fact.

Akhnaton's Teaching can therefore in no way be compared to any of those faiths based upon the supernatural revelation of a personal God through miraculous happenings. It is connected with no miracles, save the everyday miracle of birth and growth, and that miracle of perfect beauty: the life of its Founder. It is rational in the sense that its fundamentals express a human experience: that of universal oneness (an experience reserved, indeed, to a very few individuals, but of which the implications are confirmed

¹ Such as the scarab found at Sadenga, in which Aton is called “great one of roarings (or thunders).” See Sir Wallis Budge: Tutankhamen, *Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), pp. 104-105.

² Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 214.

by science), and facts of this earth, such as the happy reaction of all creatures to the warmth of sunshine. But it draws its inspiration from the beauty of the Sun and of the natural world, and from the joy of life, more than from any precise theory of the universe, however objective, however “scientific.”

At least to the extent to which we know of it, it puts forth no definite views about death and the destiny of the dead. Though a prayer, inscribed upon Akhnaton’s coffin, suggests that he personally believed in the survival of consciousness in a much subtler state of corporeality, it seems as if, in his Teaching, the “problem of death” as well as the problem of suffering were deliberately left aside as insolvable when considered at our general human scale, and automatically solved for those who, here and now, live “in truth.”

Ethically, the religion was of the highest standard, implying absolute sincerity in thought, speech and action — sincerity towards one’s self as well as towards others; above all, towards one’s deeper nature — and love, not for man alone, but for all living creatures considered as our brothers. This fact of its being by no means man-centred but “life-centred” places it, in our eyes, far above the later monotheisms that a few modern authors — one serious archaeologist at least, Arthur Weigall; and one famous psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud himself — have endeavoured to put in parallel with it,¹ or to point out as positively derived from it.² The god who has a “chosen people” and the god who is the father of all men but not, it would seem, of the rest of creatures which he gave man the right to exploit, are equally alien to the all-pervading “Heat-and-Light within the Disk” — immanent Energy manifested through the Sun. And both are but puerile and barbaric tribal gods, compared with that truly universal Father-and-Mother of all life, Whom the young Pharaoh adored.

To be truthful to the bitter end, with courage — with heroism if necessary — and to love all creatures and be kind

¹ Arthur Weigall (*Life and Times of Akhnaton*, New and Revised Edit. 1922, pp. 101, 127) stresses the resemblance of the Teaching to Christianity.

² S. Freud (*Moses and Monotheism*) sees in Moses an Egyptian, follower of Akhnaton, whose Teaching he tried to give to the Jews.

to them (not only do them no harm, but to do them positive good; to all of them impartially, as our Father, the Sun) is therefore the sacred duty of anyone who looks upon Akhnaton as his Master.

A very definite line of conduct in everyday life, and no less definite reactions to all forms of hypocrisy, cowardice and cruelty; the condemnation of the revolting exploitation of animals and men — especially of that of the more helpless animals — which has kept on dishonouring mankind from before the dawn of history, is logically implied in the admission that we are all brothers in the Sun; co-worshippers, at different levels of consciousness, of the One same Principle of all Life. Equally implied in it is the respect, as far as possible, of trees and plants which are, also, in their own way, happy to thrive in the sunlight — a whole practical philosophy in which the God-conscious Individual in tune with life as a whole (and not man as a chosen species exploiting at will the rest of the living) is the centre, the purpose, the culmination of creation on earth. And this remains true, whether those who once called themselves Akhnaton's disciples lived up to their faith with all its consequences or whether they did not.

Yet, it is correct to say that the Religion of the Disk seems to have comprised no explicit commandments and prohibitions. It logically implied certain actions; it excluded certain others. It ordered nothing; it forbade nothing. It was not a device to keep the average man out of mischief, but a "Teaching of life" addressed to those few whom their rational mind, their straightforward nature, and above all their sensitiveness to the beauty of the living sunny world predisposed to receive it and who, having imbibed its spirit, would naturally live up to its practical implications. It was — it is — as we have said, in one sense the only religion for all living creatures, and in another, a religion only for the elite of men.

Sir Wallis Budge tells us that "the Atenites adored and enjoyed the heat and light which their god poured upon them, and . . . sang and danced and praised his beneficence, and lived wholly in the present. And they worshipped the triad

of life, beauty and colour. . . .”¹ This is true in a sense, but there is more to say. That joy of life, here alluded to — and which is at the root of the Aton worship — was not, as Sir Wallis Budge seems to suppose, a superficial and sterile gaiety. It was a deep and elevating experience, an inspiration which led the worshipper as near the God-conscious King, true Son of the Sun — *i.e.*, as near the perfected End of human growth — as the limitations of his individual nature permitted him to reach.

We have just now spoken of the practical implications of the Teaching in the disciple’s daily life. What we have yet to see of Akhnaton’s unusual career illustrates the application of its principles by its very Promoter to a problem of all times: the problem of war; in particular, of war in connection with one’s colonies.

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 96.

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Part III

TRUTH VERSUS SUCCESS

CHAPTER IX**UNREST IN CONQUERED LAND**

In order to realise all the importance of what Akhnaton did — or abstained from doing — when the hard “necessities” of war were thrust upon him, one should first keep in mind the most exalted position which he occupied in the world of his days.

As we have stressed at the beginning of this book, the Egyptian empire was, when he took it over by hereditary right, the greatest empire existing. It could certainly not be compared, either in extent or organisation, with what the Roman empire was one day to be, or with what the British empire is at present. Far from it. But still, with its frontiers stretched from the banks of the Upper Euphrates and the Amanus Mountains — the extreme north of Mesopotamia and the south-eastern limits of Asia Minor — down to and even beyond the Fourth Cataract of the Nile; with the terror of the thirteen victorious campaigns of Thotmose the Third, the conqueror (and of the ruthless punitive expeditions of his successor), fresh in every man’s memory; and with the blessings of local freedom coupled with a firm administration and the security of trade which it gave to the small vassal states that mainly composed it, it surely commanded, in the fourteenth century B.C., from the Black Sea to Abyssinia and from the Grecian mainland to Arabia and the Persian Gulf, much of the prestige that the British empire enjoys to-day all over the globe.

It cannot be called the oldest empire of the world: some twenty-five centuries before,¹ Sargon of Agade had once united under his sceptre all lands from the Mediterranean to Baluchistan. But one can say, with Breasted, that “the administration and organisation” of this Egyptian empire “represent the earliest efforts of government to devise an

¹ According to others, at a much less early date; see Chap. I, p. 13.

imperial system.”¹ Without perhaps being as efficient as in a modern state of the same size, they were surely thorough enough to render the domination of Egypt practically unshakable for many hundreds of years, provided the succeeding Pharaohs would not lose the active interest of their fathers in foreign possessions, nor give up their good old warrior-like traditions and hesitate to take action at the slightest signs of disloyalty.

Akhnaton was now the emperor of those vast and various countries; the distant divine Pharaoh to whom the wild chieftains of the Far South — Nubians and even Negroes — no less than the princes of the Orontes and of the Upper Euphrates looked up as “the King, the Sun of the lands.” He was the most powerful man on earth. And the richest. The inexhaustible resources of the Sudan and of the faraway tropical forests — gold and ivory, slaves and precious woods — were his. Syria, a land of “abundant honey, wine and oil,”² of rich flocks and harvests, of ivory,³ cedar wood, precious stones, copper, lead and silver,⁴ was his — without counting Egypt herself, in all times “the granary of the East.” Taxes were collected efficiently, and the tribute of the subject princes (of which the amount, though not known to us, must have been considerable) poured in regularly, at least up to the twelfth year of the Pharaoh’s reign. And if we add to this all the wealth already amassed before his accession as the spoil of war, “the beautiful and luxurious products”⁵ of Syrian industry wrested from the palaces of vanquished kings and from the temples of vanquished gods by generations of conquering Pharaohs; if we add the fabulous treasures patiently accumulated by the priests of Amon, and the enormous revenues of their estates, all confiscated by Akhnaton himself, then we may expect, perhaps, to imagine the amount of gold and silver and mercenary manpower of

¹ Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 87.

² S. Cook: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 328.

³ S. Cook says that “elephants were hunted at Niy,” *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 328.

⁴ S. Cook: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 329.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

which the young Prophet of the Sun could easily dispose, if he liked. It is indeed no wonder that the envious foreign kings who kept on begging for presents from him in their letters, assert so emphatically, on every occasion, that “verily, in the land of Egypt, gold is as common as dust.”

We have seen previously what riches Akhnaton lavished upon his new capital, especially upon the great temple of Aton and the other most important buildings. We have mentioned the magnificent decoration of his own palace. And if the kings of Babylon, of Mitanni, of Assyria, and of the Hittites show, as they do in their letters, that they were hardly ever satisfied with the presents he sent them, we must not, it seems, with Sir Wallis Budge,¹ rush to the conclusion that he lacked the royal generosity of his father. Knowing as we do that many of his correspondents asked for “more gold” in order to achieve some “new temple” which they had begun to build, we should rather see, in the Pharaoh’s alleged “parsimony,” a refusal to contribute with his wealth to the embellishment of the shrines of foreign local gods — false gods such as he had suppressed in his own country for drawing men’s attention away from the One universal Sun. It was not “parsimony.” It was a matter of principles. Whenever he thought it necessary (or harmless) to spend money, the Pharaoh did so without hesitation, in as kingly a manner as any of his predecessors. And even after the building of Akhetaton, even after all the costly works which he undertook all over the empire, to the glory of the One God — the foundation of new cities as centres of His cult, the erection of numerous temples — he still had enormous sums at his command; more than enough to defend his Asiatic dominions, if he chose to do so.

* * *

As we have said, the Egyptian empire, especially the northern half of it, was a conglomeration of innumerable small vassal states. Every Syrian or Canaanitish town of little importance had its “king,” who acknowledged himself as the

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 98.

“servant” of the faraway Pharaoh and paid tribute to him. The whole country was under the immediate supervision of a “governor of the northern countries” or “vice-roy of the North.” A man of the name of Yankhamu was then the holder of that title.

The coastal towns, Amki, Arvad, Simyra, Ullaza, Byblos, Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, Accho and, farther south, Ashdod and Askalon (to name only a few of them), carried on with Egypt a flourishing trade. Some, like Byblos (called Gebal or Gubla in the tongue of its people), had always been more loyal to Egypt than others. In the interior, Niy, not far from the great bend of the Euphrates and the Mitannian border, Aleppo, Tunip (or Dunip), Hamath, Kadesh, Damascus, Megiddo, Shunem, Taanach, Jerusalem, were the principal “cities of the king,” some of them definitely loyal — such as Tunip, Megiddo, Jerusalem — others much less so. Kadesh seems to have been among the permanent centres of disturbance.

The limit of Egyptian conquests lay, as we have stated previously, somewhere above the Amanus Mountains. The kingdom of Mitanni, ruled by an aristocracy of probably Indo-Aryan origin, bordered the empire to the north-east. Its kings had been giving daughters in marriage to the Pharaohs ever since the days of Akhnaton’s grandfather. They also often received Egyptian royal maidens as their wives. And Queen Nefertiti, whose parentage is much disputed among scholars, may possibly have been, as Sir Flinders Petrie believes, a Mitannian princess (with an Egyptian mother and grandmother, which would explain her particular features). “Behind Mitanni,” and farther to the north-east, “the friendly kingdoms later known as Assyria were the limits of the known world.”¹

The Egyptian possessions were limited to the east by the desert, which lay between them and the territory of the Kassite king of Babylon; while to the north-west, beyond the Amanus Mountains, stretched the “Great Kheta” or Hittite confederation, of which the distant capital, Hattushash

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 198.

(modern Boghaz-Keui), stood not far from the present site of Ankara. The Hittites were a warrior-like set of people, and their king, Shubbiluliuma, a crafty and ambitious monarch. It is he who seems to have been at the bottom of all the troubles in Syria throughout Akhnaton's reign.

It is difficult to say how far the Syrian vassals of the Pharaoh had already, under Amenhotep the Third, "grown thoroughly habituated to the Egyptian allegiance."¹ However much this might have been, they were not all so loyal as to remain deaf to the various incitations of Shubbiluliuma's agents, eloquently depicting to them the advantages of independence and promising them Hittite support in order to win it. Foreign rule, after all, never was a pleasant thing; and the chieftains of Syria and Palestine, even after having been educated in Thebes (as most of them were) could not all have enjoyed it. As we shall see, those who did seem to have been a minority, while the others, however outwardly loyal, disliked it, apparently, as thoroughly as the native leaders of any subject people generally do.

It happened in this particular case, that foreign rule was Akhnaton's rule — the rule, that is to say, of the "first prophet of internationalism,"² the only man in his days to consider men of all races in the same light (as children of the same Father), and perhaps the only one, if any, capable of understanding the grievances of subject races if set before him. But they did not know him. They knew the distant impersonal king-god (a Pharaoh like any other) whom they had never seen, and quite a number of Egyptian officials and pro-Egyptian local dynasts — the latter, their personal rivals — of whom they had seen too much. And it is likely that they were, also, more often than not, impatient to replace Egyptian domination by their own personal tyranny over the people. The Hittite king, on his side, was endeavouring to use them in order to bring all Syria, if possible, under Hittite domination.

¹ Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 96.

² Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, pp. 127-128.

All that is known of the unrest in Syria and Palestine in Akhnaton's time can be gathered from a collection of some three hundred and fifty clay tablets — the famous "Tell-el-Amarna Letters" — discovered in 1887 and 1891 on the site of the Pharaoh's ruined capital. These tablets, covered with cuneiform writing, represent what is left of the diplomatic correspondence of the young king and of his father. What was exactly the situation cannot be described with full accuracy of details; nor can one follow its evolution step by step, for the date of many of the Letters is uncertain. Moreover, a great number of precious tablets have been completely destroyed through mishandling. "What has been preserved is therefore but a wreck of what might have been, had any person equal to the occasion placed his hand on them in time."¹

It can, however, be stated that "a great concerted anti-Egyptian movement,"² in which the Hittites were playing the local enemies of Egypt, repeatedly referred to in the letters from northern Syria — and the "Habiru" — the plundering tribes of the desert who joined the rebellion in Canaan — were attacking the loyal vassals of Egypt from the borders of the Euphrates (near the Mitannian frontier) down to the south of Palestine. They were fighting under the leadership of a growing number of chieftains of different races, if we judge by their names. The most prominent of these were, in the North, Itakama — "the man of Kadesh" — the Amorite Abdashirta, and, especially after the death of the latter, his ambitious and unscrupulous son, Aziru; and in the South, Labaya (or Lapaya) and his sons, along with Tagi, soon allied to Milki-ili, his son-in-law. The movement seems to have had two principal centres: the land of Amor, in Northern Syria, and the Plain of Jezreel, in Palestine.

The chiefs who fought most wholeheartedly in the interest of Egypt were Abi-Milki of Tyre, Biridiya of Megiddo (once a centre of resistance to the Pharaohs' northward advance; now a pro-Egyptian city), and, above all, the indefatigable

¹ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 259.

² S. Cook: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 303.

Ribaddi, king of Gebal (Byblos) and Abdikhipa, the faithful governor of Jerusalem. There seem to have been many more sincere supporters of Egyptian rule at the time the troubles started. But as years passed, nearly every new letter from the theatre of war announced the defection of some new “king” — or “kings” — formerly loyal. Even Abi-Milki, for long faithful to his Egyptian allegiance, finished by joining the Sa-Gaz — when tired of waiting in vain for the Pharaoh to help him against them. But all the vassals, including the most notoriously disloyal ones, protest of their loyalty in their correspondence with Egypt. It would appear that the more treacherous they were, the more vehemently they asserted their submission. “To the King, the Sun, my Lord, speaks Abdashirta, the dust of thy feet,” wrote the Amorite agitator to Akhnaton. “Beneath the feet of the King my Lord, seven times and seven times I fall. Lo, I am a servant of the King and his house-dog, and the whole of the land of Amor guard I for the King, my Lord.”¹ And his son, by far the most able and determined enemy of Egypt after Shubbiluliuma himself (of whom he was the tool), wrote in the same tone, while begging the Hittite king to help him to shake off the Pharaoh’s domination and while inciting Zimrida, king of Sidon, and other local princelings to break their old bonds of allegiance and become his allies.

It was surely very difficult for any contemporary observer to distinguish, under the conflicting statements all those chieftains and governors of cities, who was actually loyal and who was not. The Egyptian officers on the spot often made mistakes, as did Turbikha, Yankhamu’s envoy, who unnecessarily hurt the feelings of the Pharaoh’s true friends in Irkata²; or Pakhura, whose mercenaries attacked Ribaddi’s loyal troops, with whom they should have collaborated.³ To march, himself, into Syria, at the head of an army, would not perhaps have helped Akhnaton much in knowing the

¹ Amarna Letters, K. 60, quoted by James Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 353.

² Letter of the Elders of Irkata, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 360.

³ Letter of Ribaddi, K. 122, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 365.

hearts of his vassals, but it would have put an end to the Syrian squabbles and “saved the situation”; for at the mere news of his approach, every outward sign of unrest would doubtless have disappeared. The very name of Egypt, associated with that of its great conquering kings, was still feared. The crafty old monarch in Hattushash would also have changed his policy, had he been under the impression that his opponent was prepared to fight. Akhnaton seems to have been well aware of Shubbiluliuma’s enmity. He severed diplomatic relations with him — a fact of which the Hittite, whose double game had thus come to an end, complains in a letter which has come down to us.¹ But he did not wish to fight. He did not wish to be feared. And though he perhaps did realise, more than many modern authors seem to believe, that nothing would have stemmed the disintegration of the Egyptian empire but “a vigorously aggressive policy,”² he did not wish to adopt such a policy.

* * *

The troubles, which appear to have regularly increased all through the young Pharaoh’s short reign, had definitely started under Amenhotep the Third, as proved by the letter in which Aki-izzi of Katna reports to that king an alliance of the Hittites with several chieftains of the Upper Orontes with an aim to attack the plain of Damascus³ (and Katna, which was on their way southwards). Other letters of the same period report attacks on Amki,⁴ at the mouth of the Orontes, and we also learn that shortly before Akhnaton’s accession, a small Egyptian force had been despatched to Syria under an officer named Amenemapet, who recovered Simyra — an important seaport — from the hands of Abdashirta. But from the whole series of appeals for help addressed to Akhnaton himself by his loyal Syrian vassals — especially by Ribaddi, the author of more than fifty of the

¹ Amarna Letters, K. 41.

² J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 354.

³ Letter CXII (W. 139), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 281.

⁴ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, pp. 280-281; Letters CVII (W. 132) and CX (W. 125).

“Amarna Letters” — it is clear that, though the confusion had already begun to spread by the time he came to the throne, a very little help to the supporters of Egyptian rule would have been sufficient to save the empire — provided it were sent speedily. At this stage of the war, Ribaddi, menaced in his stronghold of Gebal by Abdashirta and his sons, entreats the king to send him “three hundred men” so that he may “be able to hold the city.”¹ In another despatch he writes: “May it seem good to my Lord, the Sun of the lands, to give me twenty pair of horses.”² But this slight help was never sent.

Abdashirta was killed in some skirmish, and the anti-Egyptian movement, for a time, seemed to slacken. But it soon regained a greater impetus than ever under the ablest of the Amorite leader’s sons, Aziru, who then began, in the words of a modern writer, his “amazing game of mingled cunning and boldness against the greatest empire of his world.”³ War rapidly spread all over the country, and the despatches of the loyal vassals grew more and more disquieting. The Amorites, under the command of Aziru and his brothers, were again hammering at the gates of Simyra. They were now in alliance with Arvad — another seaport, north of Simyra. And the faithful Ribaddi wrote to Akhnaton, his lord: “As a bird in the fowler’s snare, so is Simyra. Night and day the sons of Abdashirta are against it by land, and the men of Arvad by sea.”⁴ While the elders of Irkata, a small coastal town to the south of Arvad, wrote in a no less appealing letter, “Let not the breath of the king depart from us. The town-gates have been barred until the breath of the king shall come to us. Mighty is the enmity against us; mighty indeed.”⁵

But not a word of encouragement came from the distant overlord in whom they had put all their hope. It was as

¹ Letter K. 93, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 352.

² Letter K. 103, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 352.

³ J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 359.

⁴ Letter CLXV (W. 84), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 292.

⁵ Letter CLIX (W. 122), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 290. Quoted by J. Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), pp. 360-361.

though their distressed appeals did not reach him, in his sacred City, or as though they were incapable of touching his heart.

War in Syria continued raging. Ribaddi, in a pressing message, announced that Zimrida of Sidon, Yapa-addu, and other dynasts had joined the rebels, and he begged for troops,¹ for “only Simyra and Irkata” were left to him, and he had to defend them. “Let troops be sent with Yankhamu,”² he repeats, in another despatch. In another he complains that he cannot send ships to Zalukhi and Ugarit (right in the north of Syria) because of Aziru, and tells the king that the Hittites are plundering the lieges of Gebal.³ In another, he explains how acute the food problem has grown in Gebal itself⁴; in yet another, he informs Akhnaton that “the sons of Abdashirta” hold Ullaza, Ardata, Yikhliya, Ambi and Shigata, and asks again for succour, that he might still rescue Simyra from the besieging Amorites. If Simyra surrenders, he fears the fate that is likely to befall him.⁵

At about the same time, among many other increasingly pathetic calls for help, was despatched to Akhnaton from “the citizens of Tunip” in north-east Syria, what is surely one of the most moving official documents of all times. It shows what memories the great warrior-like Pharaohs had left in Syria. It shows, also, to what pitch of disappointment, verging on despair, the apparent indifference of the ruling king had brought the loyal section of the Syrian people, especially in the remoter parts of the empire, where impending danger threatened them on all sides. “Who could formerly have plundered Tunip without being plundered by Menkheper-ra?” (Thotmose the Third), runs the letter; “The gods of Egypt dwell in Tunip. May the king our lord ask his old men (if it be not so). But now we no longer belong to Egypt.” “. . . Aziru has captured people in the land of

¹ Letter CLVIII (W. 78), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 289.

² Letter CLVI (W. 87), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 289.

³ Letter CLII (W. 104), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 289.

⁴ Letter CLXI, Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 290.

⁵ Letter CLXII (W. 86), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 291.

Khatat. Aziru will treat Tunip as he has treated Niy; and if we mourn, then the king of Egypt will also have to mourn. And when Aziru enters Simyra, he will do to us as he pleases, and the king will have to lament. And now, Tunip, thy city, weeps, and her tears are flowing and there is no help for us. For twenty years we have been sending to our Lord, the king of Egypt, but there has not come to us a word from our Lord — not one.”¹

But again no troops were sent. The Pharaoh answered Ribaddi’s letters, but only to tell him to “defend himself,” as it is obvious from the Syrian prince’s reply: “Why has the king, my lord, written to me saying ‘Defend yourself, and you surely will be defended’? Against whom shall I defend myself? If the king would defend his servants, then would I be delivered: but if the king does not defend me, then who will defend me? If the king sends men from Egypt and from Melukhkha, and horses . . . right speedily, then I shall be delivered so that I may serve my lord the king. At present, I have nothing at all wherewith to obtain horses. Everything has been given to Yarimuta to keep life in me.”² This last sentence is evidently an allusion to the precarious food situation which the prince of Gebal was facing; he had had to deprive himself and his people of all other commodities that he might buy grain from the stores of Yarimuta, north of Gebal.³ The tone of the letter shows Ribaddi’s bewilderment at Akhnaton’s attitude, which he fails to understand.

The next event — which Sir Flinders Petrie calls a “landmark” in the history of the loss of the Egyptian empire — was the fall of Simyra. Its helpless defender wrote to the king: “Simyra, thy fortress, is now in the power of the Sa-Gaz.”⁴ The town was completely destroyed by Aziru and his allies. Tyre fell shortly after Simyra.⁵ Abi-Milki, its king,

¹ Letter CLXX (W. 41) quoted by Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, pp. 292-293; quoted also by A. Weigall, *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 205.

² Letter K. 112, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), pp. 363-364.

³ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 291.

⁴ Letter CLXXII (W. 56), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 293.

⁵ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 294.

had been describing his plight in every letter he sent to Egypt. But nothing had come of his efforts to attract the Pharaoh's attention upon the situation in Syria. In the end, he had let things take their course.

Ribaddi was now fighting alone against hopeless odds, for a king who seemed deaf to his cries for help and yet who could easily have supported him, had he wished to do so. It appears that, for once at least, after the loss of Simyra, Akhnaton took pity on his faithful servant. A small force of Sutu (Arab mercenaries) was sent from Egypt to Ribaddi's rescue. But that isolated help proved a disaster. For Pakhura, the officer in command of the reinforcements, mistaking friend for foe — or perhaps secretly won over to Aziru and the rebels — attacked the "Shirdanu" troops upon whom Ribaddi was relying for his defence, and made a great slaughter of them.¹ The people of Gebal immediately threw all the responsibility for this misdeed upon Ribaddi himself, whose position in the city soon became untenable. "Since that time," says he, in one of his messages to the Pharaoh, "the city has been exasperated against me; and truly the city says: 'A crime such has not been committed from eternity, has been committed against us.'"² Already his own brother was at the head of the anti-Egyptian faction, and his wife and his whole household (as he tells the king in another letter) were bringing pressure upon him to sever his allegiance to Egypt and "join the sons of Abdashirta."³ At one time we see that he was forced to leave Byblos, and that he found its gates closed against him.⁴ He managed, however, to re-enter it, seriously fearing he would be driven out

¹ Letter CC (W. 77), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 297. J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 365.

² Letter K. 122, quoted by J. Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 365.

³ Letter CCVIII (W. 71), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 209. Letter CCXVI (W. 96), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, pp. 299-300. Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 213. J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 365.

⁴ Letter CCXVI (W. 96), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 300. J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 366.

for the second time if his messengers again returned from Egypt without help. His last pathetic letters, despatched from the midst of a starving city over which he was daily losing control, are worth quoting in extenso. In this summary review of the Syrian unrest, we shall at least give one or two extracts from them. In one message, Ribaddi compares his present plight as a faithful vassal of Egypt with what his position would have been in the days when the Pharaohs' power was feared in conquered land: "Once," says he, "at the sight of an Egyptian, the kings of Canaan fled from before him, but now the sons of Abdashirta despise the people of Egypt and threaten me with their bloody weapons."¹ His position had even been much stronger in the beginning of the Amorite rebellion: "When Abdashirta formerly came out against me, I was mighty, and behold, now my people are scattered and I am small. . . ."² And letter after letter brings us always that same entreating appeal to Akhnaton to intervene vigorously and save his Asiatic dominions: "Let not my Lord the King neglect the affair of these dogs!"; and always the same unfailing loyalty, firm to the bitter end; that loyalty that found its expression even while Aziru and his men were battering at the walls of Gebal. "So long as I am in the city, I guard it for my Lord, and my heart is right towards my Lord the king, so that I will not betray the city to the sons of Abdashirta. For to this end has my brother stirred up the city, that it may be delivered up to the sons of Abdashirta. O let not my Lord the king neglect the city! For in it there is a very great quantity of silver and gold, and in the temples of its gods there is a great amount of property of all sorts."³ And finally, the last words of a gallant soldier keeping his master informed, to the end, about a situation henceforth hopeless: "The enemy do not depart from the gates of Gebal."⁴ Meanwhile, Ribaddi's son, who had been sent to Egypt to beg for help, waited over three months before he could obtain an audience from the king.

¹ Quoted from *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, pp. 305-306.

² Quoted from *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 306.

³ Letter K. 137, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 366.

⁴ Quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 366.

Gebal was stormed, as so many other cities had been. Ribaddi fell alive into Aziru's hands, and the rebel leader gave him over to his colleagues, the Amorite princes, to be put to death, probably not without torture. With him disappeared the sincerest champion of Egyptian rule in North Syria.

The news of the fall of Gebal must have been a blow to all those who felt for the greatness of Egypt. For not only did the city contain "a great quantity of gold and silver," but it had maintained an unbroken connection with Egypt for long centuries. Montet's excavations in 1921 brought to light on its site the remains of an Egyptian temple dating back to the time of King Unas, of the Fifth Dynasty — one thousand five hundred years before the conquests of Thutmose the Third. Another temple had been built there during the Twelfth Dynasty, and the local god and goddess — the "Lord and Lady of Gebal" — had been identified with Ra and Hathor. So that Ribaddi was right when he wrote to his overlord in Akhetaton: "Let the king search the records of the house of his fathers and see if the man who is in Gebal is not a true servant of the king."¹

But Akhnaton seems to have been more grieved for the death of the faithful vassal who had struggled and suffered for his sake with the bitter feeling of being abandoned, than for the loss of all his possessions. He had probably been for long aware of Aziru's duplicity, and one would think that he only half accepted the clever excuses which the rebel leader put forth each time he was asked an explanation of his behaviour. He had commanded him to rebuild Simyra.² He had summoned him to Egypt to give an account of all the fighting in which he had been involved — perhaps also to answer the accusations brought against him by Abi-Milki, Ribaddi and others. He had sent Khani, a special envoy,³ to see what he was doing, and possibly to bring him back with him to Akhetaton. The Amorite had always very carefully

¹ Quoted by J. Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 349.

² Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 211. J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 369.

³ J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 370.

avoided the issue, now begging for a delay,¹ now running away from his headquarters in order not to meet the king's messenger.² And Akhnaton had taken no step against him. He did not insist on knowing more about his intrigues. He probably held Aziru to be an ambitious princeling, impatient to aggrandise his territory — like most dynasts, when they could do so. But he does not appear to have judged him capable of having a helpless prisoner done to death in cold blood. The news of that deed came to him as a painful revelation. And the long letter he wrote to his treacherous vassal on that occasion shows a sad amazement in front of the darkest side of humanity suddenly thrust before him by hard facts. “Dost thou not write to the king thy Lord: ‘I am thy servant like all the former princes who were in Gebal’? Yet hast thou committed this crime? . . .”³ Then comes the story of how Ribaddi was handed over by Aziru to the Amorite confederates; and Akhnaton continues: “Didst thou not know the hatred of those men for him? If thou art indeed a servant of the king, why hast not thou arranged for his sending to the king thy Lord?”⁴

To send Ribaddi to Egypt, so that his accusing voice might be heard there, was the last thing which the traitor could have been expected to do. But Akhnaton was too good even to suspect such an amount of deceit and cruelty as that of his unworthy vassal.

* * *

Already before the fall of Byblos — perhaps even before the fall of Simyra — troubles had broken out in Palestine where

¹ Letters K. 160 and K. 164, quoted by J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 369. Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 211.

² Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), p. 124. Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 212. J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 370.

³ Letter K. 162, of Akhnaton to Aziru, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), pp. 370-371.

⁴ Letter K. 162, of Akhnaton to Aziru, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 371.

Labaya (or Lapaya) and his sons, and Tagi, had greatly succeeded in bringing the wandering desert tribes — the Habiru — to assist them in a general uprising against Egyptian domination.

From the beginning, the letters of the few loyal dynasts to the Pharaoh had been — like those of Aki-izzi of Katna, of Abi-Milki of Tyre, and of the faithful Ribaddi, in Syria — repeated warnings against increasing danger. “Verily,” had written, for instance, Biridiya of Megiddo, “I guard Megiddo, the city of the king, my Lord, day and night. Mighty is the enmity of the people of the Sa-Gaz, in the land: therefore, let the king my Lord have regard to his land.”¹ Yashdata of Taanach, another loyal chief, soon forced to fly for his life and seek refuge at Megiddo, had also written from there in the same tone. But just as in the case of Syria, no help seems to have been sent.

Labaya, captured by the supporters of Egypt, but allowed to escape by Zurata of Accho, a dynast who was playing a double game, was finally killed at Gina (the En-Gannim of the Bible). But his sons, like the sons of Abdashirta in North Syria, led the anti-Egyptian movement after his death. They did all they could to stir up the other local chieftains, using threats where persuasion failed. “Thus have the two sons of Labaya spoken unto me,” wrote one of these, named Addukarradu, to the king of Egypt. “‘Show hostility to the people of Gina,’ said they, ‘because they have slain our father. And if thou dost not show hostility, we shall be thine enemies’; But,” added he speedily, “I answered them: ‘The God of the king my Lord forbid that I should show hostility towards the folk of Gina, the servants of the king my Lord.’”²

But all were not as firm in their loyalty, and from the Plain of Jezreel, where it had probably begun, the disaffection and civil strife spread, on both sides of the Jordan, and soon reached as far south as Gezer. We get from all sides reports of aggression upon towns which still retain their allegiance to Egypt, and news of robbery along the trade-routes, on the part of the Habiru. In one of his letters, Burnaburiash, king

¹ Letter K. 243, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 377.

² Letter K. 250, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 379.

of Babylon, complains to Akhnaton about the plunder of one of his caravans in Egyptian territory, with loss of life, and asks for compensations.¹ The aggressor was none other but Shutatna, the son of that Zurata of Accho, who, in collaboration with one Shumaddhu (Shamu-addu), also a vassal of Egypt, had helped Labaya to escape. On the other hand, Addu-dani (of Gath?) writes that “Beia, the son of Gulati,” has “plundered the city and laid a heavy ransom upon its captives”²; Dangatakala,³ another local dynast, a queen named Ninur,⁴ who styles herself as the Pharaoh’s handmaid, and several others, write entreating despatches, asking Akhnaton for help against the Habiru. Time passed, and no help came. Finally, Jerusalem itself was threatened.

The governor of that city, Abdikhipa, seems to have been in Palestine what Ribaddi was in Syria: a wholehearted supporter of Egyptian rule, taking the Pharaoh’s interests as though they were his own. He had at first allied himself with Shuwardata of Keilah, Zurata of Accho, Milki-ili, and other dynasts and appealed, along with them, to Yankhamu to intervene against the increasing rebellion. But soon those men whom he had trusted proved false, and the situation changed entirely. The governor of Jerusalem wrote to Akhnaton telling him that Milki-ili was siding with his father-in-law, Tagi — one of the chiefs heading the rebellion, and that he had attacked him.⁵ In a subsequent message he announced that, “through the intrigues of Milki-ili and the sons of Labaya,” Gezer, Askalon, and Lachish had become hostile to Egypt; that the royal mail had been robbed in the fields of Aijalon — only fourteen miles from Jerusalem — and that, if no troops came speedily, nothing would be left of the

¹ Letter CXXIV (W. 11), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 285. S. Cook: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 313.

² Letter K. 292 (W. 239); Letter CCLX in Sir Flinders Petrie’s *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, pp. 308-309.

³ Letter CCLXIII (W. 216), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 309. A. Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 210.

⁴ Letters CCLXV (W. 173), CCXLVI (W. 174), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 309.

⁵ Letter CCXXXII (W. 186), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 303; also *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 315.

king's lands.¹ We learn from another correspondent that Lachish had seized Mukhrashti, its eastern neighbour,² and again from Abdikhipa, that Milki-ili and Shuwardata had "hired men of Gazri (Gezer), Ginti (Gath), and Kilti (Keilah), and seized the land of Rubuti (Rabbah)"; that "men of Kilti" (Keilah) had taken "Bit-Ninib, a city of the king" in the territory of Jerusalem, and that if no troops were sent the whole land would fall to the Habiru.³

In the meantime, Shuwardata protested of his innocence — "Let the king ask," wrote he, "if I have ever taken a man, or an ox, or an ass from him"⁴ — and even accused Abdikhipa of disloyalty.⁵ Tagi, the rebel leader, who, like Aziru in Syria, never lost an opportunity of reasserting his allegiance to Egypt, even managed to obtain a personal interview from the king. As in Syria, the Egyptian officers on the spot seem either to have lacked insight or to have been, perhaps, themselves, of doubtful loyalty to Akhnaton. They often favoured the disloyal dynasts, and it is perhaps on the report of some of them that Abdikhipa did not obtain from the Pharaoh as ready a hearing as the double-faced Tagi. He complained bitterly of this in his letters. "By the life of the king my Lord," wrote he, "because I spoke thus to the officer of the king my Lord: 'Why dost thou love the Habiru and hate the regents?' therefore I am slandered before the king my Lord. Because I say: 'The lands of the king my Lord are being lost,' therefore I am slandered before the king my Lord."⁶

As time passed, things fared worse and worse for Egypt. The territory north of Jerusalem was now lost as well as the hill country to the west of the city and the entire sea-coast. "Now," wrote Abdikhipa, "the Habiru occupy the cities.

¹ Letter CCLIV (W. 180), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 307.

² *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 315.

³ Letter CCLVI (W. 183), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 307. Also *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 315.

⁴ *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, pp. 315-316.

⁵ *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 315. Letter CCLI (W. 165), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 306.

⁶ *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 315. Letter K. 286, quoted by Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), pp. 379-380.

Not one prince remains; all are ruined.”¹ No longer able to defend himself against the rebel chiefs, let alone to guarantee the safety of the trade-routes without the Pharaoh’s help, he stuck however to his post, as long as he possibly could: “The king has set his name upon the land of Jerusalem, for ever,” wrote he in one of his despatches, “therefore I cannot forsake the land of Jerusalem.”²

The same insistence upon the emergency of the situation and the necessity of immediate action is repeatedly found in all the faithful governor’s letters, to the end. “The whole land of the king my Lord is going to ruin; send Yankhamu to care for the king’s land,” or “If no troops come this year, all the lands of the king my Lord will be lost.” Such sentences reappear as a leit-motif in nearly all the despatches from Jerusalem. Moreover, Abdikhipa, who seems to have been personally acquainted with Akhnaton’s cuneiform scribe, often added to his messages a “post-scriptum” addressed to him. And the post-scriptum was the same as the message itself — a desperate warning: “To the scribe of the king my Lord, thus speaks thy servant, Abdikhipa: Bring clearly before the king my Lord these words: ‘All the lands of the king my Lord are going to ruin.’”³

But no help was sent.

Finally, Palestine seems to have become too unsafe for any man openly loyal to Egypt to remain there. “Turbatsu was slain at the gate of Zilu,” writes Abdikhipa; “and Yaptiaddi” — another supporter of the Pharaoh’s rule — “was also slain at the gate of Zilu. Send troops to Jerusalem or all will be lost.” And he adds: “If there are no troops this year, let the king my Lord send an officer to fetch me and my brothers, that we may die (in Egypt) with the king my Lord.”⁴

There is no evidence that any step was taken by the king of Egypt, at the last moment, in order to recover even a part of his lost territories, or at least to save Jerusalem, which

¹ Letter CXXXIV (W. 181), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, pp. 303-304.

² Quoted by J. Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 383.

³ Letter K. 286, quoted by J. Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 381.

⁴ Letter CCXXXIV (W. 181), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, pp. 303-304. Letter K. 288, quoted by J. Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 381.

appears to have been his last important stronghold in Asia. From the boundaries of Asia Minor and Northern Mesopotamia down to the Sinai Desert, Egyptian domination now became a thing of the past; a thing, nay, that was never to be again — for though warrior-like Pharaohs were soon to enter again into Canaan and resume the old northward march at the head of their armies, they were to recover and retain but a small portion of the provinces which Akhnaton had allowed “to go to ruin.”

* * *

In the preceding pages we have tried to give, from the Amarna Letters, a rough sketch of the main developments in Syria and Palestine under Akhnaton. We purposely avoided all comments so that the reader might get a faithful picture of the unrest and nothing more. But that picture itself is not complete unless one visualises what horrible realities often lay under the few brief sentences that have come down to us in those thirty-three-hundred-year-old official despatches from the Pharaoh's correspondents. The details given in a few letters are sufficient to help one's imagination. For instance, in his complaint mentioned above about the plundering of one of his caravans, King Burnaburiash informs Akhnaton that, apart from several merchants having been killed by the robbers, “Shumadda has kept one of the Babylonians with his feet cut off; Shutatna has taken another as his slave. . . .”¹

Reports such as this show that man was no better in the fourteenth century B.C. than he is to-day. And if, to the gratuitous atrocities committed by chieftains in no way different from ordinary cut-throats and by the ferocious tribesmen who were in their pay, we add the well-known brutalities inherent to warfare — and especially to civil warfare — in all times, we shall begin to form some idea of the true story told by the Amarna Letters. We shall realise that behind the mention of a single word, the casual reference to

¹ Letter CXXIV (W. 11), Sir Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899, Vol. II, p. 285).

a new place to which war had spread, lay the fact of villages reduced to ashes in the midst of devastated fields and vineyards. We shall feel that every enumeration of a few towns “fallen to the Sa-Gaz” — every line that is, for most modern readers, but a list of picturesque names — covers all the horrors of a series of sieges: furious assaults repelled at the point of the sword; burning missiles setting on fire whole clusters of men and beasts (we have a hint of what it was in the desperate letters of Abi-Milki of Tyre and of Ribaddi of Gebal); then, wild men, half-soldiers, half-brigands, maddened by the lust of violence, rushing through the breaches in crumbling walls; pillage, murder, outrage; children and young maidens torn from their frantic mothers; whole populations driven away and sold in the slave-markets of Syria — a natural consequence of ancient warfare which we tend to forget.

And that is not all. We must picture to ourselves, fleeing in terror before the Sa-Gaz and the Habiru, the endless lines of Egyptian, Syrian and Canaanite refugees who had lost all they possessed; men, women and children, pouring into Egypt across the Sinai Desert, by hundreds and by thousands, ragged and dirty, exhausted, sick, half-starved — some of them half-insane — with recent scenes of rape, slaughter and torture still vivid before their eyes; the people of whom an Egyptian officer in charge of them said: “They have been destroyed and their towns laid waste, and fire has been thrown (into their grain). . . . Their countries are starving; they live like goats of the mountains.”¹

All this could easily have been avoided. A few war-chariots and a few hundreds of mercenaries sent in time would have sufficed; and Akhnaton had at his disposal, as we have seen, the man-power and resources of the greatest empire then existing. Moreover, he seems to have known the danger that was threatening his dominions; he knew it, perhaps not to the extent the modern historian knows it (with the account of the aftermath of the rebellion open before him), but he knew it enough to feel the necessity of taking

¹ Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 125.

some immediate measures if he did not wish to see “the whole land” lost to him. We have recalled that he was suspicious about Aziru’s behaviour; that he summoned him to Egypt and even sent a special messenger to inquire of his dealings — a messenger whom the intriguing Amorite did all he could not to meet. In the letter which he wrote to his faithless vassal, the Pharaoh reproached him for having eaten a covenant meal with the “man of Kadesh” — Itakama — who was an enemy of Egypt, and for having allied himself to him.¹ This proves that he knew all about Itakama’s collaboration with the Hittites. He was probably more aware of the situation than a few modern writers seem to believe. And he wanted peace: “Know thou,” wrote he to Aziru, “that the king desireth not that the whole land of Canaan should be in turmoil.”² And he was fully conscious of his own power to enforce it: “I am very well,” wrote he again, “I, the Sun in the heavens; and my chariots and soldiers are exceedingly numerous; and from Upper Egypt, even unto Lower Egypt, and from the place where the Sun riseth even unto the place where He setteth, the whole country is in good cause and content.”³

And yet he did not send help to the faithful vassals who only begged for the privilege of keeping the empire whole in his name.

* * *

It is easy to imagine the bewilderment of the messengers from Syria and Palestine when they found no response to their cries for military aid in the new capital of Egypt; no reaction to their indignant tales of aggression, save perhaps, in the young king’s large dark eyes, a depth of sadness that they were utterly unable to understand — instead of the expected anger and lust for revenge; no preparation for war, in answer to their desperate warnings.

It is easy to put one’s self in the place of Ribaddi’s son, running all the way from beleaguered Gebal with the one

¹ Akhnaton’s Letter to Aziru (already quoted).

² Akhnaton’s Letter to Aziru (already quoted).

³ Akhnaton’s Letter to Aziru, quoted by A. Weigall, *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 196.

fear that he might reach Egypt too late, only to find himself waiting over three months for Akhnaton to grant him an audience; and then, once in the sacred presence of that mighty monarch in whom he had put all hopes, recalling before him the horrors of the siege of Gebal only to get from him, for all answer, the assurance that he felt for the sufferings of his people but that he did not wish to keep by force a land in which so many princes seemed to be opposed to his rule! The young man probably realised that the king was thoroughly sincere; that the sympathy he expressed was not a mere lip-sympathy. He had seen his face darken with immeasurable sorrow all the time he had spoken to him. He had perhaps even seen a tear roll down his pale cheek. No, this was no hard-hearted king who did not care what happened to those who were struggling for him far away. And we can imagine the son of Ribaddi slowly walking down the steps of the palace with one question troubling his mind: “Then, why no help for us? Why? Why?”

The bearer of the pathetic letter from the elders of Tunip had in vain tortured his brains in search of an answer to the same question. The bearers of all the despatches addressed to Akhnaton by the few vassal princes and governors of cities who remained loyal to him — of all those despatches that “even now move the reader”¹ — had done the same. Anyone can imagine their feelings.

Thirty-three hundred years later, modern authors were to condemn Akhnaton’s “supineness and apathy”² in the name of their sympathy for the loyal people of Syria and Canaan. “All the letters tell the same story of successful revolt on the part of the subjects of Egypt, and the capture and plundering and burning of towns and villages by the Khabiri, and the robbery of caravans on all the trade routes,” writes Sir Wallis Budge. “And whilst all this was going on, the king of Egypt remained unmoved and only occupied himself with the cult of his god.”³ It is easier to condemn a man — and

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 209.

² J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 375.

³ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), p. 102.

especially such a man, far in advance of his own times and of ours — than to try to analyse his motives.

* * *

Just as we can realise the distress of the Syrian envoys when returning home without any promises of help, so we can also picture to ourselves what the crafty Aziru probably felt when, after crushing all his opponents, he at last decided that he could now go to Egypt and see the king, who had summoned him there years before. He sailed up the Nile in gaudy apparel, expecting, no doubt, to impress the Egyptians. But he was himself dazzled at the sight of the City of the Horizon of Aton, and still more so at that of Akhnaton's splendid palace. And though the secret supporters he had at the Egyptian court — a nobleman named Tutu, to whom he had been writing regularly, and others, too — had told him that he had nothing to fear from his overlord; though they had spoken to him of the strange new God in Whose eyes the friends and enemies of Egypt were equal, yet he could hardly believe the Pharaoh's leniency. With such wealth at his disposal, he, Aziru, son of Abdashirta, would have hired soldiers from all countries and built an empire for himself, thought he, as he gazed in amazement at the magnificent temples of Akhetaton, or as he walked through the glittering audience hall of the palace, with its over five hundred columns of gold and lapis lazuli. And this monarch had done nothing even to keep the lands his fathers had conquered! What sort of a king was he? A weakling, afraid to fight, or a fool whom the Amorite's clever lies had deceived? The Pharaohs of old would have sacrificed such a fellow as himself, Aziru, their enemy, to the battle-god Amon, with their own axe. Aziru knew it well. But the present king treated him kindly. He reproached him, it is true, with the murder of Ribaddi and of several other loyal princes. But he did not punish him for it. And the Amorite, merely recognising the suzerainty of Egypt as a matter of courtesy, went back to Syria as the ruler of a practically independent State — quite content with himself. His plans had

succeeded — so he believed. He had all along deceived that impossible dreamer who now held the throne of the conquerors of Syria. At least, he thought he had. He was incapable of feeling what an amount of suffering there was in Akhnaton's words when he had recalled Ribaddi's capture, betrayal, and death. He still less realised what conceptions of international justice, far beyond his age and many ages to come, lay behind the king's attitude towards himself as the head of the Amorite rebellion — the "Syrian nationalist," as we would say to-day. He saw Akhnaton; he spoke to him; yet he remained as alien to him and as ignorant of him as ever: an exalted savage, in presence of "the first man in whose heart was no trace of barbarism."¹

We can also, to a very great extent, imagine the comments of the victims of the Syrian war, the hungry, ragged, tired men who poured into Egypt by thousands across the border of Canaan and the Sinai Desert. The king, thought they, was the cause of their plight. He had abandoned them. He was now doing his best to relieve them, feeding them, housing them, clothing them, making the best possible arrangements to comfort the sick and bury the dead, to the utmost capacity of his officers. But could he give them back what the Sa-Gaz and the Habiru had burnt and destroyed? — and their dear ones who had been killed? — and all that their homes had meant to them? Why had he not sent troops to protect them, when it was still time?

The agents of the priests of Amon and of the other national gods — the enemies of the king — would go and tell them "why." They were many; they had never ceased being at work in Egypt; and possibly they had played a part in the Syrian rebellion itself, stirring up the vassals against their overlord. The king, they told these distressed people, was an apostate, a "heretic," an enemy of all the gods. How could one expect him not to be an enemy of men also? The wrath of Amon and of all the gods was upon Egypt and her people because of him. Amon had made Egypt great. He had guided the armies of her kings to victory. He would have helped

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 251.

them for ever to maintain peace and order in a flourishing empire. But the present Pharaoh had raised his hand against the “king of gods.” He had sought to destroy him. And now Amon was taking his revenge upon him and upon the nation that still tolerated him. And the unfortunate folk believed what they were told, for they feared the priests and feared the gods of Egypt. And so they grew to hate the best of kings, who loved them.

As for the priests of Amon themselves, they so loathed Akhnaton’s rule that they welcomed anything that would put an end to it. Outwardly full of patriotic grief at the news of Egypt’s disasters, they rejoiced in their hearts, counting the days of him whom they already called “that criminal.” Every new blow to the Pharaoh’s prestige prepared the day when they would again seize power and dominate both the king and the country more strongly than ever.

Finally, we can imagine the gradual disaffection of the courtiers — even of many of those who, at first, had enthusiastically “hearkened to the king’s Teaching” — when they saw where the principles of the Religion of the Disk were leading the country. More and more Akhnaton must have discerned that the homages paid in his presence to his God were considered by numbers of those who rendered them as merely a part of the court etiquette. He must have realised, as time passed, and as things went worse in Syria, that he was more and more alone — out of touch with his people, out of touch with his nobles, out of touch with his age, with the tradition of his country, with the tradition of the world; with the present and the past; perhaps out of touch with the future, too, for ever; a man without roots in any soil, without a hold over any other men; an isolated Individual, in tune, it was true, with the everlasting Soul of the Sun, but without a place anywhere in the human world.

A time probably came when nobody loved him apart from his devoted queen and a handful of faithful friends. And even those were too far below him to understand him to the end. Their love was soothing. But still he was alone. He had always been alone, as one who lived on the plane of eternal truth in the midst of admirers and enemies who all lived in

relative truth, if not in falsehood — in time. He only realised it, perhaps, to a greater extent than ever, now that his truth of all times and all lands — the brotherhood of living creatures, and therefore of men — came into open clash with the belief of his age: the necessity of defending an empire on the existence of which was based his own world-supremacy as king of Egypt.

Let us examine, in the light of what we know of the Religion of the Disk, that conflict between the God-conscious, eternal Individual — above country and above time¹ — that Akhnaton was, and the average man, carrying even into the most exalted states the prejudices of his environment, that his contemporaries wanted him to be. We shall perhaps then understand what motives more powerful than self-interest, and more powerful than pity, gave the young Pharaoh the strange courage to set aside the heart-rending letters of his loyal vassals (even those of Ribaddi, of Abdikhpa; even that of the elders of Tunip), and watch his empire go to pieces without interfering.

It may appear less easy to picture to one's self his reactions to the Syrian events than those of either his vassals (loyal or disloyal), his courtiers, his enemies, or his lesser subjects. But to try to do so is essential, for only thus can we hope to understand the value of Akhnaton's example, and the everlasting actuality of his forgotten Teaching.

Breasted, speaking of Aziru's being granted a year's delay, when the king could easily have insisted on his appearing before him at once, says that this "shows the astonishing leniency of Akhnaton, in a manner which would indicate that he was opposed to measures of force such as his fathers had employed."²

There can be no doubt that there was, at the root of the Pharaoh's behaviour towards the men seeking to wreck his empire (or opposing his reforms in Egypt) a spontaneous

¹ The real key to Akhnaton's strange "pacifism" lies precisely in the fact that he was a man "above Time" who endeavoured to impose his lofty ideals upon this Dark Age (both his and ours) without taking into account the fact that violence is the law of any revolution within Time, specially in the Dark Age. (The Kali Yuga, of the Hindus.)

² Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 124.

propensity to kindness. Akhnaton was the last man to be harsh, even to his declared enemies. He realised too well what suffering meant to inflict it or have it inflicted, under any pretext, upon man or beast — even upon a traitor as a punishment; and violence — let alone cruelty — was altogether out of keeping with his tender, sensitive nature.

But that would not be enough to explain his apparent apathy throughout the Syrian unrest. The appeals from Irkata, from Simyra and from Tunip, from Byblos and from Jerusalem for immediate succour, were sufficiently distressing, sufficiently pathetic to move the most callous overlord to prompt action. The sufferings of his faithful supporters must have been at least as painful to Akhnaton as those of the discontented cities that welcomed the rule of Amorites (and finally that of the Hittites) in place of his. His attitude was not dictated by mere sentiment. Had it been so, it is probable that, in spite of his reluctance for bloodshed, he would have thrown in all his might on the side of the helpless vassals who begged for his “strong hand” to deliver them. To answer the cry: “Tunip, thy city, weeps . . .” he perhaps would have gone to Syria himself. But it was not a matter of feelings alone. It was a question of principles. “Marshalling the material available for the study of this period of history,” writes Arthur Weigall, “one can interpret the events in Syria in only one way: Akhnaton definitely refused to do battle, believing that a resort to arms was an offence to God. Whether fortune or misfortune, gain or loss, was to be his lot, he would hold to his principles, and would not return to the old gods of battle.”¹

A very important question arises — a question which, as far as we know, has not yet been put forward by any of the writers who exalt or condemn Akhnaton’s “pacifism” — and that is whether or not the young Founder of the Religion of the Disk would have resorted to arms in order to defend Egypt herself, in the eventuality of foreign aggression. No answer can be given, for in his days Egypt was not attacked. Still the point remains; and it is an interesting point. Had

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 202.

the enemies who stood before him been, not the Amorites, the Habiru, the Sa-Gaz — the natives of Syria and Palestine fighting to chase out of their own country its Egyptian overlords and their local supporters — but people from a foreign land rushing across the desert to seize and lay waste his lovely Nile Valley; to destroy the splendid City which he himself had built to be the centre of a world-religion of beauty, the question (even if history can suggest no reply to it) can at least be put: would then Akhnaton have stood back and watched the disaster without trying to prevent it? Would he have tried to prevent it by means other than a resort to armed force? And if those means failed, or were unthinkable (as in the case of an inroad of barbaric hordes that force alone can stop) would he, then, have fought with that self-same indomitable courage that he actually exercised in order to remain inactive?

He undoubtedly believed in a religion of universal love which, even if superficially practised by governments as well as by individuals, would make international relations friendly. Did he believe, however, that in a world in which aggression is an impending possibility, a nation should always be, even in peacetime, prepared for war, with up-to-date armaments in sufficient quantity? One would think so, from the few sentences of his letter which we have quoted above.¹ But he never used that power to defend his dominions, to keep conquered land under his sway. Again, would he have done so to protect his native soil?

We leave the reader to think of these questions to which, in the present state of our knowledge, no definite answer can be given on a sound historic basis. The point we wished to stress in raising them is that the immediate problem to which Akhnaton, by his non-intervention in the Syrian unrest, gave the boldest practical solution ever put forth, is not that of war accepted for the defence of one's own country, but that of war waged to defend one's foreign possessions — to keep one's colonies and vassal States under control. And the solution provided by him for the first and, it would also seem, for the last time in history, consisted of nothing less

¹ See p. 225.

than to watch the struggle of the conquered country's nationalists (as we would call them to-day) against the local supporters of foreign rule, without interfering; to allow the "disloyal" elements to become the masters in their own land, if they really commanded a sufficient following; to let the princes and people of a restless empire fight out their own conflicts, solve their own problems, and create their own history. Furthermore, it consisted of nothing less than to allow even foreign powers to take the upper hand in the affairs of the disaffected land, if such was the consequence of the policy of its successful leaders. In the particular case under study, the one actually to benefit from Aziru's machinations against his Egyptian overlord was ultimately neither Aziru himself nor his people — the Amorites — nor any Syrian impatient of foreign domination, but Shubbiluliuma, king of the Hittites. And Hittite rule was to prove far more exacting, far more ruthless, far more unbearable than the Egyptian. Yet Akhnaton contented himself with severing diplomatic relations with Shubbiluliuma; at least, Shubbiluliuma's written grievances would tend to prove that he did so. But he did nothing to prevent the advance of the Hittite troops and their union with the forces of the local anti-Egyptian princes. He did nothing either to help his loyal vassals, or to help the movement for independence, of which he probably foresaw the gloomy aftermath.

He acted — or better, abstained from acting — as though the land conquered by his fathers were not his. In other words, from the time he understood that a number of Syrian and Canaanite local dynasts did not want his rule, he ceased to consider himself as their overlord. He styled himself as such, it is true, in the letters that he sent even to such disloyal princes as Aziru. But that was because Aziru and all the others, however wildly anti-Egyptian, maintained a pretence of loyalty in their official correspondence with him. In fact, he never treated them or endeavoured even to treat them as an overlord desiring to stress his rights would have done.

* * *

One must not imagine that Akhnaton's position as an absolute "non-imperialist" at the head of an empire was an easy or a pleasant one. He suffered, in order to maintain it, and to leave the world the unique example which he left, even in what appeared to be an all-round failure. The modern commentators of his history seem to forget this fact, when they hasten to tax him with "supineness and apathy." He suffered; and no man having a heart can remain unmoved at the idea of the superhuman courage with which he stood to the end, in the midst of increasing disaster and hatred, firm in the truth which he had realised.

It is true that, far from experiencing the greed of a conqueror, he was alien to that particular pride which many great rulers seems to have drawn from the tranquil possession of other people's territory. Even his own territory he regarded first as "his Father's" — as the domain of the Sun, where man and beast were to thrive in love and happiness; not as the property of any earthly monarch. "Hills, deserts, embankments, high-lands, low-lands, islands, villages, men, beasts . . . all things which the Aton produces, and on which His rays shine, they shall be for the Father, the living Aton . . ." had he said in one of the boundary-inscriptions when he had laid the foundations of his sacred City — the model of a world governed by his spirit. And one may believe, from his attitude towards his dominions, that he regarded them, too, from the beginning, not as his personal property, nor as an annexe of Egypt, but as lands of the Sun — as were, in his eyes, all lands on earth; as countries that existed, not for a few Egyptians to draw profit out of them, but for them themselves to flourish and be happy, with all the creatures that the One Sun of the whole world nourished upon their surface. To believe in the "rights" of one nation over others would have been to him (from all we know of his religion) a return to the idolatrous worship of local gods. He did not, he could not, regret the loss of Syria and Palestine in themselves.

But he could not lightly brush aside his feelings for his subjects who struggled and suffered there, in the midst of the turmoil of civil war, supporters of Egypt against the supporters of Amor or of the Hittites. His vivid imagination, of

which we have a proof in his poems, must have brought before his eyes, so as to say, all the horror of the battles and sieges which the messengers described to him with the eloquence of despair. And he knew he could put a stop to that horror, and bring back peace and normal life to Syria whenever he liked, with one single order. Only that order would have implied that the loyal vassals fighting for him had more the right to rule Syria than the disloyal ones, fighting for themselves (or, unknowingly, for the king of the Hittites); that Syria was his, because his fathers had conquered it, before being, like all the world, the free land of Him Who made it and fed it — the Sun's. Such an order he could not give. The universal fatherhood of the Sun meant, to him, the universal brotherhood of nations no less than of individuals. To him there could not be two standards of behaviour: one for individual men and the other for States. One nation could not overrule another, unless the people of that other were happy to remain under its domination. One man — even he; nay, especially he, the conscious Son of the Sun — could not assert his suzerainty over others against their will as clearly expressed as was the will of the Syrian and Canaanite princes in their long-stretched anti-Egyptian agitation. Such overlordship bred hatred, even as conquest itself bred hatred. It was an expression of separateness; a denial of the world's unity. He, Akhnaton, Son of the Sun, and one with the One Father of all life, could not go against the law of love which was the great law of life, revealed to him from within.

On the other hand, he could not abdicate — run away from the pressing empire problems. He could not say: "I have not conquered the empire; it is no concern of mine." The facts were there; he had to face them, if his lofty religion was to be of any meaning in the living, struggling world. By remaining in constant and painful touch with the realities of a widespread colonial revolt — the consequence of conquest, that is to say of greed, that ultimate source of all wars — and yet by refusing to keep his empire by force; by retaining to the end a non-imperialistic attitude, he had to demonstrate that the law of love and freedom, in which he believed,

should be and can be the basis of international relations. He had to remain deaf to the cries of distress of those who loved him and wanted his rule, in order to allow all the princes of Syria to have their say and play their part in the affairs of the land of their fathers, and to put, once for all, an end to the situation which had led to the anti-Egyptian unrest — to the injustice and hatred resulting from the Egyptian conquest. In order to be true to the Sun, his Father, Who made all lands and favours none, he had to take the course which he took.

But it was not a pleasant course — far from it. Akhnaton stood aloof from the war that was raging throughout his Asiatic dominions; he did not remain unmoved. On the contrary, one cannot but believe that the desperate letters he received from his faithful servants were to him “as so many sword-thrusts,” and “one may picture him praying passionately for strength to set them aside.”¹ He gladly sacrificed the riches of Syria to the central idea of his religion and to the consistency of his life. He accepted the loss of the cities which, like Byblos, contained “a quantity of gold and silver and a great amount of property of all sorts.”² It was less easy for him to forsake, even in the name of the same high principles, the men who were dying for the cause of imperial Egypt on the ramparts of those cities, with the love of his name in their hearts. Those alone who can realise the depth of his love — and they are not many — can hope to realise something of that “very Agony”³ which he suffered when reading the lamentable despatch from the people of Tunip, or Ribaddi’s last messages from the midst of a starving city. And what added to his suffering was, no doubt, the fact that it was impossible for him to make anyone understand the motives of his apparently strange attitude. Nobody, not even those who professed to be his followers, could, it seems, make out why his devotion to Aton, the One Sun, the One God, should clash with his imperial “duties.” For

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 209.

² Letter K. 137, quoted above.

³ Arthur Weigall: *Life and Times of Akhnaton* (New and Revised Edit. 1922), p. 207.

they could not realise what the One Sun meant to him. They thought that he who had built in Syria a town destined to be, like Akhetaton itself, a radiating centre of the new faith, would naturally do anything in his power to keep Syria under control, that he might win it over entirely to his God. They could not realise that Akhnaton's impersonal God, the Energy within the Disk, was not one to whom worshippers can be brought by a show of force; that knowledge, genuine religious experience, the vivid consciousness of universal unity and universal order were at the basis of his cult, and that the hatred generated by conquest and kept alive in the conquered people by measures of violence, was utterly uncongenial to the creation of those conditions. The far-sighted logic of his attitude was alien to them. Even his beloved queen, Nefertiti, could probably not follow him. She just accepted what he did, out of personal devotion to him, without judging him, and kept her confidence in his mission, till the end, because she loved him.

And if his closest friends and disciples could not transcend with him the deep-rooted imperialism of their time (and of many a time to come), how was he to justify his attitude in the eyes of the men who were fighting for him in faraway Syria, most of whom still clung (as their letters show) to the national gods that he had abolished? How was he to tell the messenger who brought him the distressed letter from Tunip, why he was sending him back without a promise of help? How was he to explain to Ribaddi's son why he could send no troops to his father or to anyone? (That is perhaps the reason why he kept the young man waiting three months and a half before deciding to speak to him.)

Still, he himself could not help seeing both sides of the conflict. He felt sympathy for his faithful vassals; he could not help feeling sympathy also for the "unfaithful" ones who were seeking to overthrow his rule, as his fathers had once overthrown the rule of the foreign Hyksos kings in Egypt. He could not help knowing that, at the root of all the trouble, lay the hatred that conquest always generates in a conquered people.

The One Father — the Sun — had made all nations "distinct

in speech and in the colour of their skin,” and He poured His life-giving rays over all of them. All were to live, happy and beautiful, and at peace. Conquest, the fruit of greed, was, like all forms of outrage, conceivable only to those who did not love the One Sun enough to love all His creatures impartially. And he, the Son of the universal Father — he who felt His divine Energy vibrating through his own nerves — could not lend himself to the holding down of a restless conquered land. He could not prolong a state of things which ignorance, self-pride, and greed had once created. He was to have nothing to do with “imperial duties” that were in contradiction with the principle of impartial love. It was not for him, who lived in Truth, to defend an order based upon falsehood.

* * *

Akhnaton died prematurely. And it is possible that the grief he felt for those whom he appeared to be abandoning hastened his death. “With him,” writes Breasted, passed away “such a spirit as the world had never seen before,”¹ and we add: such as was never to reappear since. Eleven hundred years after him, India’s great emperor Asoka was one day to renounce war in the name of the Buddha’s message of universal love. But the question did not arise for him to retain or to lose for its sake the lands he had inherited from his fathers. He was allowed to die leaving his vast dominions prosperous and whole. Akhnaton seems to be the one king in history who, for the sake of a philosophy which logically excluded the support of any form of aggression, actually lost a great empire. The tragic circumstances which we have tried to recall and, on the other hand, the tremendous might and wealth that the young Pharaoh could have used to defend his imperial rights, make his sacrifice all the more remarkable.

And his message of love as a basis of international relations, in the place of the time-honoured law of violence; his refusal to subscribe to conquest as a fait accompli of which the

¹ Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 127.

advantages to the conquering nation should be maintained anyhow — an attitude too modern for most rulers of men in our times — are all the more impressive precisely because they were proclaimed, not from a demagogue's platform by a handful of hungry mob-agitators, but from a throne, by the hereditary owner of the greatest empire of his days; by an absolute monarch, fully conscious of his immense wealth and power; by an emperor, whom his subjects were taught by tradition to look upon as divine — without their realising how truly godlike he actually was.

CHAPTER X

THE REWARD OF WAR

It is clear from the evidence of the Amarna Letters that, had he consented to use violence, Akhnaton could easily have stemmed the tide of events and saved the Egyptian empire, thus giving a different direction to the whole political evolution of the Near East for many centuries.

Several modern writers have criticised him for not having done so, some indeed with as much bitter vehemence as though they saw in his “pacifism” a dangerous example to the present-day owners of foreign empires. But none seem to have noticed that, apart from all political considerations, the very history of civilisation in the Near East — and subsequently in the West — would probably have been much altered had the young Pharaoh cared to quell rebellion in his Syrian dominion in the fourteenth century B.C.

However useless it may appear to ponder over possibilities which have never materialised, yet we may be excused for doing so if the sheer vision of such possibilities helps us to realise more completely the true meaning of an extraordinary man, and to interpret his decisions with a keener knowledge of their remote consequences.

* * *

So let us suppose for a moment that, unlike himself, Akhnaton had yielded to the supplications of his few loyal vassals and sent them timely help against the Amorite chieftains and their supporters. Let us even suppose that he had marched in person into Syria, with archers and chariots and all the awe-inspiring apparel of war, as any of his fathers would have done.

It is highly probable — practically certain — that in such a case the “sons of Abdashirta” would have been utterly

defeated from the start, and the Syrian rebellion nipped in the bud. In spite of long years of peace, Egypt was still a first-rate military power and, moreover, the aid that was needed to re-assert her prestige was, in the beginning, extremely slight. (Let us remember Ribaddi's letter to Akhnaton, before his position in Byblos became tragic: "May it seem good to the king my Lord to send me but three hundred soldiers and twenty pair of horses, and I will hold the city. . . .")

The youthful Founder of the Religion of the Disk would have returned in triumph to his capital, and the new City of the Horizon of Aton would have gazed upon one of those impressive displays of warrior-like pomp such as Thebes had witnessed in former days. And the bitterness and resentment caused by the erasure of the name of Amon from every stone and by the king's other decrees, and by his whole struggle against the national gods, would have been forgotten in a cry of victory; and Egypt would probably have accepted the rational worship of Aton, the One and Only God, without further murmurs.

Not that the people or even the nobles would have understood it, or felt its beauty, any better than they actually did. But they would have accepted it, as the expression of the sweet will of a popular king. The fact that, in spite of his revolutionary decrees, not a single rising is reported against his government in Egypt during all his reign, proves that Akhnaton was popular enough among his subjects, although of course hated by the priests. The only thing the Egyptians could not bring themselves to do for his sake was to renounce their traditional objects of worship in favour of a higher one. The only force that could have — and probably would have — led them to forsake even their beloved gods, at the command of him whom they still regarded as a god incarnate, was the prestige of victory added to that of royalty.

The orders of a monarch who has brought an empire to ruin, even if he be of divine descent, do not indeed carry the same weight as those of a triumphant king. There is, in armed success, a magic that commands respect, whatever be the personal views of the lucky warrior. One has seen in

modern times, nay, in our own days, men inferior by far to Akhnaton in genius and in character succeed in stamping their will upon a reluctant nation, just because they had, first, led that nation to victory upon the battlefield. And we believe that nothing would have reconciled the unwilling Egyptians to the new order installed by their inspired ruler as the knowledge that he had saved them and their empire from imminent danger. And if it be true, as some have suggested, that shadowy elements of treason lurked at the very court of Akhetaton,¹ then nothing would have confounded the hopes of the king's enemies at home so much as the sight of their Syrian accomplice, the crafty Aziru, led in chains through the streets of the capital, with some hundreds of other captives of rank.

The more we think of the situation created in Egypt by Akhnaton's zeal for truth, the more we are convinced that brilliant military achievements beyond the Sinai Desert were the one and only means for him to secure the lasting success of his reforms at home.

* * *

The enduring success of Akhnaton's religion in Egypt would have meant more than a change of cult. It would have meant new standards in art and in behaviour; sincerity of thought, freedom of expression, a critical, disinterested, truth-loving attitude in all walks of life; in one word, a new life.

What is left of the Amarna sculpture and painting shows us the beginning of an amazing return to personal inspiration in art, to naturalness, to freedom. With the failure of the Religion of the Disk, the artistic movement linked with it was stifled to death at its very outset. What it would have been, had it lived, is difficult to say. But one may imagine, from its earliest creations, which are well known to us, that it would have anticipated ideals of beauty that we now call "modern," putting far greater stress upon expression than upon lines,

¹ J. Baikie: *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 362.

and striving to reveal the inner nature, the “meaning,” so as to say, of things, rather than their exact or embellished physical likeness.

We can somewhat picture to ourselves the subsequent development of Egypt had her art, henceforth, been inspired by the Amarna standards, had her religion remained that which Akhnaton preached, and had there appeared, from time to time, especially among her ruling classes, true disciples of the One-who-lived-in-Truth, who would have modelled their lives upon his; had, in one word, her whole civilisation retained, even to a faint degree, the double mark of rationalism and of universal kindness and the essentially aesthetic outlook on life that characterised her only truly divine king. Then, even making the indispensable allowances for human wickedness and stupidity, the country, merely by seeking to walk in the trail of such a man as Akhnaton, would have put itself far ahead of all the neighbouring nations. It would have been a modern country in the midst of the Ancient World — but a modern country retaining all that was lovely in ancient life; a modern country without the horrors that our world of to-day has brought into existence by the import of greater technical efficiency combined with less reason, less inspiration, and less love.

* * *

But Egypt was not alone concerned. She occupied in the world, then, the position of a great power. Her gods, like those of all leading nations, were worshipped beyond her boundaries. It is possible, even probable, that the cult of Aton had not reached, in Akhnaton’s days, the limits of the Egyptian dominions. The elders of Tunip do not seem to have heard of it, otherwise how could they write to the king that “the gods of Egypt” dwell in their city? But there is little doubt that, had it once been able to establish itself firmly in the Nile Valley, the Religion of the Disk would have spread throughout the empire and even to allied countries; to all lands where the power of the Pharaoh was dreaded and his name held in reverence. From Napata to

Carchemish, over a stretch of twenty degrees of latitude, the name of Aton, the God above all gods, would have become familiar to people of the most various races; to the sturdy mountaineers of the regions bordering Assyria; to the subtle, mystic, pleasure-loving people of Syria; to the fair Northerners of Aryan descent who ruled the land of Mitanni, as well as to the dusky Nubians and Ethiopians, and to the Negroes of the farthest South.

How little those myriads of men would have grasped of the true spirit of Akhnaton's Teaching it is useless to say. But even a partial and altogether outward knowledge of it would have sufficed to impress upon them the idea of the excellence of a natural worship, of cosmic significance, over their thousand and one man-made cults of local scope. It would have sufficed, also, to inspire all those who were susceptible of some refinement with the feeling of the beauty of the world and of the unity of all life.

And possibly Egypt and the adjoining countries would have remained, to this day, faithful to the cult of the One God manifested in the Sun. It seems indeed doubtful whether any later monotheistic creed would have found adherents among thinking people already acquainted for centuries with Akhnaton's Teaching.

* * *

And that is not all. The worship of Aton, had it remained the State-religion of Egypt — of a victorious Egypt, mistress of her empire — would have undoubtedly influenced the whole evolution of Western thought and culture.

Even in her decline, after every sort of originality had been killed in her priest-ridden people, Egypt, which had sunk to the level of a third-rate nation, still exerted a lasting influence upon Greece. What would that influence have been, had Egypt remained powerful a few centuries longer, and had the simple and rational Sun-worship preached by Akhnaton continued to hold sway over her, instead of the more and more formal, the more and more fossilised cult of her primitive gods? A glance at these possibilities will be

enough to show what Akhnaton could perhaps have done, had he but consented to utter a word in favour of war.

As we have already many times remarked, the whole of the young king's Teaching is characterised by an unusual rationality, allied to an overwhelming sense of beauty. It is probable that, in the days of its Founder — two hundred years before the Trojan War — no account of it reached the shores of Greece. And had, by chance, some exiled Egyptian ever carried it there, we do not know what impression it would have left upon the people of Tiryns and Mykaenae. But had the scientific-minded leaders of Grecian thought come in contact with the Teaching some centuries later, at the time Greece was ready to enter the maturity of her classical age, then, we believe, the history of Western civilisation would have been different.

The sceptical Athenian mind, while continuing to pay a customary allegiance to "the gods of the city," would have welcomed that rational creed that put stress upon nothing which is outside the reach of man's experience; that related no incredible deeds, no childish fables. The few who aspired to something more than intellectual certitude would have recognised the truth in a Teaching that implied the oneness and sacredness of life. And the Greeks at large would have felt in Akhnaton's worship — and in his hymns, and in the story of his life, also — a thing of beauty unsurpassed even in their own land of light and harmony.

And slowly the time would have come for a great change in the consciousness of the ancient world; the time when, tired of conflicting philosophies as well as of rites and mysteries of which they had forgotten the sense, the Greeks would have begun to aspire to Something unknown which they could neither define nor invent; the time when, in one word, the need of a broader and kinder outlook even than that of the best Athenians would have begun to be felt throughout the Hellenised world. Then, instead of turning her eyes to any new creed, perhaps Greece would have simply drifted from the worship of her many gods to that of the Only One revealed to men and to all creatures through the flaming Disk of the Sun. And without sacrificing anything

of her passionate love of life and visible beauty, without also forcing herself to accept any dogmas “beyond reason” or “above reason” — or against reason — perhaps she would have made the fourteen-hundred-year-old Religion of the Disk the creed of her people for all times to come.

There would have been no conflict between an “old” and a “new” order, but merely a gradual absorption of the popular religions of Greece and Rome into the decorous simplicity of a more rational, more spiritual, and more ancient one, already held in regard by the elite of the Greek-speaking East.

And slowly but steadily, along with the culture and learning of the Mediterranean, the antique worship of Aton would have spread over barbaric Europe, replacing the popular cults of the North after those of Asia Minor, Greece and Italy. On the borders of the Danube and of the Rhine, on the misty shores of the Baltic and of the North Sea, temples containing no image but the Sun Disk with rays ending in hands would have been erected in honour of the One God — Cosmic Energy.

And one day, the Spanish caravelles would have carried the lofty symbol across the Atlantic, and the Religion of the Disk would have become the religion of the West.

* * *

Would the West, then, have been any better than it is? Probably not. Since with all the overwhelming loveliness of his living personality Akhnaton could not, in his days, improve human nature, it is doubtful whether his surviving Teaching — somewhat distorted, as might be expected, by clumsy interpreters — would have been able to accomplish that miracle.

Most probably the same passions would have disturbed the peace of the world. But they would not have been fanned by religious fanaticism, and that alone would have made an enormous difference. The opposition of the different national polytheisms to the universal worship of such a God as the Sun would never, it seems, have taken the form of such a

ferocious conflict as witnessed in the first centuries of the Christian era between the same old national cults and the Gospel preached by Paul of Tarsus. The adoration of light is a thing so natural — and, in its crude forms, so universally spread — that it would have been easy to convince both philosophers and barbarians of its excellence. The Emperor Julian would have been the first one to encourage a creed more rational and no less aesthetic than those of his Greek masters. And the Western world would never have known such atrocities as the ghastly murder of Hypatia or the mass-massacre of the Saxons. There would have not been any equivalent of the Crusades, or of the wars of the Arabs for the conversion of Infidels, or of the Holy Inquisition. Greed and cruelty would have remained, but in order to gratify such base passions it would hardly have been possible to exploit a religion free from puerile hopes no less than from superstitious fears, and whose Founder had never made a duty of proselytism.

No doubt, one day, the newly-discovered hemisphere would have been overrun by the same merciless adventurers in search of gold; and the same battles would have raged in Mexico, in Guatemala and in Peru, around the last bastions of American independence. But they would have been battles frankly fought for the possession of earthly goods, not for the triumph of the Faith, not for the salvation of souls, not “for the greatest glory of God.” The interview of Pizarro and Atahualpa would have been different. In the God of the Inca, “Who lives for ever in the sky,” the Spanish conqueror would have recognised his own God. And both he and the Peruvian king would have felt that, whatever be their behaviour towards each other, they — and their people — had in common something vital. And, while subjugated by a superior science of arms, the fortunate people of the New World would have learnt to link what was the best in their own traditions with a purer and more rational worship of the Sun.

And that is not all.

It seems probable that, had it become and remained the religion of Europe and America (and Australia), the Religion

of the Disk would have largely contributed to bridge the gap between East and West and to hasten the day of universal understanding.

However different may appear the pre-eminently dynastic Sun-cult of modern Japan from the essentially universal, non-political cult of Aton, the fact remains that it is still Sun-worship. And a disciple of Akhnaton would not feel himself out of place amidst a group of pilgrims devoutly greeting, from the top of one of Japan's sacred mountains, the rising in glory of the One eternal "Lord and Origin of life." And, as for the Hindus, their highest conception of Sun-worship (expressed in the Gayatri Mantra, that every true Brahman recites at dawn, his folded hands lifted in praise to the rising Sun) is practically identical with that upheld by Akhnaton. It is the adoration, not of the material Disk, but of the Energy within the Disk. And if there be a country in which the Egyptian king's Teaching still gives, to the very few who know of it, the impression of something entirely familiar, that country is surely India.

Now let us for a while try to imagine what the relations of Europe with the East would have been — nay, what the relations of India and the Far East would have been with the people of West Asia — had the timely success of the Religion of the Disk rendered the expansion of any later monotheism unnecessary and therefore impossible. The oppositions that lie at the bottom of the great conflicts of the Middle Ages — opposition of Christian Byzantium to Zoroastrian Persia; of Christian Europe to the growing power of Islam; of Islam, both to Christian Europe and to the older cultures of Persia and India — would never have existed, and the history of the Middle Ages would have been entirely different. Later on, European merchants and adventurers might well have aimed at political and economic domination over the technically less developed nations of Asia; but the idea of cultural domination, brought about through religious proselytism, would have occurred to nobody. At most, the people of Persia, of India and of further Asia might have learnt to look upon the Founder of the Western Sun-worship as an equal of their own greatest teachers, and his name,

already revered from Abyssinia to Iceland and from Peru to the Arabian Desert, would have become familiar to the limits of the earth. And the people of Europe and America would have considered with friendly sympathy foreign religions of a naturalistic, non-dogmatic character, if not always similar to their own, at least less different from it than they appear now to be.

In spite of the same colonial wars, prompted by the same lust for riches and power, there would have been more understanding, more cultural unity — or, in a way, less opposition — between East and West. And the world to-day would have been, if not more peaceful, at least better prepared to realise its fundamental unity within everlasting diversity. On the whole, it would have been, it seems, a better world.

* * *

This retrospective vision of centuries of would-be history is staggering. Yet we believe it is not the projection of a pure fancy. That gigantic dream of ours was, thirty-three hundred years ago, a living possibility. That more rational, more harmonised, more beautiful world, united under the symbol of the Sun-disk with rays ending in hands could have, and probably would have become the reality of to-day, had then the one man with a clear vision of the truth used his wealth and power to keep the empire of his fathers, and to force his will upon his people and upon men at large.

That better world — and that far-shed glory; that praise of men from ocean to ocean and from pole to pole, for ever — was the possible reward of a short and successful punitive expedition against a handful of agitators. Less than that; it was the reward of an order to Horemheb, or to any other of his generals, to march into Syria, without the king even taking the trouble of going there himself; the remote consequence of a mere word.

But, for the reasons we have seen — and perhaps for others, too — that word was never uttered.

While the distressed letters from his loyal vassals came

pouring in from Syria, Akhnaton quietly continued to greet the rising and setting Sun as though, to him, nothing else counted. He read the pathetic messages one after the other — in what spirit and with what reactions he alone knew. And he spoke not. He refused to set in motion the long series of events that would have given him, perhaps, in course of time, uncontested spiritual domination over the Western World.

CHAPTER XI

THE PRICE OF PERFECTION

There can be little doubt that, as time passed on, and as hard facts forced themselves upon him, Akhnaton became more and more aware of the difficulty of the task he had chosen. The strongly organised opposition of the priests that he never succeeded in breaking,¹ and above all the indifference which he detected, under a show of courteous sympathy or even of praise, in the greater number of those upon whom he had relied, taught him that there was nothing to expect from persuasion. And it seems impossible for him not to have understood, with his keen intelligence, that the only way to lasting religious domination left to him was that of immediate violence.

The common people of Egypt — like the common people of all countries in all times — were to be led like a flock of sheep. They would listen to the priests as long as there were priests to be listened to. Akhnaton knew it. The one and only way to put an end to the influence of Amon's servants upon the ignorant folk was to have them exterminated. But, as we have already seen, the king did nothing of the kind. He was content to confiscate the scandalous wealth of the priests; and he let their persons go uninjured. As for the educated and well-to-do Egyptians, who knew what the greatness of Egypt and her empire meant to them in riches and prestige, their permanent adherence to the new Teaching depended largely upon its value as a national creed. There are reasons to believe that even such a man as Merira, the High-priest of Aton, on whom the king had founded great hopes, failed to stand by his Master when he realised that the Religion of the Disk was costing Egypt her empire. Akhnaton knew that also. And a time must have come when he beheld, with desperate lucidity, the choice set before him:

¹ Breasted: *Cambridge Ancient History* (Edit. 1924), Vol. II, p. 126.

either to wage war upon Aziru and his allies, to re-assert the right of Egypt to be the leading nation, and to win for himself, in return, the triumph of the cult of Aton; or else, to continue following the path he had taken, and to end in disaster, in anathema, and finally in oblivion.

* * *

The religious success that the Pharaoh could contemplate as the reward of a compromise would surely seem small to us, compared with that staggering domination of more than half the globe that we have tried to describe in the preceding chapter. It was, however, no less impressing to him who considered its possibility. To Akhnaton, the country that contained the unknown sources of the Nile, and the mysterious lands that lay beyond the pale of Hatti, of barbaric Assyria and of distant Elam, may have seemed to be the limits of the earth. But knowing, as he certainly did, what a force Egypt represented in the midst of the surrounding nations, he must have clearly realised that, if successful at home, his religion would have spread even to the farthestmost regions that he could imagine. And the triumph which he thus anticipated must have appeared to him as universal. It was the triumph of reason, the triumph of truth; the beginning of a kindlier and more beautiful world. It was the fulfilment of his lifelong struggle, which had so far seemed fruitless; the magnificent reward that would outweigh for all times to come the bitterness of the few years in which he had stood alone, misunderstood or hated — it was his triumph.

If we recall the foundation of Akhetaton, the new capital of Egypt, in the midst of solemn festivities, it cannot but strike us that, once at least in his short career, Akhnaton had desired success. An inscription, carved out on one of the boundary-stones of the City, and relating to the king's burial, reflects his joyous hopes. "And there shall be made for me a sepulchre in the Eastern hills," runs the writing; "my burial shall be made there in the multitude of jubilees that Aton, my Father, hath ordained for me, and the burial

of the queen shall be made there in that multitude of years.” Obviously, he then visualised the life that spread before him, as a long succession of radiant years in which the truth that he felt so deeply would triumph through him. He had the self-confidence of youth, the unhesitating optimism of intense desire allied to boundless power. It was his will to change the face of things; he had no doubt that he would do so. And he was too human not to feel the thrill of coming glory.

And now, that glory was at hand, if he so wished. The words inscribed upon stone at his command, ten years before, could still be true. At the cost of a slight compromise — so slight that nobody would ever find it out — his name, otherwise destined to be cursed and to perish, could still be honoured “in a multitude of jubilees,” not during his lifetime (his health was ruined, and he knew his end was near), but during the countless centuries the world had yet to live. If he so wished, the future of mankind could still be brightened by his light, and marked with his sign.

The few sincere disciples he still retained at court — with probably the admirable exception of his consort — were impatient to hear him utter the word that implied compromise and success; to hear him give the order to save the empire.

Why then did Akhnaton remain silent?

* * *

Surely the young Pharaoh did not thrust aside the responsibilities of his position out of sheer carelessness, as some of his malevolent modern detractors have tried to insinuate. To suppose such a thing would be to ignore the unquestionable seriousness of his whole life.

As we have said, there seems to have been, at the back of Akhnaton’s attitude towards the Syrian events, an innate repulsion for bloodshed. The idea of war, like that of persecution, was repugnant to his sensitive nature. The brutalities inherent to any punitive expedition seemed to him too irredeemably ugly even to be tolerated as a necessary evil.

But it would not be doing full justice to his memory to look upon the king of Egypt as the Bronze Age equivalent of our modern pacifists. Akhnaton was neither a Christian nor a democrat. His religion was, as we have seen, before all, an aesthetic one. His morality sprang from his all-pervading sense of beauty. His conscientious objection to war was not the product of any narrow, uncritical love confined to the human species, but the logical consequence of his serene understanding of universal harmony. He desired to see the behaviour of intelligent beings (and especially his own) reflect, as far as possible, the beautiful inner order of the Cosmos. And he hated all forms of cruelty — the worst conceivable expressions of moral ugliness.

And the instance of history would tend to point out that, among these, there were some that shocked him more than war did. For it may be remembered that, in his new City consecrated to Aton, he built shrines to the memory of his ancestors, Amenhotep the Second and Thotmose the Third, who were among the foremost warriors of the ancient world, and that he did, at least once — after the fall of Simyra — allow an Egyptian officer to go to Ribaddi's rescue, with a small force of mercenaries. And, a little later, in the long indignant letter which he addressed to Aziru after Ribaddi's tragic death, he threatened his treacherous vassal in words that show clearly enough that he was perfectly conscious of his rights as an imperial sovereign and that, whatever his distaste for violence, he was the last man to consider it sinful to chastise a scoundrel and reaffirm the dictates of justice. "If thou, for any cause, wishest to do evil," says he to the Amorite, "or if thou even settest words of evil in thy heart, then wilt thou die, together with thy family, by the axe of the king thy Lord."¹

On the other hand, in glowing contrast with the annals of other Pharaohs and of kings of various countries, before and after him, there has not yet been found, among all the documents of Akhnaton's reign, a single record of chase, as we remarked in a previous chapter. And it may be inferred

¹ Letter K. 162, quoted by J. Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), pp. 371-372.

that he condemned that cruel sport far more uncompromisingly than he did the more gallant fighting of man against man — an assumption which fits well with all that we know of the king through his hymns.

We therefore think it would be a mistake to suppose that the sole cause of his inaction in the Syrian affair was Akhnaton's belief in a creed condemning war indiscriminately. Had it been so, such a consistent man as he was would never have allowed Pakhura to go north with his soldiers; nor would he, in the only letter of his which we possess, have spoken as a monarch instead of speaking as a preacher. It is much more probable that Akhnaton's attitude to war was a negative one; an attitude of non-interest, rather than one of systematic opposition.

The Founder of the Religion of the Disk seems to have seen both sides of the problem of violence. All atrocities disgusted him, whatever were the "higher motives" that urged men to commit them. And he was aware — as the most intelligent among our modern "conscientious objectors" — that war leads nowhere in the long run. He saw things, not from a national point of view, not even from a human point of view, but from that of Cosmic reality. And therefore it mattered little to him whether Egypt had an empire or not. He was not prepared to encourage the brutalities which he repudiated in his heart, just for the sake of securing for his people the undisturbed possession of Syria's resources. It was his concern for Ribaddi, whom he personally loved, not the lust for territorial greatness, that urged him once to permit help to be sent to him, and another time to write to his murderer with the sternness of a judge. But he knew all the time that the horrors of war were unavoidable as long as man did not change his heart. And his life-long struggle against superstition, greed and deceit had made him aware that such a change is not easy, perhaps even not possible on a broad scale — a thing which our modern pacifists too often forget. He knew that, with all the power inherited from generations of king-gods, he could do nothing to stop the fighting going on within his realm. The only reasonable course left to him was indeed to keep himself aloof from it,

serene and alone as he had always been. And that is precisely what he did.

* * *

But what astonishes the modern man perhaps more than Akhnaton's total absence of "imperialism" is his apparent indifference to the success of his religion, which largely depended, as he knew, upon his own prestige as a "strong" monarch, in the worldly sense. If he so loved his faithful servant, Ribaddi, as to allow, at least once, some troops to be sent to his rescue (and that, in spite of his personal distaste for war) then, how did he not consider it worth while despatching more substantial help to all his loyal vassals, including Ribaddi, and, if necessary, marching into Syria himself, if not to defend the interests of Egypt, at least to secure, through the glamour of victory, the adherence of Egypt to his Teaching?

The only answer is that he probably cared less for the success of his Teaching than for its purity. And he knew that success and purity seldom go together. He was not over-impressed by numbers, as lesser men often are. He knew their futility in the long run. What he wanted was that those who would "hearken to his Teaching" should mould their lives upon it — "live in truth," as he did. And experience had made him aware that very few were able to do so.

When, followed by more than eighty thousand people,¹ he had left Thebes and laid the foundations of his new capital, he may have for a time rejoiced at the idea of his Teaching spreading to the limits of his dominions and beyond. If not, one could hardly explain why he took the trouble of founding at least two other centres of rational Sun-worship, one at each end of his vast empire. But at the time the Syrian rebellion had reached its climax, Akhnaton had probably become conscious of the uselessness of all efforts to make his religion a success among men, if it was to remain as beautiful and as rational as he had conceived it. He knew that, in spite of all the care he had taken to make it accessible

¹ Arthur Weigall: *Short History of Ancient Egypt* (Edit. 1934), pp. 149-150.

to the most intelligent of his courtiers, he had no true disciple, except perhaps his loving consort. And there is a note of pessimism in the well-known verse of the hymn to Aton: “There is none who knoweth Thee, save Thy Son, Nefer-kheperu-ra Ua-en-ra. . . .” It expresses, no doubt, as we have said before, the certitude that God, or the Supreme Reality, has no meaning but for the individual soul who feels itself identical with Him, in its essence. But it may equally well be taken as Akhnaton’s sad admission, after years of fruitless efforts, that truth of the nature of that which he possessed is uncommunicable, and that those who abide in it shall always remain alone.

In that case, what was the value of worldly success? Of name? Of fame? Even of the recognised spiritual leadership of half the globe or more? It was as nothing.

Akhnaton knew that by keeping his empire whole he could soon propagate his religion as far as the remotest countries he could think of. But he could also foresee that the cult that would perhaps, one day, unite those distant lands in the glorification of his name would no longer be the religion of Life in truth as he had conceived it, and taught it, and lived it — pure, rational, unstained by fear or cruelty, daily drawing its inspiration from the joy of the rising Sun. No. It would perhaps be something better than what men had called “religion” until then; it would perhaps even be something better than what the majority of mankind would ever accept, in the future, as a guide to a higher life. But it would never be, on a broad scale, that glorious worship he had dreamt of in his days of youthful hopes — the true Religion of the Disk.

It was certainly no use silencing his personal disgust for bloodshed, and compromising with his principles, merely to magnify, in space and time, the disappointing triumph he had already experienced during his short career. If the elite of Egypt had not really accepted his Teaching, what would the empire at large and the nations beyond the empire make of it, even if one day they could be brought to pay an outward homage to it? What would most men of the future ages make of it, when in their hearts they probably would not feel its

truth; when they would not understand it, not love it, not want it? Akhnaton saw clearly that his religious leadership, when extended to millions, would amount to nothing but the gradual reinstalment of superstition, under the cover of his name — the degradation of his dearest dreams. And he refused to give his sanction to it. We have seen already that he had never tried to spread his lofty cult among the commoners of Egypt, knowing that it would doubtless have been wasted upon them. And one may safely believe that, even if he could have imagined, as we do now, the possibility of the Religion of the Disk becoming one day the official faith of such faraway continents as America and Australia, at the cost of a compromise that could seem trifling, he still would not have stirred his little finger to promote such a success. The disappointment of triumph on a small scale and for a few brief years was enough.

* * *

We should say more. A compromise with what appeared to him as ugly or irrational was, in Akhnaton's estimation, nothing but a lie in disguise, and could therefore never be overlooked as a trifle. The young Pharaoh understood more vividly than any man the joy of all creatures to live and see the beauty of the Sun. If he could do nothing to stop the bloodshed in Syria, at least he would do nothing to encourage it. (Perhaps even the threat he formulated in his letter to Aziru was but a verbal intimidation, destined to make the Amorite give up his treacherous intrigues.)

As we have already remarked, Akhnaton does not seem to have shared the contempt affected by some of our contemporaries for all conquerors. But he knew how different the implications of his own Teaching were from those of the creed of his ancestors, who worshipped national gods. For them, to glory in their conquests had been natural. But for him, to be responsible for a war would have been to lie to himself. And neither the repeated warnings of his governors that his empire was going to ruin if he did not intervene speedily, nor the tears of the men of faraway Tunip, who

still blessed his name in their distress, nor the more lofty consideration that victory would extend far and wide the sway of his religion of love and reason, could move him to subscribe to such a lie. Akhnaton was not one of those who justify the use of any effective means provided they forward a “higher end.” In his eyes, the mere fact of introducing falsehood into his own life would have killed for ever the spirit of the Religion of the Disk. It was better to sacrifice, then and there, its chances of worldly domination. In consequence, no answer came to the call of the loyal vassals of Egypt in Syria and Canaan. And, in the words of Abdikhipa, governor of Jerusalem, “all the lands of the king” were actually lost.

* * *

From the moment Akhnaton refused to bend his uncompromising logic to the exigencies of ordinary colonial policy, the fate of his beautiful Sun-worship, at least as a State-religion, was sealed. No later compromise could henceforth be introduced, by subtle casuistry, to make it “fit in” with the accepted conceptions of national grandeur, or with the accepted opinion that any course of action is good which leads to the attainment of a “higher goal.” The Founder of the Religion of the Disk — unlike that of more than one other religion — had once and for all barred the possibility of such convenient adjustments, by the bold example of his own solution of the problem of religion and State. He had made it clear that, to him, there was no higher goal than that of “life in truth,” which is another word for individual perfection.

It is to the ideal of individual perfection that he sacrificed both his existing empire and his possible spiritual domination over a still much greater area of the globe.

There are portraits of him which show us a thin, sickly face, with deep wrinkles each side of the mouth, and bones jutting out: the face of a young man worn out by sorrow and possibly also by some wasting disease. These portraits bear little resemblance to those of his early youth, except for the

unbending determination that can be read in the king's features. Given every allowance for the exaggerations and distortions that seem to have been part of the "style" of several artists of the court, there can be no doubt that they reveal to us something of the appearance of their royal model at some stage of his life, probably at the last stage. If so, they help us to some extent to visualise, so as to say, Akhnaton's heroic stand to the bitter end.

He was still very young — at an age when most great men have not yet begun to do the work for which they are born; but he was a physical wreck, and conscious that his end was drawing nigh. He had no son to succeed him; no disciple capable of continuing his work. He had married his eldest daughter, the heiress to the kingdom, aged twelve, to a young man of royal blood, Smenkhkara, who was devoted to him and to his cause, and whom he was soon to associate to the throne. Out of reverence and gratitude, Smenkhkara had taken, in official documents, the title of "beloved of Akhnaton." But the king knew that, with all his good intentions, that prince would not for long be able to postpone the fierce reaction that was to break out. He knew that the dispossessed priests of Amon were gathering more and more strength as news of national disaster rapidly spread throughout Egypt. He knew that, in the very near future, the Religion of the Disk would be swept out of the land, perhaps never to be revived again anywhere in any age. He knew that the uncommunicable truth he had cherished all his life would never again be made to inspire the conduct of a State. And he had no grounds to imagine that the scientific principles that underlay his Teaching — and that he had grasped intuitively — would receive, in three thousand three hundred years to come, an illuminating demonstration, and become the basis of what is to us modern science. To him it must have seemed as if his whole mission had been a complete failure.

Yet he knew that his Teaching was true, and that truth cannot be destroyed. His name might be forgotten, but the fundamentals of the religion of order and love which he had discovered within the Sun and within himself would endure

for ever. Sooner or later, the human mind would have to rediscover them. And if one day some accident should bring his Teaching to light again, then, at least, it would be unmarred by any practical compromise. And the most enlightened and the best of men would be able to love it without reservation. One day, perhaps, in many, many years to come, a few among the wise, truthful, and strong would revere him precisely for his refusal to tamper with truth. The unknown devotion of one of those few would be enough to outweigh the loss of an empire, the failure of a life of struggle, and millenniums of oblivion.

And even if those one or two obscure disciples were never to be born; if the Teaching for the sake of which he had lost everything were never to bear fruit, even in the heart of a single man; if the world to come would always listen to the priests of its national gods and never to him, the Priest of the universal Sun — the One real God — if he, Akhnaton, were to remain for ever a useless dreamer, not even dangerous enough to provoke the wrath of more than a few fanatics, then what of it all?

The Sun would nevertheless continue to follow, day after day, His glorious course, and it would still be true that “breath of life is to see His beams.” Light and heat, and the spark that produces life, would still be the manifestations of the One Energy — the Soul of the Sun; rhythm would still remain the principle of the Universe, whether man cared to know it or not. Akhnaton’s Teaching would still be true, and his life a thing of beauty for ever. Had the king of Egypt, in a moment of weakness, sacrificed the logic of his being to the lure of success, the future of mankind would perhaps have been, as we have seen, less gloomy, on the whole, than it actually was. But Akhnaton’s personal history — an indestructible fact in the infinity of time, whether remembered or not — would not have been that flash of beauty which it is. The world would have been poorer of one perfect Individual.

And that was enough to make any loss worth while. His contemporary Egyptians — even many of those who professed to be his disciples — seem to have preferred his empire

to himself. But we prefer him to all the empires of the earth. And provided they be sufficiently sensitive to the real value of man, which lies in the individual, the men of ages to come will feel as we do.

* * *

Akhnaton died in the twenty-ninth year of his age which was the eighteenth year of his reign. We know nothing of his last days or of the circumstances of his death. We can only try to imagine them. We can think of him gradually thrusting aside the burden of government after the elevation of Smenkhkara to the rank of co-regent, and living in retirement in his summer-house, in the midst of the beautiful gardens that lay to the south of his City. Nefertiti, who was to survive him, waited upon him till the end. From his sickbed, Akhnaton gazed at the deep blue sky — light and peace — and his heart was happy. We like to imagine his dying in beauty, as he had lived, in a last effort to lift his enfeebled hands in praise to the rising Sun.¹

* * *

His lofty religion was swept out of Egypt.

After the ephemeral reign of Smenkhkara, the priests of Amon regained great power. Akhnaton's second daughter, Makitaton, had died while yet a child, during her father's lifetime. The priests now forced his third daughter to change her name from Ankhsenpaton to Ankhsenpamon and to marry an insignificant young noble, Tutankhaton, renamed

¹ Profane history does not disclose whether Akhnaton had a natural death, or a violent one at the hands of the Amon priesthood. Rosicrucian (AMORC) tradition, however, does relate the incident of his transition. We quote in part from the archives of the Order in this regard: “. . . The untimely departure of . . . Beloved Past Master Amenhotep IV (Akhnaton) whose transition occurred on July 24, 1350, B.C. (based on the current calendar) . . . on the memorable day of his transition he forsook all earthly things and found joy in the Holy Sanctum adjoining his bed chamber in his palace. Here in the midst of meditation he was inspired to evoke the law of. . . Raising both his hands in meditation to . . . he pronounced the lost word. Then as peace and quietness came to his hungry soul, he knelt in prayer. . . In this position he finally vowed his obligations to God and to all his fellow men who preceded him for the knowledge they had given to the world, and then raised both arms to the Cosmic that it might reach down and raise him to heights sublime.”

Tutankhamen, whom they placed upon the throne and used as a puppet. In the name of Tutankhamen, the local gods were definitely restored. The court returned to Thebes. . . .

Akhnaton's City was pulled down stone by stone, and ruined so completely that men forgot where it had once stood. His body, torn from the tomb in the Eastern hills where he had desired to rest, was reburied in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, near Thebes. His name was effaced from the monuments, from his own coffin — even from the ribbons of gold foil that encircled his mummy, so that his soul, henceforth anonymous and deprived of the customary prayers and offerings, might wander for ever in hunger and agony.

In the pride of their recent triumph, the priests composed the exultant hymn of hate now preserved upon an ostrakon in the British Museum:

“Thou findest him who transgresses against thee;
 Woe to him who assails thee!
 Thy city endures,
 but he who assailed thee falls.
 The sun of him who knows thee not goes down, O Amon!
 But as for him who knows thee, he shines.
 The abode of him who assailed thee is in darkness;
 but the rest of the earth is in light.
 Whoever puts thee in his heart, O Amon,
 Lo, his sun dawns.”¹

And the world was once more, apparently at least, as though Akhnaton had never been born.

¹ “. . . Little more than a howl of savage joy at the downfall of Akhnaton and all his works.” — J. Baikie, *The Amarna Age* (Edit. 1926), p. 398.

CHAPTER XII

AKHNATON AND THE WORLD OF TO-DAY

With Tutankhamen began for the Western World an era of spiritual regression which is lasting still.

Sincere and serious as it is, this opinion of ours may at first sight appear as a mere paradox. But it is not so.

Whatever one may think of Akhnaton's Teaching, one has to concede at least three points concerning it. First, the Religion of the Disk was a universal religion, as opposed to the former local or national religions of the ancient world. The supreme Reality round which it centred — call it the Soul of the Sun, the Energy within the Disk, or give it any other name — was not only Something worthy of the adoration of all men, but also Something actually worshipped, knowingly or unknowingly, by all creatures, including plants. And all creatures, brought forth and sustained by the One Source of life — the Sun — were one in Him. Never in the world west of India had the idea of universal Godhead been so emphatically stressed, and the brotherhood of all living beings more deeply felt. And never were those truths to be stressed again more boldly in the future.

Secondly, it was a rational and natural religion¹ — not a dogmatic one. It was neither a creed nor a code of human laws. It did not pretend to reveal the Unknowable, or to regulate in details the behaviour of man, or to offer means to escape the visible world and its links. It simply invited us to draw our religious inspiration from the beauty of things as

¹ "Its strength" (of Akhnaton's religion) "lay in its nearness to obvious truth and obvious blessings. It compromised happily between crude material idolatry and a mysticism which had no connection with life. Its deity was so supermundane that no taint of earth or materialism clung to it, and yet so visibly the creative and regulative Power of all that is mundane that its worship was in touch with the most insistent realities. . . . It achieved a happy success in a direction where most of them (*i.e.*, the great religious systems) have signally failed — a basis in reality instead of speculation, and a natural rather than induced piety." — Norman de Garis Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna*, p. 47.

they are: to worship life, in feeling and in deed; or, to put it as an outstanding nineteenth-century thinker¹ has done, to be “true to the earth.” Based as it was, not upon any mythology, nor any metaphysics, but upon a broad intuition of scientific truth, its appeal would have increased with the progress of accurate knowledge — instead of decreasing, like that of many a better-known religion.

Finally — and this was perhaps its most original feature — it was, from the very start, a Teaching that exalted the individual perfection (life in truth) as the supreme goal, and at the same time a State-religion. Not only the religion of a State, but a religion for the State — for any and every State — no less than for the individual. It was a Teaching in which (if we may judge by the example of its Founder) the same idea of “truth” that was to inspire personal behaviour through and through was also to determine the attitude of a monarch towards the friends and foes of his realm, to guide his decisions regarding peace and war; in one word, to dominate international relations. It implied, not the separation of private and public life, but their identity — their subjection to the same rational and aesthetic principles; their common source of inspiration; their common goal.

Such was the message of Akhnaton, the only great religious Teacher, west of India, who was at the same time a king; and perhaps the only undoubtedly historic originator of a religion on earth,² who, being a king, did not renounce kingship but tried to tackle the problems of State — particularly the problem of war — in the light of religious truth.

* * *

The thirteen years of Akhnaton’s personal rule were but a minute in history. But that minute marks a level of perfection

¹ Nietzsche.

² Many will rightly remark that the deified Indian hero, Krishna, was a king, and that he not only put forth the doctrine of warrior-like action performed in a spirit of complete detachment (as expressed in the Bhagavad-Gîta), but applied it himself to politics, throughout the Kurukshetra War. However, such an enormous amount of legend now surrounds the person of Krishna, that it is practically impossible to assign him a place in history — to say nothing of giving him even an approximate date.

hardly ever approached in subsequent years (save perhaps in India, during the latter part of the reign of Asoka, or under Harshavardhana, or again, after many centuries, in the latter part of the reign of Akbar).

From the far-gone days of Tutankhamen down to the time in which we live, the history of the Western world — that is to say, roughly, of the world west of India — presents an ever-broadening gap between the recognised religions and rational thought; a more and more complete divorce, also, between the same recognised religions and life, especially public life.

When, under the pressure of his masters, the priests of Amon, Tutankhaton, renamed Tutankhamon, signed the decree reinstalling the national gods of Egypt in their former glory, he opened an era of intellectual conflict and moral unrest which has not yet to-day come to an end. Before Akhnaton, the world — the Western world at least — had worshipped national gods, and had been satisfied. After him, it continued to worship national gods, but was no longer fully content with them. For a minute, a new light had shone; great truths — the universality of the supreme Essence; the oneness of all life; the unity of religious and rational thought — had been proclaimed in words, in song and in deeds, by one of those men who appear once in history. The man had been cursed, and it was henceforth a crime even to utter his name. He was soon forgotten. But there was no way to suppress the fact that he had come. The old order of blissful ignorance was gone for ever. Against its will, the world dimly remembered the light that the priests had sought to put out; and age after age, inspired men of various lands set out in search of the lost treasure; some caught a glimpse of it, but none were able to regain it in its integrity. The Western world is still seeking it — in vain.

* * *

To make our thought clear to all, let us follow the evolution of the West from the overthrow of Akhnaton's work to the present day. By "West" we mean Europe, Europeanised

America (and Australia), and the countries that stand at the background of European civilisation — that is to say, Greece and a great part of the Middle East.

With the earliest “physiologi” of Ionia — eight hundred years after Akhnaton — rational thought made its second appearance in the West. And this time it did not wither away after the death of one man, but found its mouthpieces in many. Generations of thinkers whose ambition was intellectual knowledge — the logical deduction of ideas and the rational explanation of facts — succeeded one another. Among them were such men as Pythagoras and Plato, who united the light of mystic insight to the clear knowledge of mathematics, and who transcended the narrow religious conceptions of their times. But the Greek world could never transcend them; and Socrates died “for not believing in the gods in whom the city believed” — the national gods — though there had been no more faithful citizen than he. Those gods, adorned as they were with all the graces that Hellenic imagination could give them, were jealous and revengeful in their way. They would have been out of date (and harmless) had men accepted, a thousand years before, the worship of the One Essence of all things, with all it implied. But they had not; and the conflict between the better individuals and the religion of the State had begun. Rational thought was left to thrive; but not so the broad religious outlook that was linked with it. Theoretically — intellectually — any universal God (First Principle, supreme Idea of Goodness, or whatever it be) was acceptable. But the conception of Something to be loved more than the State and worshipped before the national gods was alien to Greece, to Rome, and in general to all the city-minded people of the Mediterranean. Seen from our modern angle of vision, there was a strange disparity between the high intellectual standard of the Hellenes of classical times — those creators of scientific reasoning — and their all-too-human local gods, in no way different from those of the other nations of the Near East.

There appears, also, to have been in their outlook a certain lack of tenderness. One can find, it is true, in the Greek

tragedies, magnificent passages exalting such feelings as filial piety or fraternal love. But the other love — that between man and woman — they seem to have conceived as little more than a mainly physical affair, a “sickness,” as Phaedra says in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*. And their relation to living nature, outside man, seems to have been confined to an aesthetic interest. Bulls being led to the sacrifice and horses carrying their youthful cavaliers in the Panathenaic procession are admirably sculptured on the frieze of the Parthenon. But apart from some really touching verses in Homer (such as those which refer to Ulysses’ faithful old dog, who recognises him after twenty years’ absence) there is hardly an instance, in classical Greek literature, in which a friendly feeling for animals is expressed — not to speak of attributing to them yearnings akin to ours.

Christianity is the next great wave in the history of Western consciousness. And one can hardly conceive a sharper contrast than that which exists between the clear Hellenic genius and the spirit of the creed destined to overrun Hellas, Europe, and finally America and Australia. It was originally — as preached by Paul of Tarsus, the Apostle of the Gentiles — an irrational and unaesthetic creed, fed on miracles, bent on asceticism, strongly stressing the power of evil, ashamed of the body and afraid of life. But its God was a universal God and a God of love. Not as universal, it is true, as might have been expected from a supreme Being proposed to the adoration of a rationally-trained people; nor as impartially loving as a follower of the long-forgotten Religion of the Disk would have imagined his God to be. It was a God who, in fact, never shook off entirely some of the crude attributes which he possessed when worshipped by the Jews as their tribal deity; a God who, of all living creatures, gave man alone an immortal soul, infinitely precious in his eyes, for he loved man in the same childishly partial way as old Jehovah loved the Jewish nation; a democratic God who hated the well-to-do, the high-born, and also those who put their confidence in human intellect instead of submitting to the authority of his Gospel; who hid his truth “from the wise and the learned, but revealed it to the children.”

Still, with all its shortcomings, the mere fact of Christianity's being a creed to be preached "to all nations," in the name of a God who was the Father of all men, was an immense advantage over the older popular religions. The element of love and mercy that the new worship undoubtedly contained — however poor it might be, compared, for instance, to that truly universal love preached in India by Buddhism and Jainism — was sufficient to bring it, in one way at least, nearer to the lost religious ideal of the West even than the different philosophies of the Hellenes (if we except from them Pythagorism and Neo-Pythagorism).

And it had over them all — and over the antique Teaching of Akhnaton himself — the practical advantage of appealing both to the intellectually uncritical, to the emotionally unbalanced, and to the socially oppressed or neglected — to barbarians, to women, to slaves — that is to say, to the majority of mankind. That advantage, combined with the genuine appeal of a gospel of love and with the imperial patronage of Constantine, determined its final triumph. From the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean, it slowly but steadily spread, as one knows, to the whole of Europe and to all lands that European civilisation has conquered.

But the Western world could not definitely forget centuries of rational thought. Nor could it renounce for ever that avowed ideal of visible beauty, of strength, of cleanliness — of healthy earthly life — that had been connected with the various religions of the ancients. As far as it was possible — and many more things are possible than one can imagine — it soon re-installed Greek metaphysics and polytheism under a new form in the very midst of Christianity. And later on, the Greek love of song and pleasure, and the deification of the human body, in the plastic arts as well as in life, prevailed in the spiritual capital of Christendom and throughout most Christian countries. The Western man gradually came to realise what an amount of inconsistency there was in that mixture of Hellenic and Hebrew thought (and remnants of popular myths, much older than Greece and Moses) which composed his traditional religion. He then grew increasingly sceptical, and Christianity remained for him

little more than a poetic but obsolete mythology, in some ways less attractive than that of Greece and Rome. The tardy reaction of the bold critical spirit of classical Hellas against judeo-scholastic authority had come; and modern Free Thought — the triumph of Euclid over Moses — had made its way.

* * *

Eight hundred years before the Renaissance, and twelve hundred years before Darwin, a very different, but equally important reaction had taken place in the eastern and most ancient portion of the Western world. And that had given birth to Islam, which one could roughly describe, we believe, without any serious misinterpretation, as Christianity stripped of its acquired Pagan elements — especially of its Greek elements — and brought back to the rigorous purity of Semitic monotheism.

The fact that Islam appeared and thrived long before the rebirth of critical thought (and of classical taste) in Europe, and that its whole political history seems to run quite apart from that of most European countries, must not deceive us. If we consider the Western world as a whole (Europe and its background), and not only the small portion of it which one generally has in mind when speaking of “the West,” then we have to include in it the countries of the Bible — Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Iraq — no less than Greece; for they are the geographical and cultural background of Christianity, the religion of Europe for centuries. And if this be so, we have, in this outsketch of the history of culture, to take account of Islam as one of the most important religious upheavals of the West, however paradoxical this coupling of words may seem.

Like Free Thought — its latter European parallel — Islam (at least, as we understand it; we may be mistaken) was a broad movement brought about by the incapacity of Christianity to fully satisfy the exigencies of the human mind. But the weaknesses of the Christian faith that the two reactions were destined to make up for were not the same ones. Free Thought was essentially an intellectual reaction against the

dogmatism of the Christian Church and the puerility of the stories (of whatever origin) that go to make up the Christian mythology. Its growth was naturally slow, for man takes time to question the value of his cherished beliefs on intellectual grounds. Only in the nineteenth century did it begin to affect the bulk of the people, and still to-day its influence remains confined to those countries in which elementary scientific education is granted to many individuals.

Islam, on the contrary, was a definitely religious movement — a wild outcry against every form of polytheism under whatever disguise; a reassertion of the continuity of revealed monotheism through Abraham, Moses, and Jesus of Nazareth; a reaffirmation of the brotherhood of all men, that basic truth taught already by Christ to the Jews, but less and less remembered by the Christians. It appeared more rapidly and more suddenly, for the evils against which it rose were more shocking to the simple sincere man in search of the One God, and therefore easier to detect than logical fallacies or historical inaccuracies — even than physical impossibilities. It was easier — not perhaps, recently, for us, but then, for a man of strong beliefs, fed on Jewish tradition — to detect idolatry under every form of image-worship than to feel, for instance, how ridiculous is such a tale as that of Joshua causing the Sun to stand still.

* * *

But the two reactions — the early medieval and the modern, the religious and the intellectual, the one of Semitic origin and the other started by thinkers mostly of Aryan blood and speech — failed to give the world west of India the feeling that a goal had been reached. They failed even to give it, for more than a century or two, the impression that it was on its way to reach a state of intellectual and emotional equilibrium preferable to that attained in a relatively recent past.

True, for many generations, the Islamic portion of what we have broadly called “the West” seems to have enjoyed through all the vicissitudes of its political history, the mental

peace that a few definite, simple, overwhelming religious convictions bring to people in whose life religion holds the first place. True, the problem of religion and State — that the Free-thinkers of Europe never had the opportunity (or the power) to tackle in a practical manner — was for a short time solved, to some extent, under the early Khalifs. But rationalism, strengthened by the fact of modern science, even when it has not altogether shaken the basis of their faith, seems to be influencing more and more many an educated Muslim of the present day in a sense similar to that in which it influenced so many Christians, from the sixteenth century onwards. The result of that influence upon the most liberal of the contemporary Turks, Persians, Egyptians, and even some of the Muslims of India, is obvious. On the other hand, the solution of the problem of religion and State as put forward by the Khalifs, in the early days of Islam, is too closely linked with a particular religious faith to be extended, at the present day, to all countries. It rests upon a somewhat strictly theocratic conception of the State, and upon a rigid line of demarcation between all men who have accepted the revelation of the Prophet — the faithful — and the others. And, rightly or wrongly, the modern world seems evolving in the sense of the separation of the State from religious questions of purely dogmatic interest.

* * *

Now, if we turn to the latter reaction against the shortcomings of Christianity — namely, Free Thought — we find that it has left the people who have matured under its influence in a state of moral unrest far greater than that of those Mussulmans whom their inherited medieval outlook on life no longer satisfies.

Thanks to the undeniable influence of Free Thought, the conclusions of intellectual investigation are not to-day subordinate to Christian theology as they once were. When a scientific hypothesis concerning the texture of atoms or the origin of man is put forward, it matters little whether it tallies or not with the narrative of the Genesis. Even good

Christians are ready to accept it, provided it explains facts. Moral questions, too, have been nearly completely freed from the overshadowing idea of a supernatural imperative. Right behaviour is valued because it is thought to be right — no longer because it is the behaviour ordained by God.

But that is about all the difference between the modern “rationalist” outlook and the Christian outlook before the Renaissance. Theoretically, it may seem considerable. In life, it is hardly felt. Important as it is, the fact that, in the field of pure knowledge, thought is now independent from clerical or scriptural authority, plays little part in the formation of the spirit of our times. Thoughts, opinions, intellectual conclusions are, indeed, constructive only to the extent they determine our reactions in the field of behaviour. And there we fail to see how the old authorities have ceased to hold their sway. Except for sexual morality — in regard to which the modern man has become more and more lenient because it suits his fancy, but has not yet, however, outdone the magnificent toleration of many a cardinal of the sixteenth century — the behaviour styled as “right” is precisely that which is in accordance with Christian standards; that which approaches the charitable, democratic, and somewhat narrow ideal of the Christian Gospel; that which obeys the Commandment: “Love thy neighbour as thyself.” The builders of the Parthenon had not gone even as far as that, it is true. But modern rationalism has never gone further than that. It may have, to some extent, taught the present-day Westerner to think in terms of Cosmic Realities. But it has not yet taught him to feel in terms of cosmic values. It has denounced Christian metaphysics as obsolete; but it still clings to the no less obsolete man-centred conception of right and wrong. It no longer maintains that man alone has an immortal soul, and it has forsaken the naïve idea that the world and all it contains was purposely created for man. But it seems to see no harm in man’s exploiting, destroying, or even torturing for his own ends the beautiful innocent creatures, animals and plants, nourished by the same sunshine as himself in the womb of the same mother earth. For all practical purposes, it seems to consider them no more

worthy of attention than if they were, indeed, created for him — by that very God who caused the fig-tree in the Gospel to wither in order to teach a lesson to Christ's disciples, and who allowed the evil spirits to enter the Gadarene swine in order to relieve a human being from their grip.

There are, of course, free-thinkers who have personally gone beyond the limits of Christian love and embraced all life in their sympathy. Many a broad-hearted Mohammedan saint, also (such as Abu-Hurairah, the "Father-of-cats"), has shared the same conception of truly universal brotherhood. But these individual cases cannot blind us to the fact that neither of the two great movements that sprang up, so as to say, to supersede Christianity, has actually emphasised that fundamental truth of the unity of all life (with its practical implications) which the Christian Scriptures had omitted to express. There are, no doubt, remarkable Christians — for instance, Saint Francis of Assisi — who have grasped that truth and lived up to it. Still, in the omission of the Gospel to put the slightest stress upon it lies, in our eyes at least, the main weakness of Christianity compared with the great living religions of the East — Vedantism, Buddhism, Jainism — and also, nearer its birthplace, with the lost Religion of the Disk. The only two large-scale attempts ever made west of India to restore to men the consciousness of that all-important truth were Pythagorism (and, later on, Neo-Pythagorism) in Antiquity, and nowadays Theosophy — both movements that owe much to direct or indirect Indian influence. The interest shown for the latter by many of our educated contemporaries points out how much ordinary Free Thought — a scientific conception of the world, plus a merely Christian-like ideal of love and charity — is insufficient to meet the moral needs of the most sensitive among us.

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There is more to say. Modern Free Thought has completely dissociated, in the minds of most educated people, the idea of positive knowledge — of science — from that of

worship. Not that a man of science cannot be, at the same time, a man of faith — he often is — but he considers the two domains as separate from each other. Their objects, he thinks, cannot be interchanged any more than their aims. One does not know God as one knows the data of sensuous experience or the logical conclusions of an induction; and however much one may admire the supremely beautiful picture of visible reality that modern science gives us, one cannot worship the objects of scientific investigation — the forms of energy, the ninety-two elements, or such.

And the tragedy is that, once a rational picture of the world has imposed itself upon our mind, the usual objects of faith appear more and more as poetic fictions, as hidden allegories, or as deified moral entities. We do not want to do away with them altogether; yet we cannot help regretting the absence, in them, of that character of intellectual certitude that makes us cling so strongly to science. We feel more and more that moral certitude is not enough to justify our wholehearted adoration of any supreme Principle; in other words, that religion without a solid scientific background is insufficient.

On the other hand, there are moments when we regret the lost capacity of enjoying the blessings of faith with the simplicity of a child — without the slightest mental reservation, without strain, without thought. We wonder, at times, if the men who built the Gothic cathedrals were not, after all, happier and better men than our contemporaries; if the tremendous inspiration they drew from childish legends was not worth all our barren “rational” beliefs. We would like to experience, in the exaltation of the “realities” which we value, the same religious fervour which they used to feel in the worship of a God who was perhaps an illusion. But that seems impossible. Men have tried it and failed. The cult of the Goddess Reason put forward by the dreamers of the French Revolution, and the cult of Humanity, which Auguste Comte wished to popularise, could never make the Western man forget the long-loved sweetness of his Christian festivals, interwoven with all the associations of childhood. How could one even think of replacing the tradition of

Christmas and Easter by such dry stuff as that? Science, without the advantages of religion, is no more able to satisfy us than religion without a basis of scientific certitude. Prominent as some of them may be, the men who nowadays remain content with Free Thought are already out of date. The twentieth century is growing more and more aware of its craving for some all-embracing truth, intellectual and spiritual, in the light of which the revelations of experience and faith, the dictates of reason and of intuition — of science and religion — would find their place as partial aspects of a harmoniously organic whole. The evolution that one can follow in the outlook of such a man as Aldous Huxley is most remarkable as a sign of the times.

* * *

Along with the divorce of religion from science, we must note the divorce of religion from private and public life. As Aldous Huxley timely points out in one of his recent books,¹ the saints proposed to our veneration as paragons of godliness are rarely intellectual geniuses; and the intellectual geniuses — scientists, philosophers, statesmen — and the artists, poets, writers who have won an immortal name are hardly ever equally remarkable as embodiments of the virtues which religion teaches us to value. So much so that we have ceased to expect extraordinary intelligence in a saint, or extraordinary goodness in a genius according to the world, and least of all in a political genius. For nowhere is the separation of religion from life more prominent (and more shocking) than in the domain of international relations.

The much-quoted injunction of Christ to “render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God that which is God’s” illustrates — as it is generally interpreted — a division of duties which has survived the belief in dogmatic Christianity. Whether he be a Christian or a Free Thinker — or a Mussulman, in one of the modern Islamic States that have undergone the influence of European ideas — the Western man, as a man, is guided, in life, by certain principles different

¹ *In Ends and Means* (Chapter on Education).

from, and sometimes in contradiction with those that lie at the basis of his outlook as a citizen. Caesar and God are more often than not in conflict with each other. And when this happens — when there is no way of serving both — then the Western man generally serves Caesar first, and offers God, in compensation, some scraps of private piety. But more and more numerous are growing those who denounce this duality of ideals as a sinister product of deceitful casuistry.

In the ancient world, as long as religion was a national concern, and connected with practices rather than with beliefs, its actual separation from life was impossible. In one way, that may seem better than what we see now. And the bold ideologists who, in recent years, in Europe, have endeavoured to wipe out altogether the spirit if not the name of Christianity and to raise the Nation — based on the precise physiological idea of race — as the object of man's ultimate devotion, those ideologists, we say, may seem wiser and more honest than their humanitarian antagonists. If religion indeed, does not, as it is, respond any longer to the needs of life, it is better to change it. It is far better to openly brush aside two thousand years of errors (if errors they be) and to come back to the national gods of old, and to be true to them to the bitter end, than to keep on rendering divine honours to the Man who said: "Love thy neighbour," and to wage a war of extermination upon men of rival nations whom one has not even the excuse of considering as "infidels" or "heretics." There is no hypocrisy in the votaries of the religion of Race, as in those of the religion of man. The only weakness one could point out in their creed — if the latter be artificially separated from the Religion of Life, of which it is, fundamentally, and remains, in the minds of its best exponents, the true expression — is that it has been transcended, and that therefore it is difficult to go back to it, even if one wishes to. The religion of man itself has been transcended long before its birth. The truth is that both are too narrow, too passionately one-sided, too ignorant of great realities that surpass their scope, to satisfy any longer men who think rationally and who feel the beauty

and the seriousness of life, unless they be integrated into the Religion of Life.

To frankly acknowledge a moral ideal still narrower than that of Christianity or humanitarian Free Thought will not ultimately serve the purpose of filling the gap between life and religion. The higher aspirations of the spirit cannot entirely be suppressed. The gap will soon reappear — this time between the religion of race, nation or class, and the life of the better individuals; a sad result. That gap will always exist, under some form or another, as long as a religion of integral truth, transcending man, and of truly universal love is not acknowledged, in theory and in practice, by individuals and groups of individuals.

Moreover, the mystic of race (or of nation, or of any entity with a narrower denotation than that of “man”) is, nay, under its narrowest and least enlightened aspect, unassailable, unless and until the ideology of man, inherited by Free Thought from Christianity, is once and for ever pushed into the background in favour of an ideology of life. For if, indeed, one is to believe that living Nature, with all its loveliness, is made for man to use for his profit, then why should not one admit, with equal consistency, that the bulk of mankind is made for the few superior races, classes or even individuals to exploit at will?

Ultimately, one has to go to the limit, and acknowledge cosmic values as the essence of religion, if religion is to have any universal meaning at all. And if it is to be something more than an individual ideal; if it is no longer to remain separated from the life of States; if truth, in one word, is ever to govern international relations as well as personal dealings, then one has to strive to put power into the hands of an intellectual and moral elite — to come back to Plato’s idea of wise men managing public affairs, makers of laws and rulers of men, uncontested guides of reverentially obedient nations.

* * *

We have just seen how, in the world west of India, one great thought-current has succeeded another from the days

of Tutankhamen onwards, without defining the relation of religion to science and to politics; without giving birth to a creed that all of us, including the most rational-minded and the kindest, could look up to and admire without reservation; without suggesting to us an ideal approach to such questions as that of imperialism and war by the example of any exalted “precedent.”

And there is, at the same time, all through the history of that vast area, an underlying yearning for such a perfect creed as would fulfil all the aspirations of its successive cultures — a yearning for rationality in religion, for love extended to all living things, and for a conception of international relations based on the same principles as those which should guide individual behaviour.

Expressed more or less emphatically in the lives of the best individuals of each epoch, that craving for an all-round perfection has never found its mouthpiece in any of the great historic thought-currents of the West themselves. Each of the successive waves of consciousness that we call Hellenic thought, Christianity, Islam, and modern Free Thought, has put stress upon one or another point — on logical reasoning and on beauty; on the love of man; on the oneness of God; on scientific certitude — striving to realise one side of an ideal Teaching which none of them could conceive in its whole.

One or two schools of Hellenic philosophy, such as Pythagorism and Neo-Pythagorism, strongly influenced by the East, have probably come nearer to that lost ideal of total truth than any other expression of Western thought. What we know of the life and teachings of Apollonius of Tyana — that “god among men,” as a modern author¹ has called him — is sufficient to support this statement. But it is doubtful whether the doctrine of his sect, or that of any other remarkable Greek school, could be revived to-day in its integrity. No doctrine which is too precise concerning questions about which knowledge is not definite can be “a possession for ever.” And the Pythagorean theory of numbers, for instance, many not appear satisfactory to the

¹ Mario Meunier: *Apollonius de Tyane, ou le séjour d’un dieu parmi les hommes*, Paris, 1936.

modern mind as it did to the disciples of old. For, if it has not been disproved, as the cosmogony of the Stoics or so many other particular theories linked with ancient philosophies — if it even be irrevocable in some of its aspects, as the mathematical side of Plato's philosophy is said to be by some writers¹ — it has at least been surpassed in an ever-broadening mathematical outlook, and cannot, therefore, be considered to-day as sufficient.

Apart from that, there is one point which none of the great doctrines of the past three thousand years have touched, and that is the question of the application of their own principles to the practical life of nations, and to international relations. The reason for this is probably that, with the one exception of Akhnaton, none of the initiators of new thought in the West were kings, like some of the most popular Indian teachers; none even ministers of state, like Confucius. Plato himself, for whom the best government is that in which the ruler is a lover of wisdom, had personally no voice in the direction of Athenian policy.

* * *

Let us now look back to Akhnaton's Teaching, of which we have recalled the main features at the beginning of this chapter. The more we examine it, in the light of thirty-three hundred years of history, the more we are convinced that it is the perfect religion in search of which the Western world is still groping without being able to re-imagine it.

It has, over whatever other creed has been invented, west of India, as an answer to the higher aspirations of man, the advantage of being simple and complete. It is perhaps indeed the simplest among the lofty teachings of the whole world; a framework, suggesting an attitude towards the possible problems of individual and public life, rather than a system offering solutions of those problems once and for all. It is not only free from all mythology, from all metaphysics, from affirmations of any sort about things that are not known for certain, but it has hardly any tenets. To call it a creed is

¹ D. Néroman: *La Leçon de Platon* (Niclus Edit., Paris, 1943).

nearly a misuse of the word. It comprises no “theory,” even about the world of facts. It is not a doctrine concerning science — which could grow out of date. Yet, it is based upon a bold scientific intuition which has not only been proved correct, but is broad enough to contain and sum up, after so many centuries, the essential of man’s positive knowledge of the universe, and which thus confers upon the whole of it the permanent strength of intellectual certitude. It has no catalogue of imperatives, and makes no mention of right and wrong. Yet, the fervent love expressed in Akhnaton’s hymns implies the noblest behaviour towards all living things — even towards one’s enemies — and historic events have shown that the implication was not an empty one.

Finally, the fact that the promoter of the Teaching was the ruler of a first-rate military power, with foreign possessions and vassal States — colonies and protectorates, as we would call them nowadays — and that he put the spirit of his religion in action on an international scale, is of great importance. For the time has come when the world feels that religion cannot remain foreign to burning questions of international interest such as that of war. No teaching which ignores those questions can therefore really appeal to modern consciousness. If God and Caesar are in conflict with each other — as we see they so often are — then they cannot both claim our allegiance. If we do not deify the Nation and sacrifice God, renouncing all values beyond the national ones, then we must consider the problem of war and conquest in the light of the highest religious values and, if necessary, sacrifice the interest of the Nation. No great Western teacher has done so, save Akhnaton. None could do so, for none had the power to make peace and war. And the few among our modern pacifists who boast of doing so now, put forward their claims from an armchair, for none of them has any say in the decisions of his country’s government.

If, by taking the unusual course which he did, Akhnaton lost an empire, he at least left the world an example for ever which was worth its while. In all simplicity, without theorising on right and wrong, he showed us in what direction is to be sought the solution of the war problem, if one does not

want to sacrifice truth (that is to say, God) to the State.

Sir Flinders Petrie was already aware of the undying value of the Religion of the Disk when he wrote in his *History of Egypt*, at the dawn of the present century: “If this were a new religion invented to satisfy our modern scientific conceptions, we could not find a flaw in the correctness of his (*i.e.*, Akhnaton’s) view of the energy of the solar system. . . .” “He (Akhnaton) had certainly bounded forward in his views and symbolism to a position which we cannot logically improve upon at the present day. Not a rag of superstition or falsity can be found clinging to this new worship, evolved out of the old Aton of Heliopolis, the sole Lord of the Universe.”¹

Petrie puts special stress upon the scientific accuracy of the Teaching and upon its rational value. We add that the truly universal love it implies is equalled only in the religions originated in or borrowed from India. So much so that — putting together the kindred seers of the East, sons of one same civilisation, and taking them as a whole — the great idea of the unity of all life and brotherhood of all creatures seems to have had two parallel exponents in antiquity, and the world two everlasting teachers: India and Akhnaton.

* * *

There is still more to say. Since the discovery of Eastern thought by the Europeans, in the eighteenth century — that second Renaissance, less dazzling, but no less if not more important than the sixteenth century one — the world has been increasingly craving for something in which the East and West could meet and feel themselves one in spite of all their differences.

We are living now in a period of transition between an old and a new spiritual order, bearing to the world of yesterday a relation somewhat similar to that of the Hellenistic period to classical antiquity; an epoch in which, for the second time, the East and the West — India and Greece, to take the two countries that have had the greatest influence

¹ Sir Flinders Petrie: *History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899), Vol. II, p. 214.

upon the culture of man as a symbol of the two halves of mankind — have come in contact with each other, and are trying to know and understand each other and to create together, if they can (this time on a world-wide scale), a work of truth and beauty unparalleled in the history of their separate achievements.

They feel the need of a common faith that would become the basis of their future collaboration, the foundation of a really universal fraternity of souls, and perhaps also, one day (if men grow less foolish, and less numerous, too), of a world-wide commonwealth of free nations, at peace with one another.

None of the living creeds professed west of India to-day is sufficiently comprehensive for a thoughtful Hindu to look upon it as fit to be ranked with his own religion or with any of those that sprang from it. None can match Buddhism and Jainism in the preaching of universal kindness; none can match Vedantism, in the conception of divine Reality. That is probably why there are people who suggest to reverse the out-dated activities of the Christian and other missionaries, and to preach to the West the main general tenets of Indian religion. And it is to be noted that, contrarily to the crowds of ignorant Easterners converted to the religions of the West, mostly for purely social reasons, the few Euro-Americans who have adhered to Eastern creeds are mainly men above the average, who have done so for religious or moral reasons alone.

Still, we believe that the attempt, successful as it may be in individual cases, and infinitely more justified than that of the Western missionaries, cannot easily be generalised. The faith of the world cannot be any particular faith linked up with a definite tradition, a given theology (or given metaphysics) to be found in a more or less elaborate literature of sacred texts and learned commentaries. Races differ in their genius. If any creed is to unite them all to some extent, that must be an extremely broad one, with which none of man's deeper aspirations will clash, and which will need, on the part of each individual, no difficult adaptation to a trend of thought alien to his own.

The religions of India, apart from the intricate metaphysical

speculations intertwined with them (and which it is difficult to detach from them without altering them profoundly) seem to have in common a more or less marked tendency to ascetic renunciation. It would, of course, be easy to find texts in which the importance of life and action in the world is stressed to the utmost. But the ultimate goal remains to transcend individuality; to drown personal consciousness in the realisation of an unnameable Infinite, beyond all imaginable thought or even feeling. If not ascetic life, at least an ascetic outlook on life, an awareness of the transience and therefore of the inanity of the visible world, is commended at every stage of man's evolution. And it is this, perhaps, above all, that makes it so difficult for most Westerners to grasp the essence of Indian religion. They understand the Hindu (or Buddhist) point of view, intellectually; they cannot really make it theirs, for their outlook on life and on the visible world is quite different. They may, for instance, accept the doctrine of reincarnation — that basic belief of the East. But they will find it hard, in general, to desire not to be reborn as individuals. It is perhaps only in the higher stages of mystic experience that the two ideals of salvation in eternal life and of “deliverance” from all individual existence meet and merge into each other. But that experience is beyond most people's reach.

We therefore think that it is difficult to make the East — namely, the spiritual sons of India — and the West — the spiritual sons of West Asia and Greece — meet on purely Eastern religious grounds. The common faith in which the two can walk hand in hand is to be sought elsewhere.

Why not try to revive the forsaken Religion of the Disk among the elite of all countries, and make it the basis of the new spiritual order uniting East and West?

If one takes “the West” in the broad sense that we have given to that word, then Akhnaton's Teaching seems, as we have stated above, the one product of the Western mind that can stand in parallel with the great teachings of India, both for its lofty conception of the Energy-within-the-Disk — hardly different from the central idea of the Gayatri mantra of the Hindus — and for the love of all living creatures which it implies.

Far from looking upon it as anything alien to her own religious genius, India could therefore see in it another proof of that essential oneness in man's highest inspiration, which she has never ceased to proclaim through the mouth of her greatest sons; something so akin, indeed, to her own oldest recorded contribution to religious thought that some authors¹ have hastily supposed it to be a result of Indo-Aryan influences upon its Promoter.

On the other hand, it differs from the great Eastern teachings of world-wide scope precisely in that it is not a teaching of renunciation. It emphasises the joy of life, the sweetness of sunshine to all beings, the loveliness of the visible world. And the only few lines through which we can hope to form an idea of its Founder's own conception of the hereafter express a joyous confidence in the coming of a new individual life, presupposing even, perhaps, some sort of subtle corporeality. In this attitude of his to personal existence and to the beautiful world of forms and colours which he transcends without ceasing to feel their infinite value, Akhnaton remains a child of the West, whom the West can understand.

It seems difficult indeed to find a historic figure uniting, to the same degree as he, the complementary qualities of what we may call the two poles of human perfection: uncompromising logic, and boundless love; rationality, and the intuition of the divine; the smiling serenity of Greek wisdom, and the fiery earnestness of the East; the love of glorious life in flesh and blood and, at the same time, the tranquil indifference of the saint to every form of worldly success. No man deserves more than he the double homage of the two great sections of mankind: the undivided admiration of the West; the respect of the East.

And the one powerful country of the world in which dynastic Sun-worship is still to-day the State-religion — Japan — could hardly fail to recognise the supreme beauty of a nature-loving, Sun-centred Teaching, preached by a king of one of the oldest solar dynasties of the past. Among the Western cults, old and new, the Religion of the Disk

¹ Sir Wallis Budge: *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism* (Edit. 1923), pp. 113, and following.

might perhaps be the one which, if only better known, would appeal to the heart of that proud nation, stirring in it, beyond and above its age-long devotion to symbols of national Godhead, a holy fervour towards the truly universal Sun, God of all life.

* * *

In January, 1907, a skeleton — all that remained of the world's first rationalist and oldest Prince of Peace — was discovered by Arthur Weigall and Ayrton in a tomb in the royal necropolis near the ruins of Thebes. At the foot of the coffin was inscribed the prayer, previously quoted, most probably composed by the dead king himself, in praise of the One God for the sake of Whom he had lost everything.¹

On the top of the coffin were the name and titles of the Pharaoh:

“The beautiful Prince, the Chosen-son of the Sun, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Living in Truth, Lord of the Two Lands. Akhnaton, the beautiful Child of the living Aton, whose name shall live for ever and ever.”

The name had been erased, but the titles were sufficient to reconstruct the inscription in its whole.

The tomb had once been that of Akhnaton's mother; and the body of the young Pharaoh had been brought there from Akhetaton, after the desertion of the sacred City by the Egyptian court, under Tutankhamen, and laid next to the remains of the deceased queen. But soon after, the priests of Amon, restored to power, had found it proper to remove Queen Tiy's mummy to another place; and Akhnaton's body, wrapped in its double sheets of pure gold, had been left alone in the sepulchre. Century after century it had remained there, forgotten. And as the priests had not cared to seal the entrance of the lonely chamber properly, the

¹ “I breathe the sweet breath that comes forth from Thy mouth; I behold Thy beauty every day. It is my desire that I may hear Thy sweet voice, even in the North wind, that my limbs may be rejuvenated with life, through love of Thee. Give me Thy hands holding Thy spirit, that I may receive it and live by it. Call Thou upon my name unto eternity, and it shall never fail.” (Quoted in Chapter V, p. 132)

dampness of the air had penetrated it and had slowly caused the embalmed flesh to decay. So that, after three thousand and three hundred years, when human eyes once more beheld the young king who had sung the glory of life, nothing was left of his mortal form but dry bones.

The discovery was a subject of discussion among scholars for some time. Apart from that, it remained unnoticed. After examining the skeleton, Professor Elliot Smith declared that the Pharaoh could not have been more than twenty-eight or twenty-nine when he died. A learned German scholar, Professor Sethe, supposing him to have been older, doubted that the bones were actually his. A great deal was written about the matter, until it was practically proved that they were.¹ Arthur Weigall, a few years later, published his beautiful book, *The Life and Times of Akhnaton*, in which he asserts himself as a genuine admirer of the Pharaoh and of his Teaching.

But no such interest as was roused, in 1922, by Lord Carnarvon's discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen, was stirred among the public at large. There were no articles written for lay people in the Sunday editions of the daily papers about the most perfect man whom the Western world had produced; no romantic history for popular consumption came forth overnight; no lectures were given in literary and semi-literary circles; no tea-table talk took place around the Pharaoh's name. For little had been found of those treasures which impress the imagination of crowds: no jewels (save a beautiful golden vulture, with wings outstretched); no gems; no gilded furniture; nothing but the skeleton of a god-like man who had died, rejected and cursed thirty-three hundred years before.

Yet that man was the one the world had been unconsciously seeking all the time, through centuries of moral unrest, disillusionment and failure.

¹ J. D. S. Pendlebury (*Tell-el-Amarna*, Edit. 1935, pp. 31-32) still maintains, however, that Akhnaton's mummy was probably destroyed by his enemies, and that the remains found by Arthur Weigall in 1907 were therefore not his.

* * *

Confident in their suddenly re-acquired power, and maddened by the joy of revenge, the priests of Amon had decided to wipe out every trace of Akhnaton's memory for ever. The temples of the various gods were restored and their cult reinstalled in all its former splendour. And a curse was proclaimed throughout the land against him who had dared to forsake the traditional path and preach the Way of the One God.

Let us remember the hour of his defeat. Let us think of the national cult; let us picture to ourselves the huge affluence of pilgrims from all parts of the empire, assembled there to see the old order begin again; to hear, as before, the old prayers and the old songs in honour of the god of Thebes — of the god of Egypt — who had made Egypt great, and who would have helped her to remain so, had it not been for the “apostate” king, who had risen against him; let us imagine the smoke and fragrance of incense, the music of the holy instruments amplified through the successive halls of granite; the flame of the sacrifice, reflected upon the dusky faces, and upon the golden hieroglyphics shining in the darkness in praise of Amon, king of gods. And in the midst of all this, echoing from hall to hall, telling the world of that day and the world to come that the “criminal of Akhetaton” had been vanquished, and that Egypt was herself once more, the song of triumph and of hate:

“Woe to him who assails thee!
Thy city endures,
but he who assailed thee falls.”

the song of the victorious crowd led by its cunning shepherds — of the Nation, of all nations; of the average man, walking in the footprints of his fathers — over the dead body of Him Who, being one with the Sun, walked in His own light; of the divine Individual:

“The abode of him who assailed thee is in darkness,
but the rest of the earth is in light. . . .”

In that crowd from all parts of the empire, there were men who had known King Akhnaton in the days of his glory; men

who had received from him gifts in gold and silver, and to whom he had spoken kind words, and on whom he had relied, believing them to be faithful. But not one of them stirred as he heard the frenzied hymn of hate. The priests of Amon had what they wanted. The world obeyed them — not Him. And it has continued obeying them ever since, cherishing its manifold superstitions and paying homage to its tribal gods. To the present day, no man has yet raised his voice and openly challenged their triumph in the name of the Child of Light whom they persecuted beyond death.

But there is one thing that the priests could not do, and that was to keep the world from groping in search of the dream — or the reality — for which he had lived. They could not stop the evolution of the spirit, nor put an end to the quest of truth.

While Akhnaton's memory was rapidly being effaced, the quasi-universality of Sun-worship was a fact. However wanting were the different conceptions of the Sun held in different countries, still it was to the fiery Disk that all men rendered praise, in some way or the other, justifying the words of the inspired king. And no force on earth could keep that unanimity from meaning what it did.

And as time passed, the better men of the Western world began to feel the limitations of their man-made religions; to crave for a faith that should be founded solely upon the facts of existence; a faith that should include the whole scheme of life, and not man alone, within its scope; a faith that should also find its practical application in questions of international interest (mainly in the question of conquest and war) no less than in the private behaviour of individuals; and at the same time, a faith that should be simple, extremely simple — the world is tired of intricate metaphysics, of sterile mental play centred around ideas that correspond to nothing important in living life. In other words, as one imperfect creed after another rose and thrived, and decayed in its turn, leaving behind it disillusionment and doubt and moral sickness, the better men have been unknowingly seeking for the lost truth preached by King Akhnaton.

Deprived of name and fame and of the love of men, the

royal youth lay in the desecrated tomb in which his enemies had put his body, while centuries rolled on. And no one knew that the light that the best ones were still seeking was his light. The discovery of his bones was no more noticed than any other archaeological discovery. In all appearance, his persecutors still held their sway. Only they could not silence the yearning of Western consciousness for a truly rational religion in tune with life, uniting the scientific spirit to all-embracing love. Nor could they suppress the need of the whole world for a permanent understanding of East and West, on the basis of an extremely simple faith in which the two could recognise the expression of their complementary ideals.

The discovery of Akhnaton's remains, thirty-seven years ago, was hardly spoken of, save in very restricted scholarly circles. But times were already beginning to ripen for the recognition of his Teaching as the Gospel of a new and better world — for his long-delayed triumph. Sir Flinders Petrie had proclaimed the eternal actuality of the Religion of the Disk in the early eighteen-nineties. Less than ten years later,¹ one of the greatest artists of the modern West, the Greek poet, Kostis Palamas, referring to the unending conflict between the Pagan and the Christian spirit — the conflict at the centre of European culture — had written:

“A day will come when you will walk hand in hand,
Pagans and Christians, with your eyes open,
nourished with the herb of Life.
Fantasies will appear to you as fantasies,
and you will stretch out your hands so that, of all that is vital,
you, too, might hold something. . . .”²

¹ The poem was composed, as the author himself says in his preface, between 1899 and 1906.

² From *The Twelve Discourses of the Gypsy*, 2nd Edition, Athens, 1921, p. 84.

He did not suggest what particular Teaching could supersede the conflicting wisdoms, and make them appear as “fantasies,” as “illusions” to their followers. And we do not know if he was at all acquainted with Akhnaton’s religion. But his verses are none the less prophetic. They express the increasing awareness of the Western world that the time has come for the triumph of some true faith of life which will give it, in one whole, all that the Athenian miracle — the miracle of reason and beauty — and the equally beautiful “folly of the Cross” — the miracle of love as the West knows it — have given it separately, and still more.

We believe that no faith could respond to this expectation better than Akhnaton’s worship of Cosmic Energy, Essence of Life, through the beautiful Disk of our Parent Star in which It radiates as light and heat.

After killing the Religion of the Disk and thrusting their country back into the path that was to lead it to slow decay, the priests of Egypt believed that Akhnaton and his Teaching were dead for ever. They were sure no man would ever rise in favour of him whom they had condemned, and they departed content from the great temple where his doom had been solemnised. And we have seen that, for three thousand three hundred years, their unholy verdict held good. One can think of no other historic instance of hatred being successful for such a long time.

But the hour has come for the age-old injustice to end. It is the duty of the modern man to challenge the judgement of the priests of the outdated local deity, and to undo what they have done; to answer their hymn of hate, and to proclaim the glory of the most lovable of men; to teach the children that are growing up to hold his name sacred, to look up to him as to their own beloved King and, above all, to live in accordance with his Teaching of life.

May we consider that duty also as a privilege — perhaps the greatest privilege of our troubled times — and may we feel proud to accomplish it without failure. And then, even as the Sun reappears in the East after a long night, Akhnaton, His High-priest and Son, “who came forth from His substance,” shall rise again from the dust of dead history, in

youth and beauty, and live in the consciousness of our times and of all times to come, and rule the hearts and lives of the elite of the world, “till the swan shall turn black and the crow turn white, till the hills rise up to travel and the deeps rush into the rivers.”

Calcutta, May 1942 — New Delhi, 24th January, 1945.

HYMNS OF AKHNATON TO THE SUN

LONGER HYMN

Thy appearing is beautiful in the horizon of heaven,
 The Living Aten¹, the beginning of life;
 Thou risest in the horizon of the east,
 Thou fillest every land with thy beauty.

Thou art very beautiful, brilliant and exalted above earth,
 Thy beams encompass all lands which thou hast made.
 Thou art the sun, thou settest their bounds,
 Thou bindest them with thy love.
 Thou art afar off, but thy beams are upon the land;
 Thou art on high, but the day passes with thy going.

Thou restest in the western horizon of heaven,
 And the land is in darkness like the dead.

They lie in their houses, their heads are covered,
 Their breath is shut up, and eye sees not to eye;
 Their things are taken, even from under their heads, and they know it not.

Every lion cometh forth from his den,
 And all the serpents then bite;
 The night shines with its lights,
 The land lies in silence;
 For he who made them is in his horizon.

The land brightens, for thou risest in the horizon,
 Shining as the Aten in the day;
 The darkness flees, for thou givest thy beams,
 Both lands are rejoicing every day.

Men awake and stand upon their feet,
 For thou liftest them up;
 They bathe their limbs, they clothe themselves,
 They lift their heads in adoration of thy rising,
 Throughout the land they do their labours.

¹ The name of the Solar Disk is written Aten by some authors, such as Sir Flinders Petrie, Sir Wallis Budge, Griffith, etc., and Aton by others, such as A. Weigall and J. Breasted. All through this book we have written Aton.

The cattle all rest in their pastures,
 Where grow the trees and herbs;
 The birds fly in their haunts,
 Their wings adoring thy ka,
 All the flocks leap upon their feet,
 The small birds live when thou risest upon them.

The ships go forth north and south,
 For every way opens at thy rising.
 The fishes in the river swim up to greet thee,
 Thy beams are within the depth of the great sea.

Thou createst conception in women, making the issue of mankind;
 Thou makest the son to live in the body of his mother,
 Thou quietest him that he should not mourn,
 Nursing him in the body, giving the spirit that all his growth may live.
 When he cometh forth on the day of his birth,
 Thou openest his mouth to speak, thou doest what he needs.

The small bird in the egg, sounding within the shell,
 Thou givest to it breath within the egg,
 To give life to that which thou makest.
 It gathers itself to break forth from the egg,
 It cometh from the egg, and chirps with all its might,
 It runneth on its feet, when it has come forth.

How many are the things which thou hast made!
 Thou createst the land by thy will, thou alone,
 With peoples, herds and flocks,
 Everything on the face of the earth that walketh on its feet,
 Everything in the air that flieth with its wings.

In the hills from Syria to Kush, and the plain of Egypt,
 Thou givest to every one his place, thou framest their lives,
 To every one his belongings, reckoning his length of days;
 Their tongues are diverse in their speech,
 Their natures in the colour of their skin.
 As the divider thou dividest the strange peoples.

When thou hast made the Nile beneath the earth,
 Thou bringest it according to thy will to make the people to live:
 Even as thou hast formed them unto thyself,
 Thou art throughout their lord, even in their weakness.
 O lord of the land that risest for them.

Aten of the day, revered by every distant land, thou makest their life,
 Thou placest a Nile in heaven that it may rain upon them,
 That it may make waters upon the hills like the great sea,
 Watering their fields amongst their cities.
 How excellent are thy ways!

O Lord of eternity, the Nile in Heaven is for the strange people,
 And all wild beasts that go upon their feet.
 The Nile that cometh from below the earth is for the land of Egypt,
 That it may nourish every field.
 Thou shinest and they live by thee.

Thou makest the seasons of the year to create all thy works;
 The winter making them cool, the summer giving warmth.
 Thou makest the far-off heaven, that thou mayest rise in it,
 That thou mayest see all that thou madest when thou wast alone.

Rising in thy forms as the living Aten,
 Shining afar off and returning.
 The villages, the cities, and the tribes, on the road and the river,
 All eyes see thee before them,
 Thou art the Aten of the day over all the land.

Thou art in my heart, there is none who knoweth thee, excepting thy son Nefer . kheperu . ra . ua .
 en . ra;
 Thou causest that he should have understanding, in thy ways and in thy might.

The land is in thy hand, even as thou hast made them;
 Thou shinest and they live, and when thou settest they die;
 For by thee the people live, they look on thy excellencies until thy setting;
 They lay down all their labours when thou settest in the west,
 And when thou risest, they grow. . . .
 Since the day that thou laidest the foundations of the earth,
 Thou raisest them up for thy son who came forth from thy substance,
 The king of Egypt, living in Truth, lord of both lands, Nefer . kheperu . ra . ua . en . ra,
 Son of the sun, living in Truth, Akhenaten, great in his duration; Nefer . neferu . Aten
 Nefer . iti, living and flourishing for ever eternally.

Translated by Griffith, quoted by Sir Flinders Petrie in *A History of Egypt* (Edit. 1899),
 Vol. II, pp. 215-218.

SHORTER HYMN

A Hymn of Praise to the living Horus of the Two Horizons, who rejoiceth in the horizon in his name of “Shu, who-is-in-the-Aten”-(*i.e.*, Disk), the Giver of Life for ever and ever, by the King who liveth in Truth, the Lord of the Two Lands, NEFER-KHEPERU-RA UA-EN-RA, Son of Ra, who liveth in Truth, Lord of the Crowns, AAKHUNATEN, great in the duration of his life, Giver of Life for ever and ever.

(He saith)

Thou risest gloriously, O thou Living Aten, Lord of Eternity! Thou art sparkling (or coruscating), beautiful, (and) mighty. Thy love is mighty and great . . . thy light, of diverse colours, leadeth captive (or, bewitcheth) all faces. Thy skin shineth brightly to make all hearts to live. Thou fillest the Two Lands with thy love, O thou god, who did(st) build (thy)self. Maker of every land, Creator of whatsoever there is upon it, (*viz.*) men and women, cattle, beasts of every kind, and trees of every kind that grow on the land. They live when thou shinest upon them. Thou art the mother (and) father of what thou hast made; their eyes, when thou risest, turn their gaze upon thee. Thy rays at dawn light up the whole earth. Every heart beateth high at the sight of thee, (for) thou risest as their Lord.

Thou settest in the western horizon of heaven, they lie down in the same way as those who are dead. Their heads are wrapped up in cloth, their nostrils are blocked, until thy rising taketh place at dawn in the eastern horizon of heaven. Their hands then are lifted up in adoration of thy Ka; thou vivifiest hearts with thy beauties (or, beneficent acts), which are life. Thou sendest forth thy beams, (and) every land is in festival. Singing men, singing women (and) chorus men make joyful noises in the Hall of the House of the Benben Obelisk, (and) in every temple in (the city of) Aakhut-Aten, the Seat of Truth, wherewith thy heart is satisfied. Within it are dedicated offerings of rich food (?).

Thy son is sanctified (or, ceremonially pure) to perform the things which thou willest, O thou Aten, when he showeth himself in the appointed processions.

Every creature that thou hast made skippeth towards thee, thy honoured son (rejoiceth), his heart is glad, O thou Living Aten, who (appearest) in heaven every day. He hath brought forth his honoured son, UA-EN-RA, like his own form, never ceasing so to do. The son of Ra supporteth his beauties (or beneficent acts).

NEFER-KHEPERU-RA UA-EN-RA (saith)

I am thy son, satisfying thee, exalting thy name. Thy strength (and) thy power are established in my heart. Thou art the Living Disk, eternity is thine emanation (or, attribute). Thou hast made the heavens to be remote so that thou mightest shine therein and gaze upon everything that thou hast made. Thou thyself art Alone, but there are millions

of (powers of) life in thee to make them (*i.e.*, thy creatures) live. Breath of life is it to (their) nostrils to see thy beams. Buds burst into flower (and) the plants which grow on the waste lands send up shoots at thy rising; they drink themselves drunk before thy face. All the beasts frisk about on their feet; all the feathered fowl rise up from their nests and flap their wings with joy, and circle round in praise of the Living Aten. . . .

LONGER HYMN

A hymn of praise of Her-aakhuti, the living one, exalted in the Eastern Horizon in his name of Shu-who-is-in-the-Aten, who liveth for ever and ever, the living and great Aten, he who is in the Set-Festival, the Lord of the Circle, the Lord of the Disk, the Lord of heaven, the Lord of earth, the Lord of the House of the Aten in Aakhut-Aten (of) the King of the South and the North, who liveth in Truth, Lord of the Two Lands (*i.e.*, Egypt),

NEFER-KHEPERU-RA UA-EN-RA, the son of Ra, who liveth in Truth, Lord of Crowns, AAKHUN-ATEN, great in the period of his life (and of) the great royal woman (or wife) whom he loveth, Lady of the Two Lands, NEFER-NEFERU-ATEN NEFERTITI, who liveth in health and youth for ever and ever.

He saith:

Thy rising (is) beautiful in the horizon of heaven, O Aten, ordainer of life. Thou dost shoot up in the horizon of the East, thou fillest every land with thy beneficence. Thou art beautiful and great and sparkling, and exalted above every land. Thy arrows (*i.e.*, rays) envelop (*i.e.*, penetrate) everywhere all the lands which thou hast made.

Thou art as Ra. Thou bringest (them) according to their number, thou subduest them for thy beloved son. Thou thyself art afar off, but thy beams are upon the earth; thou art in their faces, they (admire) thy goings.

Thou settest in the horizon of the west, the earth is in darkness, in the form of death. Men lie down in a booth wrapped up in cloths, one eye cannot see its fellow. If all their possessions, which are under their heads, be carried away, they perceive it not. Every lion emergeth from his lair, all the creeping things bite, darkness (is) a warm retreat. The land is in silence. He who made them hath set in his horizon.

The earth becometh light, thou shootest up in the horizon, shining in the Aten in the day, thou scatterest the darkness. Thou sendest out thine arrows (*i.e.*, rays), the Two Lands make festival, (men) wake up, stand upon their feet, it is thou who raisest them up. (They) wash their members, they take (their apparel), and array themselves therein, their hands are (stretched out) in praise at thy rising, throughout the land they do their works.

Beasts and cattle of all kinds settle down upon the pastures, shrubs and vegetables flourish, the feathered fowl fly about over their marshes,

their feathers praising thy Ka. All the cattle rise up on their legs, creatures that fly and insects of all kinds spring into life when thou risest up on them.

The boats drop down and sail up the river, likewise every road openeth (or showeth itself) at thy rising, the fish in the river swim towards thy face, thy beams are in the depths of the Great Green (*i.e.*, the Mediterranean and Red Seas).

Thou makest offspring to take form in women, creating seed in men. Thou makest the son to live in the womb of his mother, making him to be quiet that he crieth not; thou art a nurse in the womb, giving breath to vivify that which he hath made. (When) he droppeth from the womb . . . on the day of his birth (he) openeth his mouth in the (ordinary) manner, thou providest his sustenance.

The young bird in the egg speaketh in the shell, thou givest breath to him inside it to make him to live. Thou makest for him his mature form so that he can crack the shell (being) inside the egg. He cometh forth from the egg, he chirpeth with all his might, when he hath come forth from it (the egg) he walketh on his two feet.

O how many are the things which thou hast made!

They are hidden from the face, O thou One God, like whom there is no other. Thou didst create the earth by thy heart (or will), thou alone existing, men and women, cattle, beasts of every kind that are upon the earth, and that move upon feet (or legs), all the creatures that are in the sky and that fly with their wings, (and) the deserts of Syria and Kesh (Nubia) and the Land of Egypt.

Thou settest every person in his place. Thou providest their daily food, every man having the portion allotted to him, (thou) dost compute the duration of his life. Their tongues are different in speech, their characteristics (or forms) and likewise their skins (in colour), giving distinguishing marks to the dwellers in foreign lands.

Thou makest Hapi (the Nile) in the Tuat (Underworld), thou bringest it when thou wishest to make mortals live, inasmuch as thou hast made them for thyself, their Lord who dost support them to the uttermost, O thou Lord of every land, thou shinest upon them, O ATEN of the day, thou great one of majesty.

Thou makest the life of all remote lands. Thou settest a Nile in heaven, which cometh down to them.

It maketh a flood on the mountains like the Great Green Sea, it maketh to be watered their fields in their villages. How beneficent are thy plans, O Lord of Eternity! A Nile in heaven art thou for the dwellers in the foreign lands (or deserts), and for all the beasts of the desert that go upon feet (or legs). Hapi (the Nile) cometh from the Tuat for the land of Egypt. Thy beams nourish every field; thou risest up (and) they live, they germinate for thee.

Thou makest the Seasons to develop everything that thou hast made:

The season Pert (*i.e.*, November 16 to March 16) so that they may refresh themselves, and the season Heh (*i.e.*, March 16 to November 16)

in order to taste thee. Thou hast made the heaven which is remote that thou mayest shine therein and look upon everything that thou hast made. Thy being is one, thou shinest (or, shootest up) among thy creatures as the LIVING ATEN, rising, shining, departing afar off, returning. Thou hast made millions of creations (or, evolutions) from thy one self, (viz.) towns and cities, villages, fields, roads and rivers. Every eye (*i.e.*, all men) beholdeth thee confronting it. Thou art the Aten of the day at its zenith.

At thy departure thine eye . . . thou didst create their faces so that thou mightest not see . . . ONE thou didst make . . . Thou art in my heart. There is no other who knoweth thee except thy son Nefer-kheperu-Ra Ua-en-Ra. Thou hast made him wise to understand thy plans (and) thy power. The earth came into being by thy hand, even as thou hast created them (*i.e.*, men). Thou risest, they live; thou settest, they die. As for thee, there is duration of life in thy members, life is in thee. (All) eyes (gaze upon) thy beauties until thou settest, (when) all labours are relinquished. Thou settest in the West, thou risest, making to flourish . . . for the King. Every man who (standeth on his) foot, since thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, thou hast raised up for thy son who came forth from thy body, the King of the South and the North, Living in Truth, Lord of Crowns, Aakhun-Aten, great in the duration of his life (and for) the Royal Wife, great of Majesty, Lady of the Two Lands, Nefer-neferu-Aten Nefertiti, living (and) young for ever and ever.

Translated by Sir E. Wallis Budge, in *Tutankhamen, Amenism, Atenism, and Egyptian Monotheism*, London, 1923, pp. 116-135.

LONGER HYMN

Thy dawning is beautiful in the horizon of the sky,
 O living Aton, Beginning of life!
 When thou risest in the Eastern horizon,
 Thou fillest every land with thy beauty.
 Thou art beautiful, great, glittering, high above every land,
 Thy rays, they encompass the lands, even all that thou hast made.
 Thou art Re, and thou carriest them all away captive;
 Thou bindest them by thy love.
 Though thou art far away, thy rays are upon earth;
 Though thou art on high, thy footprints are the day.

When thou settest in the western horizon of the sky,
 The earth is in darkness like the dead;
 They sleep in their chambers,
 Their heads are wrapped up,
 Their nostrils are stopped,
 And none seeth the other,
 While all their things are stolen

Which are under their heads,
 And they know it not.
 Every lion cometh forth from his den,
 All serpents, they sting.
 Darkness . . .
 The world is in silence,
 He that made them restest in his horizon.

Bright is the earth when thou risest in the horizon.
 When thou shinest as Aton by day
 Thou drivest away the darkness.
 When thou sendest forth thy rays,
 The Two Lands (Egypt) are in daily festivity,
 Awake and standing upon their feet
 When thou hast raised them up.
 Their limbs bathed, they take their clothing,
 Their arms uplifted in adoration to thy dawning.
 (Then) in all the world they do their work.

All cattle rest upon their pasturage,
 The trees and the plants flourish,
 The birds flutter in their marshes,
 Their wings uplifted in adoration to thee.
 All the sheep dance upon their feet,
 All winged things fly,
 They live when thou hast shone upon them.
 The barques sail up-stream and down-stream alike.
 Every highway is open because thou dawnest.
 The fish in the river leap up before thee.
 Thy rays are in the midst of the great green sea.

Creator of the germ in woman,
 Maker of seed in man,
 Giving life to the son in the body of his mother,
 Soothing him that he may not weep,
 Nurse (even) in the womb,
 Giver of breath to animate every one that he maketh!
 When he cometh forth from the body . . . on the day of his birth,
 Thou openest his mouth in speech,
 Thou suppliest his necessities.

When the fledgling in the egg chirps in the shell,
 Thou givest him breath therein to preserve him alive.
 When thou hast brought him together
 To (the point of) bursting it in the egg,
 He cometh forth from the egg
 To chirp with all his might.

He goeth about upon his two feet
When he hath come forth therefrom.

How manifold are thy works!
They are hidden from before (us),
O sole God, whose powers no other poessesseth.
Thou didst create the earth according to thy heart
While thou wast alone:
Men, all cattle large and small,
All that are upon the earth,
That go about upon their feet;
(All) that are on high,
That fly with their wings.
The foreign countries, Syria and Kush,
The land of Egypt;
Thou settest every man into his place,
Thou suppliest their necessities.
Every one has his possessions,
And his days are reckoned.
Their tongues are diverse in speech,
Their forms likewise and their skins are distinguished.
(For) thou makest different the strangers.

Thou makest the Nile in the Nether World,
Thou bringest it as thou desirest,
To preserve alive the people.
For thou hast made them for thyself,
The lord of every land, who risest for them,
Thou Sun of day, great in majesty.
All the distant countries,
Thou makest (also) their life,
Thou hast set a Nile in the sky;
When it falleth for them,
It maketh waves upon the mountains,
Like the great green sea,
Watering the fields in their towns.

How excellent are thy designs, O lord of eternity!
There is a Nile in the sky for the strangers
And for the cattle of every country that go upon their feet.
(But) the Nile, it cometh from the Nether World for Egypt.

Thy rays nourish every garden;
When thou risest they live,
They grow by thee.
Thou makest the seasons

In order to create all thy work:
 Winter to bring them coolness,
 And heat that they may taste thee.

Thou didst make the distant sky to rise therein,
 In order to behold all that thou hast made,
 Thou alone, shining in thy form as living Aton,
 Dawning, glittering, going afar and returning.
 Thou makest millions of forms
 Through thyself alone;
 Cities, towns, and tribes, highways and rivers.
 All eyes see thee before them,
 For thou art Aton of the day over the earth.

Thou art in my heart,
 There is no other that knoweth thee
 Save thy son Ikhnaton¹.
 Thou hast made him wise
 In thy designs and in thy might.
 The world is in thy hand,
 Even as thou hast made them.
 When thou hast risen they live,
 When thou settest, they die;
 For thou art length of life of thyself,
 Men live through thee,
 While (their) eyes are upon thy beauty
 Until thou settest.
 All labour is put away
 When thou settest in the west.

Thou didst establish the world,
 And raise them up for thy son,
 Who came forth from thy limbs,
 The King of Upper and Lower Egypt,
 Living in Truth, Lord of the Two Lands,
 Nefer-khepru-Re, Wan-Re (Ikhnaton),
 Son of Re, living in Truth, lord of diadems,
 Ikhnaton, whose life is long;
 (And for) the chief royal wife, his beloved,
 Mistress of the Two Lands, Nefer-nefru-Aton, Nofretete
 Living and flourishing for ever and ever.

Translated by J. H. Breasted, in *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*, Chicago, 1912, pp. 324-328.

¹ The King's name is given different spellings by different Egyptologists. Sir Flinders Petrie writes it Akhenaten; Sir Wallis Budge, Aakhun-Aten; J. H. Breasted, Ikhnaton; and Arthur Weigall, Akhnaton, the spelling which we have adopted in this book.

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