CHAPTER TWO: GARBETT'S RELIGION

Young versus Old

Garbett ended his life as a member of the Peculiar people. That at least, is the label he added after his name in a book promoting a scheme of national health published just before he died. [1] The Peculiar People were an evangelical sect started by William Bridges in 1838. [2] Their distinguishing feature was the fact that they accepted the divine inspiration behind every word of the Bible. This led them to a literal interpretation of James 5.14,15: ...*and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick.* As a result of this the Peculiar People chose to receive no medical care, instead relying on prevention through wholesome living and constant prayer.

1. Garbett (1898) He signs himself *E.L. Garbett of the Peculiar People*

2. Hastings (1917) Vol. 9, entry: "Peculiar People"; Cavendish (1983) Vol. 78, entry: "Peculiar People."

But Garbett as a young man was a very different person to the older one he grew into. The intervening period is dotted with several important events which threw him off course rather violently. The most significant of these were the publication of the *Essays and Reviews* of 1857, Darwin's *Origin of Species* of 1859 and Joseph Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jésus* of 1863. These books not only altered many of Garbett's views but caused him to take a definite and frequently extreme stand on the issues which these publications launched.

Such a relatively clear-cut pigeon-hole regarding his religious attitudes does not extend to Garbett as a young man. In the *Treatise* Garbett's precise attitude to religion is never made explicit and can only be distilled from vague impressions thrown up by the style of his prose and his intellectual frame of reference. Much later he would describe himself as a young man as "a poor agnostic". But this has to be taken as the disapproving judgement of a puritanical old man and consequently relativated. The style of his

early writing does not perhaps point to any specific religious convictions beyond a vague low-church Anglicanism imbibed through the bible, the book of Common Prayer and the sermon, but it was unmistakably religious in tone. [3]

In 1850 Garbett's views on religion had not yet been forced to congeal and harden. It is unlikely, for instance, that Garbett as a young man was as stringent and as uncompromising in his acceptance of the literal truth of the Bible as the older version certainly was. In any case, the question did not have the urgency about it in 1849 and 1850 which it was to achieve after Darwin's theory of evolution was published some ten years later. Towards the end of his life Garbett does talk of a religious experience which he was supposed to have had on returning from Jamaica in 1845, at the age of 21. This experience, of which we are never given any details or description, had made Garbett "see" the imminent fulfilment of Daniel's prophecies. This vision would increasingly dominate his later life as an evangelist of a new sort of obscuritanism which had science to serve its cause.

The conclusion is that one cannot take the beliefs of Garbett as an old man, which were so heavily influenced by events during the two decades following 1850 and which were so strangely coloured by bitterness, obsessiveness and, dare one say, mental instability, to illustrate the much younger, much more rational and perspicacious Garbett of the *Treatise*.

Even so, it must become immediately obvious to any reader that the *Treatise* was constructed on an aesthetic model heavily dependent on the metaphysical implications of a Newtonian universe which at the same time took the Platonic and Neo-Platonic metaphors which pervaded Christian belief much for granted. Beyond that, the bible and its influence on the prose and imagery of the period cannot be ignored. To gain a better understanding of Garbett's world it is necessary to produce

---

3. See Chapter 1, note 28.

a generalised picture of Religion in the nineteenth century, concentrating on those aspects which might be relevant to an analysis of Garbett's theory of architecture.

Methodism as Method

Religious thinking and belief were snowballed into a period of revitalisation during the first half of the nineteenth century. Many historians place the role played by the Church, or rather the churches, at the very centre of a concentric picture in which all the various aspects of mid-century England are neatly arranged. [4] The magic word in this picture is Evangelicalism. This word encodes an attitude to religion and to daily life that did not confine itself to any one religious sect but pervaded the whole of society. [5] A special case of the evangelical revival which encapsulated its spirit better than any other form of dissent, was Methodism.

In the eighteenth century the Wesley brothers had given religion a new impetus. The ball which had been set rolling by them took its time to achieve some momentum. By the time the Catholic Relief act had been passed in 1829 and the Oxford Movement had been founded in 1833, the effects of that momentum could be felt throughout England. All of these developments must be seen as extensions of this process of revitalisation and as supplements and reactions to the spirit of Evangelicalism. When the Test and Corporation Acts had been repealed in 1828, officially allowing dissent in all walks of life, this impetus had

4. See for example the chapter headed "Moral Conscience," Thomson (1978, repr. 1985) p. 107 ff; Young (1934); Trevelyan (1967) p. 522 ff; The most comprehensive history of the church itself is Chadwick (1966 & 1970); Cowling (1980) p. xii, writes concisely: *It is from religion that modern English history should begin.* I also used Davies (1961) & Davies (1962)

5. With regard to Evangelicalism: Bebbington (1989); Hilton (1988) and Jay (1979).

taken on the proportions of a movement which could no longer be controlled.

What then is this evangelical spirit? And how could it affect architecture? The word *spirit* frequently stands for a mood which is thought to have come from a specific source (in this case an evangelical sect) and subsequently acquires a multivalence able to order and define a person's attitude to all sorts of issues. This was very much the case with Methodism. The name *Methodism* stands for a religiosity shaped by the *methodical study of Scripture*. The Wesley brothers consciously modelled their religious experience on academic habit, a new form of scholasticism which been allowed time to absorb the implications of a new view of the world and its mechanisms. At one level Methodism advocates an invigorated approach to conversion and instruction. By instituting Sunday schools, cheap literature and huge open-air meetings, Methodists inaugurated the mechanisation of belief as described by Thomas Carlyle in his "Signs of the times": *Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also.*[6] Dissemination and even soul-procurement had become subject to mechanisation.

Evangelicalism (including Methodism) promoted an attitude, a *method* of approach to religion and to daily life based on the belief that virtue could be achieved through strict moral conduct and propriety. In other words it promised to formulate a simple *mechanics* of virtue. This was considered possible as the causes of evil and vice were thought of as palpable. They could identified as absolute values and obviated. The increase of knowledge was considered the most effective medium towards perfectibility. The old Socratic maxim that vice is the direct and exclusive result of ignorance, was rejuvenated in this frame of mind, and became a justification for the idea of progress. Cardinal Newman in his *Apologia* explained the mechanics involved:

---

6. Carlyle (1971) p. 64.

Virtue, he writes, *is the child of knowledge; vice of ignorance, therefore education, periodical literature, railroad travelling, ventilation, and the art of life, when fully carried out, serve to make a population moral and happy.*[7]

This passage is, among other things, a direct a summons to architects. Architects are invited to contribute to the physical and therefore the moral health of the nation by improving their buildings by way of ventilation. [8] A similar conclusion concerning the role of architecture in society was reached thirty years earlier by another converted catholic, Augustus Welby Pugin in 1836. But even Pugin was not the first to reach the intersection between architecture and social reform. [9] It is even doubtful whether he can be said to have brought the debate to England. [10] Alfred Bartholomew, whose *Specifications* were very popular within the building world, had also intended to improve society by improving the excellence of its physical structure. What is important is that English architecture became filled with a mission at around the time that Pugin published his *Contrasts*, of which it has still not let go. [11] The architect/architectural theorist could no longer be exclusively concerned with buildings; through buildings the theorist wanted to improve society as a whole.

If the word Methodism belongs to religion, the general attitude it promoted

7. J.H. Newman (1967) Note A, p. 262. I found the passage in Pevsner (1972) p. 219. He in turn quoted it from G.M. Young (1934) p. 7.

8. *The Builder* during the forties, fifties and sixties, carries many an article on ventilation and sometimes a heart rendering print of the results of bad ventilation.

9. cf. Vidler (1987) p. 2.

10. On Pugin's Intellectual debt to France see Andrew Saint (1983); Phoebe Stanton and Nicolaus Pevsner (1972)

11. Prince Charles' debate is an extension of this problem.

was infused with the world order which the eighteenth century had been trying to construct for itself as a result of the surge of scientific discovery and the consequent re-ordering of aesthetic and metaphysical norms. During the eighteenth century, religion started breathing the same air of method and regularity with which science was achieving such amazing successes. That regularity was expressed in a general morality. Whether Evangelicalism was directly influenced by science and scholarship or vice verse is not a useful question. What is important, is that science and religion had certain icons in common. This is not so strange, after all religion and science represent different ways of trying to explain the same thing: our being here, and applying that knowledge to further the ends of mankind.

The religious Methodist and the scientific experimentalist both advocated an attitude to experience which was based on a morality which exalted methodical regularity, a certain stringency with regard to habit and which demanded strict accountability to be measured by various forms of approbation. With science the aim was to confirm an understanding of nature, or alternatively, to enlarge that understanding. The success of scientific predictions implied knowledge of the truth. With religion, and especially religious morality, strict behaviour was an act of acceptance of a metaphysical world-view already assumed to be true. Method would ensure moral and religious completion, that is, salvation.

Happiness was not only considered to be the ultimate aim of society, but it was thought that there was a simple mechanical model by which that happiness could be achieved under controlled conditions. An illustration of this wish for a controlled progress was Bentham's rather awkward Felicific Calculus. That system formed the basic ingredient of Ruskin's early aesthetics. [12] In fact, the tenet of Bentham's utilitarianism,

12. cf. Modern Painters I, 1

the greatest happiness of the greatest number, became the motivation for legislation and the English judicial system as a whole. Society had taken the apparently mechanical and essentially Euclidian nature of the universe to heart, and was using that image to formulate its own rules.

Most people would have agreed with Newman that happiness could be promoted through knowledge. But the word knowledge had a very personal connotation. Knowledge meant certainty and conviction. The evangelic approach to the attainment of happiness therefore, was to spread its own certainties systematically. Dissemination became the moving power behind this felicification of society:

...every machine, writes Thomas Carlyle in his "Signs of the Times," *must have its moving power, in some of the great currents of society; every little sect among us, Unitarians, Utilitarians, Anabaptists, Phrenologists, must have its Periodical, its monthly or quarterly Magazine;-hanging out, like its windmill, into the populis aura, to grind meal for the society.*[13]

The conditions of happiness were set by specific actions, specific conduct, and this is important when describing the foundations of architectural theory. Because of its emphasis on a strict personal morality, on regularity and on predictability, Evangelicalism could be applied to any social occasion or purpose.

The renewed enthusiasm for religion in the first half of the nineteenth century must be seen in relation to a very similar enthusiasm for popular science. Science and religion fed on each other. It was at that time difficult to set them up as opposites. Loyalty to either was far from mutually exclusive. [14] Their intellectual

13. Thomas Carlyle (1971) p. 65-66.

14. *Science was not generally seen as in opposition to religion before the publication of the Origin of Species, but as part of a widely accepted natural theology*. in: T.W. Heyck (1980) p. 162.

vicinity provoked confrontations which sometimes resulted in a strong antipathy either way but this did not happen often during the first half of the nineteenth century. At this time religious and scientific discourse resembled each other to an uncanny degree. This was because they were perceived to have a common purpose.

The spirit of Evangelism is logically and closely connected to the much felt need for reform in all strata's of society. The mid-Victorians may often be characterised as a swaggering, maudlin, and complacent lot, revelling in their own sense of respectability, but such a description is caricatural. [15] A lot of them were deeply conscious of their society's short-comings. They were saved from despair by a common belief in cure. The great tide of architectural polemics conducted in the period leading up to 1850 stem from a deeply felt dissatisfaction with the state of architecture as it was and the belief that reform was possible and that through architectural reform society could be notably improved. In other words, architectural discussion was characterised by a grand sense of purpose. But this larger purpose reciprocates in the sense that many architectural theorists looked far beyond their own discipline to form their opinions about architecture. Through the causal analysis of the processes of perception and beauty, through the re-evaluation of the purpose of architecture, many and diverse thinkers quietly intruded into the realm of architectural theory. Thinkers such as John Locke, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, Archibald Alison and others began to have an enormous influence on the appreciation of architecture. They supplied the basic metaphysics, the framework of experience, upon which aesthetic fashions could be constructed. But their specific contribution to Garbett's *Treatise* will be discussed where appropriate. It is now necessary to concentrate on another, more generally pervasive source for Garbett, namely, natural theology. In

15. cf Young (1934)

1850 the argument of design still was a force to be reckoned with, a force moreover which let science and religion co-habit in a shared logic: that of Natural theology.

Garbett's architectural doctrine is clearly based on the logic of natural theology. Natural theology, as represented by the writings of William Paley and the *Bridgewater Treatises*, takes the attempt to prove the existence of a God to a self-consciously *scientific* level. Two authors of the *Bridgewater Treatises*, Charles Bell and William Whewell, were not only eminent scientists in their day, they were also important theorists in the field of art and architecture and direct influences on Garbett's *Treatise*.

The silent paradigm

Garbett was well aware of the latest developments in philosophy, theology and the sciences. Having said that, science and the reading of nature were used by Garbett to confirm an old aesthetic model, in which, by way of illustration, the perfection of the circle still dominated. His most radical thinking is paradoxically used to service a deep-rooted conservatism. Almost all the ideas with which he intends to change architectural norms are made to justify and qualify preferences and attitudes which are already well-established. Garbett's definition of *good architecture* is far from revolutionary. It is based on an aesthetic of excellence which was shared by every artisan and connoisseur. In fact that definition made use of certain scholastic ideas. Only through the rigor of his conservatism and his supposedly *scientific* approach, did Garbett hit on new ideas.

One can broadly distinguish two types of sources for Garbett's thinking. The first source consists of evidence which fits within an obvious architectural tradition from Vitruvius onwards although includes the relevant evidence from archaeologists, scientists, artists, philosophers as well as the more inbred world of architectural theory.

The second source is largely silent. It reveals itself only by vague impressions

beneath the film of rhetoric. This is where the paradigms of the imagination, upbringing and desire have taken hold. The symptoms of those influences are only occasionally given the chance to surface. Even so, the logic of natural theology and the argument of design can be shown to have exercised an immense compulsion on Garbett. The most popular version of the argument of design was given in the opening paragraph of William Paley's *Natural Theology*.[16]

Garbett uses scientific discourse in the way that natural theology used it, not for the unprejudiced reading of nature but for the confirmation an established aesthetic ideal, and for the confirmation of the purpose underlying all things. In Paley's case that aesthetic ideal was represented by a Christian God. In Garbett's case it was his conception of Nature. He believed he had been able to distil *true* and permanently valid principles from his reading of nature. He believed he had found these *natural* principles confirmed by his analysis of the *pure* architecture of the Greek and Gothic builders.

---

16. I wish to quote the opening passage of Paley's book in full: *In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer, that for anything I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever; nor would it perhaps, be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given -that, for anything I knew, the watch might always have been there. Yet why should not this serve for the watch as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, viz., that when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose*. William Paley, (n.d) p. 17-18.

The attraction of natural theology as a rhetorical model for architectural theory is that it is able to argue its case by way of a simple analogy which connects the productions of animal, man and God along a presupposed chain of being. That analogy is subsequently supported by an immense wealth of pertinent illustrative material, ranging from the eye to the heavenly spheres as the greatest symbol of God's omnipotence and the beauty of the creation. Every scientific discovery only added to the strength of the argument. Indeed, Paley's *Natural Theology* is no more than an encyclopaedia of examples to support the initial, rather simple argument which is that a watch implies a designer. The world is a mechanism comparable to a watch and therefore must imply a designer too. Paley's study of nature is in the first instance intended to further the glory of God and give intellectually satisfying proof of his existence. His scientific illustrations are supplementary to that purpose.

Garbett's objective is to complete the circle of the argument, thereby involving himself in a paradox. If natural theology needed the purposiveness of human products to prove the purposiveness of the phenomena of nature, Garbett took God's providence as a given and used it to show how he and the Greek and Gothic architects had successfully gone back to nature to establish the principles of design in architecture. In other words purposiveness in nature was used to extrapolate rules for architecture.

For Garbett, Natural theology was his methodological and metaphysical paradigm; it provided Garbett with both the basic assumptions as well as the structure of his argument. The arguments of natural theology whisper through the bars of every sentence, moulding the grammar of his discourse.