

c. The Creator.

The lands in which Cunninghame Graham lived out his life put him in touch with primitive paganism, with Christianity and Islam, and often with a blend of paganism and faith. He would ride under the stars and wonder at the meaning of human life on this star, Earth. He found some atheism, some agnosticism and much Christian protest in the new social attitude which can be traced back to the seventies of the 20th century in Britain: and a strongly moral agnosticism among the philosophers and scientists, of whom T H Huxley stood representative when he stated his conviction:

".....that there is no alleviation for the sufferings of mankind except veracity of thought and action, and the resolute facing of the world as it is when the garment of make-believe by which pious hands have hidden its uglier features is stripped off"¹.

He was dedicated ".....to untiring opposition to that ecclesiastical spirit, that clericalism, which in England, and whatever denomination it may belong, is the deadly enemy of science"².

Among divided churches, Cunninghame Graham found it difficult to discern one God represented. He thought Islam, with its one god Allah, more understandable than Christianity with its Trinity³.

As has been noted, he had a capacity for entering into the outlook of other people and speaking as if he had made it his own. He speaks for the conception of God found in other races, which here would tend to be contemptuously dismissed; the Indians' gualichu tree, the African's ju-ju, the god-monarchs of the Incas, and contrasts them favourably with the "Christian's god", - money. When he speaks for himself, it is as if he gained little illuminations from these polyglot influences and had to discern God with a direct perception of the senses.

He speaks of God in two different ways. Looking at life and failing to find in it a pattern of significance, he comes to one conclusion. Thinking of the variety and beauty of created life, he comes to another.

In face of the futility of life, he sees God as ".....the great ringmaster in Eden....."⁴. At times it seems that ".....all the world is but a pantomime badly put on the stage by an incompetent stage manager....."⁵. Or, for him ".....God seems to sit, presiding blindly over a world which either mocks Him or is mocked by Him....."⁶.

"The conception of a not impossible one God, not caring overmuch for that which he has made, but to be appealed to when the flesh is weakening.....appeals at times to all who have lived either in deserts, pampas, or in any other of the vast open spaces of the earth, and more especially when the nights are fine"⁷.

¹ From "Autobiography" in his Collected Essays, vol. i.

² From "Autobiography" in his Collected Essays, vol. i.

³ He calls the doctrine of the Trinity "dabbling in polytheism" in "Progress", p.179.

⁴ "Writ on Sand", p.9.

⁵ "The Ipane", p.180. cf. P.188.

⁶ "Faith", p.92.

⁷ "Progress", p.179. cf. "Mogreb-el-Acksa", p.195.

So, he says, God exists: but there would appear to be no rational redemptive connection between His existence and the fandango we dance on earth.

As we have seen, in his wonder at the natural world, and in the feeling that the world is not human property to be dealt with in terms of ends we set it, Cunninghame Graham speaks with real reverence of God. Looking over a prospect of countryside, he notes "....a vast and always changing scheme of colour, such as no earthly palette could ever have devised"¹. God's existence just has to be posited. But he judges that the world is a provision made by God for created life, and that we are not to look beyond it. Speaking of the sweet savours of life in the tropics, he writes:

"That is the true millennium.....and each man makes or mars it for himself, as long as health gives him power to drink it in, and to enjoy"².

Yet though God is removed from this life (and Cunninghame Graham prefers it so, for His intervention would load the dice, and take the admirable quality out of human daring and resource)³ it is implied that He is Judge at the end. He will gather up the seas⁴. Since He is not deceived by those who honour Him only for the uses they may have of Him⁵, and is not hoodwinked by those who use His name and crush the poor, or otherwise violate His good will,⁶ He must in the end accuse and vindicate. This power is assumed to be God's, but the thought is nowhere developed more adequately.

Occasionally, Cunninghame Graham indicates the existence of a present link with this remote God, apart from that inexplicable secret stair bequeathed to mystics. Communion then is thought of in terms of an overall comprehending relationship of which one is given an awareness, so that the soul is lifted:

".....out of the region of mere selfish yearnings to be one with God, for its own welfare, into communion not only with the Deity, but with all that He has made"⁷.

God is still not participant. He is related to, but does not influence, life. The nearest he comes to the thought of God's relevance to human life, is when he rejects idolatrous anthropomorphisms: God as the Patron of Big Business or of a class, or of a race - as Silvio Sanchez, the negro poet, discerned it:

".....my very God is white, made in your image, imposed upon my race by yours. His menacing pale face has haunted me from childhood, hard and unsympathetic⁸ or of nation - as when natives turn in judgement on empire builders, saying "These are but weaklings, and their God made in their image, merely an Anglo-Saxon and anthropomorphic fool"⁹.

Christ is thought of as a fairy, a phenomenon, who may be the express image of God's person but whose life does not change our state. True, Cunninghame Graham always

¹ "The Conquest of New Granada", p.4.

² "A Brazilian Mystic", p.235.

³ "The Conquest of New Granada", p.132.

⁴ "Doughty Deeds", p.6.

⁵ "Mogreb-el-Aeksa", pp. 273 and 282.

⁶ "Hernando de Soto", Preface, pp. vii and viii.

⁷ "A Brazilian Mystic", p.187; cf. "Faith", p.169.

⁸ "Hope", p.117

⁹ "The Ipane", p.256.

speaks reverently of Christ and can say: "....the birth of Him who died upon the Cross to bring peace to the earth"¹. True, he reacts against idolatrous worship. Of Cortes' exhortation to his soldiers before marching on Mexico, he wrote: "One fails to recognise the Saviour as the God of Battles"². Of the bitter sectarian church life of Selvagia, he writes: "Not that Jesus had ever ought to do with Gart-na-Cloich. The deity worshipped there is Dagon, or some superfetated Moloch born in Geneva"³. Yet the most we can distinguish, I believe, is his belief in the genuine intention of Christ, allied with complete mystification concerning its realisation in the world's life.

The Holy Spirit is rarely mentioned. I remember but one allusion⁴.

Life is a hand-over. Its obstinate tenor is unaffected by the existence of God, the coming of Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit. Humanity goes it alone. Better so, for though the futility of life presses on one, human freedom is preserved, even at cost:

"His will will be accomplished, who, having made the earth a paradise, gave it to us to turn into a purgatory for ourselves and all the dwellers in it"⁵.

Probably Allah represented a picture of God more acceptable to his mind than that given by the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he was, as I have said, the residuary legatee of many expressions of religion. Here is one place where those are not fused in his thought.

¹ "Charity", p.73.

² "Bernal Diaz del Castillo", p.73, footnote.

³ "The Ipsane", p.194.

⁴ "Horses of the Conquest", p.73.

⁵ "The Ipsane", p.66.