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AKHNATON.

THE MAN AND HIS VISION.

BY G. C. PARKHURST BAXTER.

I DO not pretend in this paper to aspire to do other than collect in a short essay the leading thoughts and material which have been placed on record and have inspired those writers who have delved into the past and added to our knowledge of the aims, the purpose, the achievements and the failures of a King of Egypt of the long ago. A man who has been described as one of the most interesting characters ever known, who, in an age of superstition and in a land where the grossest polytheism reigned absolutely supreme, evolved a monotheistic religion second only to Christianity itself in purity of tone. The first human being to understand rightly the meaning of divinity and when the world reverberated with the noise of War to preach the first known doctrine of peace.

Amenophis IV, later known as Akhnaton, was Pharaoh of Egypt for seventeen years (1375-1358 B.C.), some thirteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, three centuries before the age of David and Solomon, and many a year before the preaching of Moses. He was the ninth King of the Eighteenth Dynasty which took possession of the throne of Egypt in the year 1580 B.C., over 1,300 years after the building of the great pyramids and some 2,000 years after the beginning of the dynastic history of the Nile Valley. His predecessors raised the prestige of Egypt to a point never attained before or since, and it reached its zenith in the reign of the sixth King of the dynasty, Thutmosis III, who conducted campaign after campaign in Syria and every year returned to Thebes, his capital, laden with the spoils of Asia. His son, Amenophis II, carried on these conquests and was succeeded by his son, Thutmosis IV, who was then eighteen years of age. During this King's reign the beginnings are to be observed of certain religious movements which became more apparent in the time of his son, Amenophis III, and of his grandson, Akhnaton.

Egypt had, at the time when Amenophis III ascended the throne, existed as a civilized nation for over 2,000 years, during the whole of which period religious beliefs had been developing and were now so engraved in the hearts of the people that changes, however slight, assumed revolutionary proportions, and at this time the old gods of Egypt were at the height of their power.

Of these gods, Amon, the presiding deity of Thebes, was the most powerful. Originally the tribal god of the Thebans, he had risen to the state god of the country when Thebes became the capital of Egypt.

The Sun God, Ra, originally the deity of Heliopolis near Cairo, had been the state god in earlier times and the priests of Amon

contrived to identify the two deities under the name "Amon-Ra, King of the Gods."

The Goddess Mut, "The Mother," was the consort of Amon. By Amon she had a son, Khonsu, who formed the third member of the Theban trinity. He was the God of the Moon. In Upper Egypt, Osiris, Isis and Horus formed a trinity. At Memphis the tribal god was the little dwarf Ptah, the European Vulcan, the blacksmith, the artificer and the potter of the gods. In this city also, as in many other districts of Egypt, there was the Sacred Bull here called Apis, who was worshipped with divine honours and was regarded as an aspect of Ptah. During a visit I paid to Egypt last year I spent a day at Sakkara (all too short a time) and was immensely struck with the Apis tombs which were excavated by Mariette Pasha in 1850. They are underground tombs and were rifled by the many invaders who conquered Egypt. But you can now see the empty stone sarcophagi with their heavy lids slightly moved by the ancient robbers who carried off the precious contents. There are in all twenty-four sarcophagi of colossal dimensions, but only two or three bear any inscriptions which can be inspected by the aid of candle or torchlight. It is a mystery how the old Egyptians managed to place these gigantic coffins of basalt and granite in these gloomy galleries that run into the bowels of the Libyan desert. They are ranged on the two sides of a gallery and one immense coffin is wedged in the entrance as if the workmen were stopped in placing it. There is very little room to pass by and later on one sees the empty chamber in which this coffin should have been placed.

In addition to these gods there were many other tribal and other deities which need not be referred to in this paper.

To administer to these hosts of heaven there had of necessity to be a vast number of priests. At Thebes the priesthood of Amon formed an organization of such power and wealth that the actions of the Pharaoh had largely come to be controlled by it. The High Priest of Amon-Ra was one of the most important personages in the land. He was usually Grand Vizier also and thus combined the highest civil appointment with the highest sacerdotal office. The priesthood of Ra at Heliopolis was also of great, though less importance. The High Priest of Ptah at Memphis was called the "Great Master Artificer," but he and the many other high priests of the various gods did not rank with the two great leaders of the Amon and Ra priesthoods.

When Thutmosis IV ascended the throne the Heliopolitan priesthood was chafing against the power of Amon and was striving to restore the fallen prestige of its own god Ra, who of late had had to play an annoying second to the Theban god. The King did not altogether approve of the political character of the Amon priesthood, but his brief reign only marks the indecisive beginnings of the struggle between Amon and Ra which culminated in the early years of the reign of his grandson Akhnaton.

Akhnaton succeeded to the throne at the age of twelve or thir-

teen under the name given him at his birth, Amenophis, and like his ancestors he was called "Beloved of Amon, Lord of Heaven." Apparently to counterbalance this one finds the surprising title:—

HIGH PRIEST OF RA-HORAKHTI, REJOICING IN THE HORIZON
IN HIS NAME "HEAT-WHICH-IS-IN-ATON."

It is obvious that a boy of twelve or thirteen could not himself have claimed the office of High Priest. His mother, Queen Tiy, and her advisors must have deliberately endowed the young King with the office in order to set the seal on the fate of Amon. In order to appreciate this attitude the condition of things at the Court must be considered. Egypt was still at the height of its power, the Kings of Syria and Palestine were tributaries to the young Pharaoh, the princes of the sea-coast cities sent their yearly impost, Sinai and the Red Sea coast as far south as Somaliland were included in the Pharaoh's dominions. The wealth of Egypt was enormous. The splendour and gaiety of the Court remind us of the tales from the Arabian Nights. The tendency was to break away from the hardier traditions of an earlier age. But while the Court amused themselves in sumptuous fashion the God Amon and his representatives towered over them like some sombre bogie, holding them to a religion which they considered obsolete, claiming also political power and a share of the royal wealth. The Queen Mother, of Syrian blood, was also no doubt influenced by Syrian thought, and Weigall tells us that the name Aton perhaps had some remote Syrian connection and was introduced into Egypt for the first time during her reign.

During the first years of the reign of Akhnaton he was entirely under the regency of his mother, and it was not till he was in his seventeenth or eighteenth year that his exalted monotheism became really apparent. While he was still a mere boy he was studying religious problems with zeal and with more than the usual amount of boyish understanding. He must have been precocious and clever, with a mind that worked swiftly, and he possessed a determined will, very definite religious convictions, and a fearless nature. He did not lightly brook opposition and he believed sincerely in the truth and honesty of his motives and actions. He seems also to have devoted a considerable amount of time and thought to the changes which were taking place, and there were no doubt many passages of arms between the High Priest of Amon-Ra and the royal High Priest of the sun. It is however clear that he lacked a practical knowledge of men and things. He never realized the true nature of the duties which, as King, he owed to his country and people, and he never understood the realities of life. The Court officials blindly followed him, and, thus encouraged, the King and his mother developed their speculations and drew into their circle of followers some of the greatest nobles of the land. The expected break with the priesthood of Amon was not long in coming, and in the sixth year of his reign the King abandoned Thebes, thus reducing it to the status of a provincial town. He changed his name from Amenophis, "The

Peace-of-Amon," to Akhnaton, "Aton-is-satisfied," and built a new city, "The City of the Horizon." Later he ordered the very name of Amon to be obliterated everywhere.

The creed of Akhnaton may be summed up thus:—

The earlier Egyptians worshipped the great Sun God Ra. Akhnaton brought Divinity into his worship. He worshipped Aton, the physical body of the Sun, whom he regarded as the source and mainstay of all created things, animate and inanimate, as the Lord and Giver of Life, the Bestower of Mercy, the Father of the Fatherless. All His attributes were symbolized in the sun. Its rising and setting signified Darkness and Light. Its power as the creative force in nature—Resurrection. It evolved mankind from the lower life and implanted the spirit of divinity in him through the creator of all things created. The sun was God created, His Symbol, His manifestation, in other words heat and light formed his God. Akhnaton taught his people to address Aton as their "Father which art in Heaven," to worship *in Truth* simply and without an excess of ceremonial. The True God had no form. No graven image was to be made of him. The most ancient symbol of the Sun God was a pyramid, and as a falcon, the figure of that bird was also used to designate him. These, however, were intelligible only in Egypt, and Akhnaton had a broader arena in view—The New Symbol of the religion was the sun's disc from the circumference of which there extended downward numerous rays each ending in a hand bestowing life on men and animals and on the earth itself. The idea of this many-armed and many-handed god was probably of Aryan origin, and after the King's death was not perpetuated in Egypt. It was a masterly symbol suggesting a power arising from its celestial source and putting its hand upon the world and the affairs of men. But this Symbol was not to be worshipped.

Never before had man conceived a formless deity, a god who was not endowed with the five human senses. The Hebrew patriarchs believed God to be capable of walking in a Garden in the cool of the evening, to have made man in His own image. Akhnaton proclaimed God to be a life-giving intangible essence; the living Aton the power which produced and sustained the energy and movement of the sun, whose flaming glory was the most practical symbol of the Godhead. But always Akhnaton strove to teach that beyond this visible or understandable expression of divinity there was a power more remote than the sun and acting through the sun. And though so remote the Aton was the tender loving Father of all men—ever present and ever mindful of his creatures. "There dropped not a sigh from the lips of a babe that the intangible Aton did not hear; no lamb bleated for its mother but the remote Aton hastened to soothe it. He was the loving Father and Mother of all that he had made, who brought up millions by his bounty." In Dmitri Merezhovsky's *Akhnaton* he gives the following as the creed of the King:

"Words of wisdom of King Akhnaton Uaenra Neferheperura—Sun's joy. Sun's beautiful essence. Sun's only Son—heard and written down by Dio, daughter of Aridoel, a Cretan, priestess of the Great Mother.

The King says :

'Aton, the face of god, the disc of the sun, is the visible image of the invisible God. To reveal to men the hidden one is everything.

My grandfather, Prince Tutmose, was hunting once in the desert of the Pyramids ; he was tired, lay down and dropped asleep at the foot of the great Sphinx which, in those days, was buried in the sands. The Sphinx appeared to him in a dream and said, " I am your father, Aton ; I will make you king if you dig me out of the sands." The prince did so, and I am doing so, too ; I dig the living God out of the dead sands—dead hearts.'

The King says :

'There are three substances in God : Zatut—Rays ; Neferu—Beauty ; Marita—Love ; the Disc of the Sun, Light and Warmth ; Father, Son, Mother.'

'The symbol of Aton, the disc of the sun with three rays like hands, stretched downwards is clear to all men—to the wise and to the children.'

'The remedy from death is not ointments for the dead, balsam, salt, resin or saltpetre, but mercy and love. Have mercy upon one another, O people, have mercy upon one another, and you shall never see death !'

The King said to the malefactor who attempted his life, Issachar the Israelite : 'Your God sacrifices all to Himself, and mine sacrifices Himself for all.'

The King says :

'The way they break granite in the quarries of Egypt is this : they make a hole in the stone, drive a wooden wedge into it, moisten it with water, and the wood, as it swells out, breaks the stone. I, too, am such a wedge.'

'The Egyptians have an image of Osiris-Set, god-devil, with two heads, on one body, as it were, twins grown together. I want to cut them in two.'

'The deadness of Egypt is the perfect equilibrium of the scales. I want to disturb it.'

'How little I have done ! I have lifted the coffin-lid over Egypt and I know, when I am gone, the lid will be shut down again. But the signal has been given to future ages !'

'When I was about eight I saw one day the soldiers piling up before the King, my father, the cut-off hands of enemies killed in battle, and I fainted with the smell of corruption. When I think of war I always recall this smell.'

'On the wall of the Charuk palace, near Thebes, where I spent my childhood, there was a mural painting of a naval battle between the Cretans and the Egyptians ; the enemies' ships were going down, the men drowning and the Egyptians were stretching out to them poles, sticks, oars, saving their enemies. I remember someone laughed looking at the painting : "One wouldn't find such fools anywhere except in Egypt!" I did not know what to answer and perhaps I do not know now, but I am glad to be living in the land of such fools !'

'The greatest of the kings of Egypt, Amenemhet, had it written on his tomb :

"In my reign men lived in peace and mercy
Arrows and swords lay idle in my reign."

"The god rejoices when he goes into battle and sees blood," is said in the inscription of King Tutmose the Third, the Conqueror, to the god Amon. Amon is the god of war, Aton the god of peace. One must choose between them. I have chosen.'

'There will be war so long as there are many peoples and many gods ; but when there is one God and one mankind, there will be peace.'

'We Egyptians despise the Jews, but maybe they know more about the Son than we do : we say about Him "He was" and they say "He is to come."'

The King said to me alone and told me not to repeat it to anyone :

'I am the joy of the Sun, Akhnaton ? No, not joy as yet, but sorrow ; not the light, but the shadow of the sun that is to rise—the Son !'

In *The Life and Times of Akhnaton*, by Arthur Weigall, late

Inspector-General of Antiquities to the Egyptian Government and whose book I have used largely in preparing this paper, we have what is known as the longer Hymn to Aton. It is too long to quote in full, but Weigall gives a parallel of this hymn to Psalm civ., and this I quote with some slight additions. This hymn was found in the tomb of Ai, a priest of Aton and the successor of Tutankhamen and the Throne of Egypt. I have departed from Weigall's version in one or two instances and have given that adopted by Sir E. A. Wallis Budge in his book *Tutankhamen*.

AKHNATON.

The earth is in darkness in the form of death. Every lion emergeth forth from his lair; all the creeping things bite. Darkness reigns.

Bright is the earth when Thou risest in the horizon. . . . The darkness is banished. . . . Their arms uplifted in adoration to Thy dawning. Then in all the world they do their work.

All cattle rest upon the herbage, all trees and plants flourish; the feathered fowl fly about their marshes. Their wings uplifted in adoration to Thee. All the sheep dance upon their feet.

The ships sail up-stream and down-stream alike. . . .

The fish in the river leap up before Thee.

And Thy rays are in the midst of the Great Sea.

How manifold are all Thy works! They are hidden from before us, O Thou Sole God, whose powers no other possesseth.

Thou didst create the earth according to Thy desire.

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.

Thou has set a Nile in Heaven
That it may fall for them
Making floods upon the mountains;
And watering their fields.
How excellent are Thy designs,
O Lord of Eternity!
The Nile in Heaven is for the strangers,
And for the cattle of every land.

PSALM CIV.

Thou makest darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.

The sun ariseth, they get them away, and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.

The trees of the Lord are full of sap . . . where the birds make their nests. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats.

Yonder is the sea great and wide wherein are . . . both small and great beasts. There go the ships . . .

O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all. The earth is full of Thy riches.

He watereth the hills from above. The earth is filled with the fruit of Thy works. He bringeth forth grass for the cattle and green herb for the service of men.

AKHNATON.

Thou makest the seasons in order to
create all Thy works ;
Winter bringeth them coolness
And the heat the summer bringeth ;
Thou hast made the distant heaven
In order to rise therein ;
In order to behold all that Thou didst
make.
Dawning, shining afar off and return-
ing.

PSALM CIV.

He appointed the moon for certain
seasons and the sun knoweth his
going-down.

In face of this remarkable similarity one can hardly doubt but that the Psalmist had this poem in mind when he wrote the civ. Psalm or, as Weigall suggests, both might have been derived from some common Syrian source. Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, however, states that when we examine the specimens of the hymns which embody the "teaching" of Akhnaton, and which are found written on the walls of the tombs at Tel-el-Amarna, we find that there is in them hardly an idea that is not derived from the older religious works of Egypt. Against this, we have the fact that Akhnaton believed himself to be the only man to whom God had revealed Himself, that he never admits that he was in any way taught to regard God as he did, that he always speaks of himself, and is spoken of, as the originator and teacher of the faith, and that he insists that the ideas expressed in the hymn were entirely his own. The Aton religion was never spoken of by any other name than "The Teaching" and the King himself is indicated as the "Teacher" of the new creed.

This royal hymn doubtless formed an excerpt or a series of fragments excerpted from the ritual of Aton as it was celebrated from day to day in the great Temple at Amarna. In this great hymn the universalism of Empire finds full expression, and the royal author sweeps his eye from the far-off cataracts of the Nile to the remotest lands of Syria. It is clear he was projecting a world religion. He bases the universal sway of God upon His Fatherly care of all men alike, irrespective of race or nationality, and he calls Aton the father and mother of all that he has made. But it should be noted that there is nothing spiritual in the fragments of the hymn which have been discovered, and no expression of any consciousness of sin. Strong emphasis is shown in praising the life-giving heat of the eternal, almighty and self-producing Aton as the source of material well-being, happiness and pleasure. They contain no petition for spiritual wisdom and no allusions to the hereafter.

In the thirteenth year of the reign the City of the Horizon was now a place of surpassing beauty. A great temple had been built to Aton, contrasting strikingly with the buildings in which Amon had been worshipped. There vast halls were lit by minute windows and a dim uncertainty hovered round the worshipper. Such temples lent themselves to mystery. But in Akhnaton's temple each court was open to the full blaze of the sun. There was, there could be,

no mystery. Akhnaton had no interest in incantations and mysteries. Boldly he looked to God as a child to its father, and having solved what he regarded as the riddle of life there was to him room for nothing but an open, fearless adoration of the Creator of all things. He was the sworn enemy of the table-turners of his day, and the tricks of priestcraft and stage effects were anathema to his mind.

The art of the age was unavoidably affected by this extraordinary revolution of thought, and the King's interest in the new Art is evident. Bek, his chief sculptor, appended to his title the words "Whom his majesty himself taught." The artists of the Court were taught to make the chisel and the brush tell the story of what they actually saw. The result was a simple and beautiful realism. They caught the instantaneous postures of animal-life, the coursing hound, the fleeing game. I was specially struck myself with the life-like hunting scenes and the wonderful colouring which can be seen in some of the tombs and in the Museum at Cairo, and this revolution in art has been most unexpectedly revealed to us in all its wondrous beauty and freedom in the tomb of Tutankhamen. Some of the finest pieces found among the sumptuous furniture of Akhnaton's son-in-law were made at Amarna and carried back thence by Tutankhamen to Thebes on his return there.

About this time Akhnaton seems to have experienced his first real sorrow in the death of his second daughter in her ninth year, and he was beginning to find that his doctrines were not being accepted in Egypt as he had hoped. There was hardly a man he could trust to continue in the faith should he himself die. The Empire he had dreamed of, bound together in the common worship of Aton, was fast fading out of sight. Quarrels arose in the outlying parts of the Empire. The hold of Egypt on Western Asia was weakening rapidly, and when the kings who were allies of the King of Egypt and his vassal governors in Syria and Palestine learned that Akhnaton had "turned priest" they made haste to take advantage of the situation. He had the power to let loose upon Asia an army which would have silenced all insult, but he either did not find such a step consistent with his principles or he was too weak or too indolent. Pathetic letters were sent to him for aid and were disregarded, though he must have known the inevitable result.

Akhnaton was succeeded by his son-in-law, Sakara, who had married the Princess Meritaten. His reign was short and unimportant, but he seems to have been a loyal supporter of his father-in-law. He was succeeded by Tutankhamen, who married Aukhsenpaaten, the third daughter of Akhnaton, and who was a follower of Aton, and when he ascended the throne he was called Tutankhaten, i.e. "living image of Aton." At first he tried to perpetuate the cult of Aton, but finding he could not resist the power of the priesthood of Amon-Ra he removed his court to Thebes and substituted the name of Amon for that of Aton in his own name and that of his wife. In the fourth or sixth year of his reign he restored the worship of Amon and order again prevailed in Egypt. When

or how he died is not known. He was succeeded by Ai who apparently was associated with Tutankhamen as co-regent, for the names of both were found stamped on bands of leather in a tomb in western Thebes. He was originally a follower of Aton and even tried, after he became king, to continue the building of a temple to Aton at Thebes. It is possible that this caused his downfall, for he only reigned from three to five years. He was succeeded by Heremheb, a military commander who seems to have been a kinsman of Amenhotep III, and who was nominated to the throne by the priests of Amon.

We are indebted to the famous tables of Tel-el-Amarna for an accurate account of the last days of Akhnaton and the conditions in the East, found a few years ago by a native woman at Tel-el-Amarna, which is built on the site of the City of the Horizon. They are made of wet clay and stamped in cuneiform or the Babylonian writing. Some are in the Museum of Cairo, some in the Museums of England, France, and Germany, but as a result of rough handling in transit a number were reduced to powder.

Also in the Museum of Cairo is the door of a little private chapel from a house at El Amarna. On both sides is seen Akhnaton followed by the Queen and one of their daughters making offerings and libations to the solar discs. In front is a very fine head, in hard sandstone, of a princess, showing the extreme exaggeration of the back of the head, which is peculiar to Akhnaton's reign. Colossal statues of the King are also in the galleries of the Museum. These originally formed part of a series of such statues, which leaned against the pillars round the peristyle Court in the Temple to Aton in the City of the Horizon. A peculiar characteristic of these statues shows the King wearing the royal helmet which encased the back of his head to conceal the disease from which he suffered (Hydrocephalus). So anxious was he to conceal this affliction that he had his wife and daughters represented with their skulls deformed in the same way as though it were a mark of beauty.

Another interesting exhibit is the lid of the coffin originally made for Queen Tiy, which was afterwards modified to serve for her son. It strongly resembles the larger coffin of Tutankhamen, made of wood with a thin coating of gold, ornamented with red and light and dark blue glass. The gold mask and the King's name have all been torn off, doubtless as an act of vengeance by the priests of Amon.

Why did Akhnaton's attempt fail? For two reasons:—

1. It lacked the spirit of compromise with the Established Religion. That the Sun God should be worshipped under a new name and a new form was in itself nothing, but that Amon should be suppressed, his temples remain idle, and his name erased was another matter. The hymns to Aton suggest that Akhnaton and his followers conceived an image of him in their minds and worshipped him inwardly. But the abstract conception of thinking was wholly inconceivable to the average Egyptian, who only understood things in a concrete form. It was probably some conception

of this kind that made the cult of Aton so unpopular among the Egyptians and caused its downfall.

2. The new religion was of a purely contemplative character, absorbing its votaries to the exclusion of all other employments, whether political or diplomatic. While Akhnaton and his Court were singing hymns to the Sun an Empire was being lost to Egypt in Asia, and we have but to read the decrees of Heremheb, the first King of the restored religion, to realize the extent to which Egypt had become disorganized. These decrees consist of a remarkable series of highly specialized laws directed against the practice of extortion from the poor by fiscal and other officials, and very severe penalties were imposed on such cases being proved.

The foregoing short description of the life, religion and times of the "Heretic King" is submitted in the hope that it may interest those to whom he is but a name, and may lead them to the study of one of the most absorbing periods of Egyptian history, particularly at the present time, when the world is so largely interested in the wonderful discoveries in ancient art and sculpture found in the tomb of Tutankhamen. Many of the problems of our own time seem to be but a replica of the troubles experienced in that remote age. I am largely indebted to the writings of Sir E. A. Wallis Budge and Mr. Arthur Weigall, and to the writers in Vols. I and II of the Cambridge Ancient History in compiling this paper. I commend these books to those of my readers who wish to study this most engrossing subject for themselves.

STORIES FOR THE LITTLE PEOPLE. By Deaconess B. Oakley, Principal of the Church Sisters' Training Centre, and Deaconess Ethel Luke, Tutor. (*Home Words Publishing Co., 2s. 6d. net.*)

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