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Little Journeys in the Higher Anticriticism.

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I. The Myth Hypothesis.

(Continued.)

“Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte.”

Whately's *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte* was directed primarily against the skepticism of David Hume, but a few extracts from its pages will readily show how apt a reply it is to the mythological theory in every form. Archbishop Whately imitates the subject of his criticism to such an extent that one may read many passages and whole pages without being able to detect the slightest trace of the writer's irony. He speaks with a sober face throughout:—

“The *celebrated Hume* has pointed out the readiness with which men believe, on very slight evidence, any story that pleases their imagination by its admirable and marvelous character. Such hasty credulity, however, *as he well remarks*, is utterly unworthy of a philosophical mind; which should rather suspend its judgment the more in proportion to the strangeness of the account, and yield to none but the most decisive and unimpeachable proofs.” It is reasonable, he concludes, to inquire into the evidence on which people in his day believed the extraordinary story of the exploits of one Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France. He notes, first of all, a great dissonance in the testimony:—

“According to some, he was a wise, humane, magnanimous hero; others paint him as a monster of cruelty, meanness, and perfidy: some, even of those who are most inveterate against him, speak very highly of his political and military ability; others place him on the very verge of insanity. But allowing that all this may be the coloring of party prejudice (which surely is allowing a great

deal), there is one point to which such a solution will hardly apply, — if there be anything that can be clearly ascertained in history, one would think it must be the personal courage of a military man; yet here we are as much at a loss as ever; at the very same times, and on the same occasions, he is described by different writers as a man of undaunted intrepidity, and as an absolute poltroon.

“But what shall we say,” Whately continues, “to the testimony of those many respectable persons who went to Plymouth, on purpose, and saw Bonaparte with their own eyes — must they not trust their senses? I would not disparage either the eyesight or the veracity of these gentlemen. I am ready to allow that they went to Plymouth for the purpose of seeing Bonaparte; nay, more, that they actually rowed out into the harbor in a boat, and came alongside of a man-of-war, on whose deck they saw a man in a cocked hat, who, they were told, was Bonaparte. This is the utmost point to which their testimony goes; how they ascertained that this man in the cocked hat had gone through all the marvelous and romantic adventures with which we have so long been amused, we are not told. Did they perceive in his physiognomy his true name and authentic history? Truly, this evidence is such as country people give one for a story of apparitions. If you discover any signs of incredulity, they triumphantly show the very house which the ghost haunted, the identical dark corner where it used to vanish, and perhaps even the tombstone of the person whose death it foretold.”

Having dwelt on the contradictions in which the fabricators of the Napoleon-myth have involved themselves, the Archbishop proceeds to analyze the story in detail and to show that, on the very face of it, it carries an air of fiction and romance: —

“All the events are great, and splendid, and marvelous; great armies, — great victories, — great frosts, — great reverses, — ‘hair-breadth ’scapes,’ — empires subverted in a few days; everything happened in defiance of political calculations and in opposition to the experience of past times; everything upon that grand scale so common in epic poetry, so rare in real life; and thus calculated to strike the imagination of the vulgar, and to remind the sober-thinking few of the *Arabian Nights*. Every event, too, has that roundness and completeness which is so characteristic of fiction; nothing is done by halves; we have complete victories, — total overthrows, — entire subversions of empires, — perfect reestablishments of them, — crowded upon us in rapid succession. To enumerate the improbabilities of each of the several parts of this

history would fill volumes; but they are so fresh in every one's memory that there is no need of such a detail."

"Let us assume," he continues, "that in the antique records of any nation we found such a passage as this:—

"In those days the Pope returned unto his own land. Now the French and divers other nations of Europe are servants of the Pope, and hold him in reverence; but he is an abomination unto the Britons, and to the Prussians, and to the Russians, and to the Swedes. Howbeit, the French had taken away all his lands, and robbed him of all that he had, and carried him away captive into France. But when the Britons, and the Prussians, and the Russians, and the Swedes, and the rest of the nations that were confederate against France came thither, they caused the French to set the Pope at liberty, and to restore all his goods that they had taken; likewise they gave him back all his possessions; and he went home in peace, and ruled over his own city as in times past.

"And it came to pass, when Napoleon had not yet been a full year at Elba, that he said unto his men of war that clave unto him, Go to, let us go back to France, and fight against King Lewis, and thrust him out from being king. So he departed, he and six hundred men with him that drew the sword, and warred against King Lewis. Then all the men of Belial gathered themselves together and said, God save Napoleon! And when Lewis saw that, he fled, and gat him into the land of Batavia; and Napoleon ruled over France,' etc., etc., etc.

"Now if a free-thinking philosopher — one of those who advocate the cause of unbiased reason, and despise pretended revelations — were to meet with such fissues of absurdities as this in an old Jewish record, would he not reject it at once as too palpable an imposture to deserve even any inquiry into its evidence?"

Historic Doubts was published in 1819. In 1821 the world was apprised of the exiled emperor's death. Whately at once issued a new edition of his *Doubts*. Why, of course, he says, — now they declare him dead! "Supposing the whole of the tale I have been considering to have been a fabrication, what would be the natural result of such an attempt to excite inquiry into its truth? Evidently the shortest and most effectual mode of eluding detection would be to kill the phantom and to get rid of him at once!" The argument is continued in the seventh edition, issued in 1840, when Napoleon's remains were transferred from St. Helena to Paris for burial!

“Grand Erratum. The Non-Existence of Napoleon Proved.”

This is the title of the famous satire which appeared in France, in 1827. It was directed against one M. Dupuis, a scholar of great erudition, who believed that all religions, and the story of Jesus of Nazareth as well, could be explained as solar myths. Its author was Jean Baptiste Peres, professor of mathematics at Agen, a small town of Southern France. His fame rests entirely upon the little brochure which so successfully pillories the mythological method.

We reprint the salient portions:—

“Napoleon Bonaparte, of whom so much has been said and written, never even existed. He is nothing more than an allegorical personage. He is the personification of the sun; and we can prove our assertion by showing how everything related of Napoleon the Great has been borrowed from the great luminary.

“1. In the first place, every one knows that the sun is called Apollo by the poets. It is unquestionable that the word Apollo means *Exterminator*; and it seems that this name was given by the Greeks to the sun on account of the injury it did them before Troy, where a part of their army perished from the excessive heat and from the pestilence. Now, Apollo is the same word as Apoleon. They are derived from Apollyo, or Apoleo, two Greek verbs which are really the same, and which mean ‘destroy,’ ‘kill,’ ‘exterminate.’ But this personage is called Napoleon, and thus his name contains an initial letter which we do not find in the name of the sun. Yes, there is an extra letter, an extra syllable even; for, according to the inscriptions cut in every part of the capital (Paris), the real name of this supposed hero was *Neapoleon*, or *Neapolion*. This is more particularly to be seen on the column of the Place Vendome.* Now, this extra syllable makes no difference whatever. The syllable, no doubt, like the rest of the name, is Greek; and in Greek *ne*, or *nai*, is one of the strongest affirmations, equivalent to our *veritably*, or *yea*. Whence it follows that Napoleon means Veritable Exterminator, — Veritable Apollo; it means, in truth, the sun.

“But what is to be said of his other name? What connection can there be between the word *Bonaparte* and the star of the day? At first it is not at all evident, but this at least can be understood: that as *bona parte* means ‘good part,’ it has, no doubt, to do with something consisting of two parts, a good and a bad, with some-

* The reference is to the error of a French sculptor, Napoleon’s name being misspelled Neapoleon.

thing which, in addition, is connected with the sun, Napoleon. Now, nothing is more directly connected with the sun than the results of his diurnal revolution, and these results are day and night, light and darkness. No doubt, *bona parte* meant light, — day as opposed to night. There can then be no doubt that this name is connected with the sun, especially when it is seen to be associated with Napoleon, who is himself the sun, as has been already demonstrated.

“2. According to Greek mythology, Apollo was born in an island in the Mediterranean (the Isle of Delos); an island in the Mediterranean has, therefore, been fabled as the birthplace of Napoleon.

“3. His mother is said to have been named Letitia. But by the word Letitia (or ‘joy’) was meant the dawn, whose first tender light fills all nature with joy. Again it is worthy of remark that, according to Greek mythology, the mother of Apollo was called *Leto*. But if the Romans made Latona of Leto, it has been preferred in our century to change it into Letitia, because *laetitia* is the noun derived from *laetor* (obsolete form, *laeto*), which means ‘to inspire joy.’ Assuredly, then, this *Letitia*, no less than her son, belongs to Greek mythology.

“4. According to tradition, this son of Letitia had three sisters, and there can be no doubt that these three sisters are the three Graces, who, with their companions, the Muses, were the ornaments of their brother Apollo’s court.

“5. This modern Apollo is said to have had four brothers. Now, as we shall show, these four brothers are the four seasons of the year.

“Of Napoleon’s four brothers, three, they tell us, were kings; these three kings are Spring, who reigns over the flowers; Summer, who reigns over the harvest; and Autumn, who reigns over the fruit. As these three seasons derive all their potent influence from the sun, we are told that Napoleon’s three brothers held their sovereignty at his hands, and reigned only by his authority. And when it is added that of Napoleon’s four brothers one was not a king, it is because one of the four seasons — Winter, reigns over nothing. Indeed, he governed a small principality which has been described as in connection with the village of *Canino*, in preference to any other, because *Canino* comes from *cani*, which denotes the white hairs of chill old age, and they recall winter.

“6. According to these same fables, Napoleon had two wives; hence two wives have been attributed to the sun. These two wives

are the moon and the earth: the moon according to the Greeks (Plutarch is our authority), and the earth according to the Egyptians; with this noteworthy difference, that by the moon the sun had no issue and by the earth he had a son, *an only son*. This child was the little Horus. . . . Horus, born from the earth impregnated by the sun, represents the fruits of agriculture. Even so the birth of the supposed son of Napoleon has been fixed at the 20th of March, the period of the vernal equinox, because in the spring agricultural produce undergoes its most important phase of development.

"7. The Python, an enormous serpent, was the cause of great terror in Greece; Apollo slew the monster, and dissipated the fear of the people; this was his first exploit. Hence we are told that Napoleon began his reign by crushing the French Revolution, which is itself as much a chimera as everything else. For *revolution* is obviously derived from the Latin word *revolutus*, which denotes a curled-up serpent. The Revolution is the Python, neither more nor less.

"8. The celebrated warrior of the nineteenth century had under him, we are told, twelve marshals at the head of his armies, . . . obviously the twelve signs of the zodiac, marching under the order of the sun Napoleon, each of them commanding a division of the innumerable army of the stars, which is called the *celestial host* in the Bible.

"9. We are told that this leader of so many brilliant armies overran in triumph the countries of the south, but that, having penetrated too far north, he was there unable to maintain himself. Now, these details precisely apply to the sun's course. The sun, it is well known, rules supreme in the south, as is said of the Emperor Napoleon. But it is most worthy of note that, after the vernal equinox, the sun makes for the northern regions, and moves farther away from the Equator. . . . This, then, is the material from which has been drawn Napoleon's imaginary northern expedition to Moscow, together with the humiliating retreat by which it is said to have been followed. Thus everything we have been told of the success or defeat of this strange warrior is nothing more than a series of allusions to the course of the sun.

"10. Finally, and this needs no explanation, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, as all the world knows. . . . We are told that Napoleon came by sea from the east (Egypt) to reign over France, and that he disappeared in the western seas after a

reign of twelve years. The twelve years are nothing more than the twelve hours of the day during which the sun shines on the horizon.

“It has, then, been proved that the supposed hero of our century is nothing more than an allegorical personage, deriving his attributes from the sun. It follows that Napoleon Bonaparte, of whom so much has been said and written, never even existed; and this fallacy, into which so many people have fallen headlong, arises from the amusing blunder of mistaking the mythology of the nineteenth century for history.”

An ingenious satire, the reader will admit, and happy especially in its caricaturing of the scientific *smartness* which characterized then, as now, the use of etymology in the bolstering up of the myth hypothesis.

The Goethe and Bismarck Myths.

“Forty years ago,” wrote F. Bettex in 1898 (*Naturstudium und Christentum*), “criticism still maintained that there had never been a Homer nor a Troy, and as late as 1872 the name Homeros was explained as a Grecisized plural of the Keltic ‘Omar,’ meaning ‘collection,’ hence ‘homeros’ = ‘the collections.’ Then came Schliemann, said little, commenced digging, and found Troy and Mycenae!

“How will critical research,” continues Bettex, “one day play havoc with our century! We may well imagine a learned lecturer returning to his people from a trip to the ruins of London and Berlin in the year 3,000, and proving incontestably that such a man as Goethe never existed.

“‘This so-called national poet,’ we hear him exclaim, ‘does not mention with as much as one syllable the compatriots who died for his country; has not one word of admiration for the uprising of his people against the foreign tyrant; does not even mention Napoleon,’ — here Bettex is at fault; Goethe has one reference to Napoleon in a little known travelog, — “‘though he was said to be a contemporary of Napoleon and Secretary of State to a prince involved in war with Napoleon! Furthermore, the literary works which go under the collective name of *Goethe’s Werke* according to one variant reading are the *Works of the Goths*, and indeed reveal such a diversity of contents and style that this “Goth” must be understood to represent the genius of that great intellectual tribe, the Germans. There is strong internal evidence for this position in a fragment ascribed to this mythical author. In the *Erliking* primi-

tive man is seen roaming about at night in constant dread of the sinister and destructive forces of nature, here personified; intent only on the satisfaction of material wants and on the propagation of his species, represented by the "child." We have here only father and child, the family in its simplest terms; the state does not exist, and the lack of any reference to the mother indicates the subordinate station of woman in that age. The only domestic animal mentioned is the horse. The concluding phrase, "The child was dead," plainly refutes the notion that the immortality of the soul is an idea innate in man. Countless millenniums had to elapse before the metaphysical idea of a "soul" was acquired. Undoubtedly the unknown author of this poem, the "Goth," was a caveman, feeding on acorns and horse-flesh, in constant dread of the elemental forces of nature.

"A later epoch gave rise to the allegorical poem of "Herman," or "German," and "Dorothea," according to a more correct reading, "Dothea," or "Gothea," — representing the peaceful union, after ages of warfare of the "Germans" and "Goths."

"A bipartite work of the same author has come down to us, the so-called "Faust." In the first part, superstitious beliefs in a personal devil, in magic and sorcery, abound. From all that modern research has revealed concerning a so-called Dark Age, critical science has established the year 913 as the approximate date for this poem. The second part testifies to a great progress in intelligence and enlightenment, its language being much more scientific and hence more difficult to understand, and some of the persons referred to, for instance, the emperor and his courtiers, may be historical. Whether the lapse of one century was sufficient to account for this progress, or whether several centuries elapsed between Part I and Part II, is a question which scholarship has not yet been able to answer.

"And so, gentlemen,' we hear the honorable professor conclude his remarks, 'the torch of critical research has succeeded also in clearing up the obscurities which in the course of ages have attached themselves to this mythical "Goth," and enables us to recognize in "Goethe" a personification of the poetic genius of this powerful nation. perished long ago.' (Prolonged applause!)"

Bettex continues: —

"Another ambitious youth will qualify for a degree by proving that the gigantic figure of Bismarck, with his broad-brimmed hat and his great dog (a symbolism transferred to him from an earlier divinity, 'Odin' or 'Wotan'), is nothing but the cruel northern

winter. He defeats Napollo or Apollo, the sun-god, whose twelve marshals undoubtedly signify the twelve months of the year, and whom Bismarck finally takes captive." The contradictions which are inherent in this myth are pointed out: "The same person is described, variously, as an unknown northern junker and as a world-ruler, as universally hated and as the ideal of his time; as a friend and guest of Apollo and again as his most bitter enemy (according to the varying aspect of the seasons); as friend and adviser and, again, as implacable enemy of a ruler called 'Wilhelm,' who is sometimes described as a white-bearded old man (Winter) and again as a fiery youth (Spring). All manner of Germanic attributes are found in the later forms of this myth. Bismarck is, in popular fancy, endowed with great hunger and still greater thirst, with a gigantic lead-pencil, a long pipe, a beer-stein; and all this while the characteristics of Odin, the broad-brimmed hat, and the dog continue to occur in the references to this figure!

"On the strength of this very satisfactory exposition, the product of serious historical research, our young man will no doubt be promoted to the doctorate — let us hope, *Summa cum laude!*"

(To be continued.)
