



ARTHUR BERNARD COOK

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1868-1952

ARTHUR BERNARD COOK was born on 22 October 1868, and died on 26 April 1952 at the age of 83. He was one of the most learned and brilliant classical scholars of his generation, and although his fame rested principally on his vast knowledge of the religions of the classical and barbarian worlds, few people realized that his acquaintance with the whole of ancient literature was far greater than that to which most scholars of the present day can lay claim. Perhaps the greatest value of his work lies in the fact that his studies appear to form a bridge between the earlier productions of his great friend Sir James Frazer on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the work of younger students of ancient religion such as Nilsson, Rose, Nock, and Guthrie. Moreover, there was one field of studies to which he turned his attention with even more zeal than did some of his younger contemporaries—the field of numismatics. Though he ceased writing in 1940 he had already taken full cognizance of the then current work of Imhoof-Blumer, Hill, Newell, Seltman, Robinson, and the two Babelons for its illumination of Greek religious thought, and had himself built up a very respectable collection of Greek and Roman coins. In so far as he followed the present numismatic studies of Mattingly, Sutherland, and Grant, he derived continuous pleasure from the knowledge that a once-neglected *scientia* had at last come into its own. Every modern user of Cook's *magnum opus* is impressed by the wisdom of his approach to the ancient world, since he never forgot that any primary source—like a coin, inscription or vase—is of greater evidential value than any secondary or tertiary transcribed and transmitted source.

Arthur Cook was born in Hampstead where his father, William Henry Cook, M.D., had an extensive practice. His mother, Harriet, sister of a Bishop of Exeter, was of the Bickersteth family which produced several eminent ecclesiastics and hymn-writers of the evangelical persuasion. The family, of which he was the eldest surviving son, was closely knit in affection and in community of interests, and his brothers shared with him a curiosity and desire for knowledge about remoter humanity. It was this that steered Arthur towards an ever-growing interest in the ancient world, while his younger brother, Albert, turned to medicine, later to make his way as a medical

missionary to Uganda, where he founded what became in its day the best hospital in the whole of East Africa.

In the 1880's the brothers attended as foundation scholars St. Paul's School, where their unusual gifts were already apparent. Arthur came up to Trinity College, Cambridge with a Major Scholarship in 1887; Albert, likewise with a Major Scholarship, entered the same college in 1889. At that point in time their interests began to diverge, the younger brother concentrating on science which led him, by way of St. Bartholomew's Hospital and medical degrees to a distinguished career in Uganda, and to a well-deserved knighthood in 1932, one year after his elder brother became the first Laurence Professor of Classical Archaeology in Cambridge. But we anticipate.

From 1887 onwards sheer hard work, an infinite capacity for taking pains, and an unquenched thirst for knowledge drove Arthur Cook forward. The year 1889 saw him placed in the first class of the Classical Tripos Part I, saw him as the winner of the Craven University Studentship, and also as the successful candidate for the Chancellor's Gold Medal for English Verse. Two years later he became the Chancellor's Senior Medallist for Classical Learning, and obtained a first class in Part II of the Classical Tripos, while in the following year (1892) he obtained the much-coveted Members' Latin Prize. Even in those palmy days young men of such gifts were very rare, and Arthur Cook naturally obtained in 1893 a Fellowship which was of six years' duration at Trinity, where he turned his attention to ancient philosophy. When he was elected to his Trinity Fellowship he was also, and independently, appointed Professor of Greek in Bedford College, London, at an age which one can only call 'the tender age' of 24. In the 1890's he must surely have been the youngest 'professor' in England, if not in Europe. This post did not in any way interfere with his residence in Cambridge and his philosophic research, since it was easy in those days, when the Great Eastern provided a better service than do British Railways today, to teach in London and to study and write in Cambridge. Under such circumstances as these matrimony became possible, and in 1894 Arthur Cook married Emily, daughter of George Thomas Maddox of Hampstead. The first child—a boy—died in infancy, an event which was a source of great grief to both parents. Later a daughter was born and survives as his heir. The results of his philosophic research and reflections appeared in 1895, which saw the publication of his book entitled *The Metaphysical Basis of Plato's Ethics*.

Had Cook's studies continued along these lines, there would have been no occasion to compose this obituary record, for he would undoubtedly have faded into the academic backcloth as yet another 'forgotten don'. It was the movement in his life, the simple weekly train-journeys to London, the constant visits to the British Museum, to be followed later by Mediterranean travels, which changed the man. The scientist in him had always been moved by contact with 'Realien'; and so visits to the famous sites and cities of the ancient world in Italy, Sicily, Greece, and Asia Minor combined with the slow judicious acquisition of a few 'actualities'—coins, lamps, terra-cottas, pots which the men, women and children of antiquity had themselves handled—began to change Cook from a philosophic speculator to a full-blooded humanist. Gradually he perceived that his supreme interest was concentrating on the religion and beliefs of the classical and pre-classical world, to which a most valued contribution could be made by accurate study of the everyday things handled by rich and poor and slave so long ago.

When Cook's Trinity Fellowship ran out at the end of the century, it was Queens' College which had the great good fortune to secure him as a Fellow and to appoint him to a Classical Lectureship in the College. Soon after this the main trend of his interests began to appear in a series of brilliant articles contributed to *The Classical Review* on 'Zeus, Jupiter, and the Oak', and to *Folk-Lore* on the subject of 'The European Sky-God'. The first essay was printed in the issue of September 1904 and was followed by a continuation in September 1905, March, June, September and December 1906, and in March 1907. The articles were, of course, in a sense prolegomena to the great work which was to emerge, and they already showed his characteristic accuracy and love of detailed checks and counter-checks. There was one field of literature which Cook would not touch; and that was the writing of reviews. His passion for expressing what he held to be the truth combined with an unwillingness to hurt the feelings of others decided him to abjure all reviewing of books. When questioned he would quote, 'judge not that ye be not judged'; but this did not save him, when his life-work began to emerge, from being 'judged' sometimes rashly, sometimes a little maliciously, by younger men who, though scholars, ranked well below Cook's own intellectual calibre.

It was in 1907 that he resigned the chair at Bedford College in order to become in the following year Reader in Classical Archaeology in the University of Cambridge. The appointment

carried with it the Curatorship of the Museum of Classical Archaeology in Little St. Mary's Lane. In those days it existed for the display of casts and reproductions—not of any originals. Cook, who actually ran the Museum for a quarter of a century, changed it from a conventional assembly of plaster 'antiques'—such as might have disgraced any large backward borough—into a modern scientifically planned School for the study of Greek plastic art by means of plaster casts. At the same time he gradually transformed the library housed in the same building into a Departmental Library of value to the University. An observation made by many of his pupils who worked in the Museum before 1914, and again from 1918 until 1934, should be recorded, for they knew the remarkable devotion and affection which Cook received from the members of the Museum staff who still look back nostalgically to the later years of his Curatorship. Indeed, his was a character which elicited feelings of true affection not only from college and university servants but from devoted pupils and admiring colleagues. Among the undergraduate members of Queens' College as well as among those of the womens' colleges, whom he regularly supervised, 'A.B.C.' was certainly one of the most loved and respected dons of his generation.

Meanwhile his intensive and diligent studies began to fulfil the expected promise when the first volume of his life-work was published. This occurred in the autumn of 1914 after the start of the First World War. Except for the authorship of a number of articles in learned journals, all of them leading up to the *magnum opus*, Arthur Cook was a 'one-work' author; and it seems fitting to hold back an evaluation of *Zeus: a Study in Ancient Religion* to the end of this record, and to continue with an account of his tranquil life in Cambridge, where after 1918, teaching, administration, writing, Sunday-school activities, and hospitality in College and home formed a kind of polychrome background to the zealous passion of a keen collector of books and of classical antiquities. But since he had no knack of arranging his collections attractively in their show-cases in his College rooms, the 'gems' among his possessions often escaped the notice of visiting archaeologists and students. While he had a true flair for objects of classical antiquity and always acquired the right things, he had none for eastern *objets d'art* in which he sometimes dabbled to his own undoing. But this was only on a small scale. By contrast his admirable collection of Greek and Roman coins, which he kept in his home in Cramner Road, was a model of selection and of accurate classification.

During the post-war 'twenties' another project of his matured when in 1928 he became General Editor of a series of Handbooks of Archaeology, the publishers of which were Messrs. Methuen & Co., the majority of authors writing for this series being former pupils of Arthur Cook. It was before the twenties that he had also embarked on an undertaking which never achieved publication. The late Peter Giles, Master of Emmanuel, who died in 1935, asked Cook to collaborate in an edition of Theocritus. The work of collating manuscripts and the production of a new critical text was undertaken by Giles, while Cook supplied the historical and archaeological commentary. This material, which was very considerable in bulk, passed at Cook's death into the possession of Messrs. Galloway and Porter, who have generously presented it—together with his manuscript lecture notebooks—to the University Library; and the Librarian has agreed to keep all the Theocritean material together in order that it may be available to scholars.

Arthur Cook's principal distinctions came to him towards the end of his active academic life. In 1926 he proceeded to the degree of Doctor of Letters, and in 1931 he became the first occupant of the Maitland Laurence Chair of Classical Archaeology. The brilliant inaugural lecture which he gave on that occasion was a model for all of its kind, and was enhanced by the fact that Cook remained to the end of his lecturing days a lucid and inspiring speaker from the platform. In 1941, after the publication of the third and final volume of *Zeus*, Cook was elected a Fellow of the British Academy and, at about the same time, an Honorary Member of the American Philosophical Society. Meanwhile he had retired from the Chair of Classical Archaeology in 1934 on reaching the age of 65, but he continued active in teaching classical students of Queens' College and archaeological pupils from other colleges, and his interest in the affairs of the Foundation, of which he had become Vice-President in 1935, remained strong to the end. His last official appearance in public was in 1948, on the occasion of the visit of Her Majesty the Queen, Patroness of the College, when the quincentenary celebrations took place.

The death of his wife in 1943 after a short illness was a severe blow, depriving him of his closest companion, but there was consolation in the fact that their only daughter, though much taken up with her own duties, continued to run her school on the ground-floor of her father's house and to be at hand. He was still able to dine frequently at the High Table and to add

enlightenment to conversation over the port and coffee; and the Society always looked forward with pleasure to those evenings when Arthur Cook was dining. Sometimes his talk would lead round to his favourite poet, Robert Browning, whom he delighted to quote appositely and accurately. Like others of his generation he was somewhat addicted to the often unpopular pun. But when one slipped out almost—it seemed—against his will, he would hastily add ‘may I be forgiven!’. Two may perhaps be recorded. A student of ancient religion and former pupil of his, having been elected to a Fellowship at Newnham College, was fêted at a dinner given by her Tutor, and Cook was invited as the principal guest. The lady’s name was Jacqueline; and Cook wrote to regret deeply that he could not take part in the ἰσχυρὴ Ἀθήναια. On another occasion when someone turned to him to ask half-flippantly, ‘What is the masculine of prima donna?’, the retort was instant, ‘Oh, prim don, of course’.

Much of the last six years of his life was spent in the necessary and gradual dispersal of his archaeological collections and books, these things being the only form of ‘savings’ he had made against the needs of old age. The war-ravaged Liverpool Museum and University Museums in Sydney and Dunedin, as well as in several American cities, benefited from these transactions. In that period a little band of colleagues and friends were constantly visiting and they were well aware of his slow failure of physical strength, accompanied by pain and discomfort. But his spirit seemed unimpaired, and up to the last month his encyclopaedic mind would function if his interest was stirred, and he would raise the pertinent question, ‘Have you looked up this?’—or ‘Have you consulted that?’ His religion was profound, and it was in essence of the old-fashioned evangelical type, though he was too fine a scholar ever to have been a fundamentalist in his views of scripture. There can be no doubt that towards the close of his life he modified further some of his theological views, and to his most constant visitor it was apparent that, after long years of devoted study, ‘Zeus’ was slowly moving him to a simple deistic attitude of mind.

‘Last words’ are suspect; but Cook’s can be vouched for on the best authority. They are the last—apart from a personal familiar request—to be spoken to a colleague. And they are worth the record because any scholar or scientist would be proud thus to have ended on a note of critical integrity.

The Dean of Queens’ College was visiting on the evening of 25 April 1952 when the last state of coma appeared already to

approach. Opening his Bible at the 121st psalm, the Dean began to read: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.' 'That', said Arthur Bernard Cook, 'is a mis-translation.'

ZEUS

An appraisal must now be made of Cook's monumental work, and of his scholarly industry, untiring despite handicaps of collegiate tutoring and domestic chores such as have made life uneasy for many a twentieth-century scholar. He worked for approximately ten years at each volume, starting on the framework of the whole and on the design of volume i in about 1904, at the time when some of his prolegomena were appearing in *Folk-Lore*. *Zeus: a Study in Ancient Religion*, vol. i, was published by the Cambridge University Press in 1914; *Zeus: a Study in Ancient Religion*, vol. ii, which was bound in two parts, in 1925, and finally *Zeus: a Study in Ancient Religion*, vol. iii, again bound in two parts, in 1940. For a lesser scholar, or for any superficial writer, it could have spelt disaster that two-thirds of his work should have emerged during those very periods when the fate of the country, together with its learning, integrity, and way of life were threatened with destruction by another kind of culture based on a different set of values. Yet, in fact, for as long as religion and classics exist as any part of the studies pursued by civilized Western man, Cook's work, by reason of its form, structure, and presentation, will continue to be an indispensable source of knowledge.

When the first volume appeared in 1914 it did not receive as favourable a Press as it deserved for a reason which today may seem a little strange. In the introduction there was a phrase which Cook's friends recognized as no more than a symbolic 'doffing of the hat' to his old-fashioned evangelical background. This was resented by certain rationalists in Cambridge. The phrase was taken to signify that in Cook's view all ancient religion was a sort of *praeparatio evangelica* which 'in thousands of wistful hearts throughout the Hellenic world . . . awakened longings which could only be satisfied by the coming of the very Christ'. Historians knew then—as they do now—that Hellenic hearts were not wistful and that the 'new proletarian faith' raised at first more apprehension than regard. Rationalist critics, indignant at Cook's little gesture, raised the innuendo of hypocrisy, and proceeded to decry his whole *opus*. This was odd because *Zeus* as a work of scholarship owed much to Frazer's

Golden Bough, although in matters confessional Frazer and Cook were far apart. To the author of the *Golden Bough* religion was mainly a delusion and a darkness, something meant to control mankind by the mechanisms of fear; but to Cook it was a leading up to revelation.

Be that as it may, anything like evangelical partisanship is completely lacking in a work which does deserve careful consideration and admiration because of its masterly structure. Volume i (1914) has as its sub-title 'Zeus, God of the Bright Sky'. Volume ii (1925) bears the sub-title 'Zeus, God of the Dark Sky (Thunder and Lightning)', while volume iii (1940) announces 'Zeus, God of the Dark Sky (Earthquakes, Clouds, Winds, Dew, Rain, Meteorites)'. When, at last, the third appeared, more than one student was moved to turn statistician and to estimate that the *opus* contains over 3,000 pages, and nearly 2,500 illustrations, while the text, supported by its precious burden of footnotes, runs to something near half-a-million words. So massive a work could in the long run have proved almost unusable by future scholars if it had been published without an index. But Cook supplied for each volume a double-index—(i) *Persons, Places, Festivals*; (ii) *Subjects, Authorities*—which operates and aids so well that one is still surprised by the uncanny orderliness behind the conception of these indexes. Whatever tags occur to one—and there are many that could be pulled out—no one can resist exclaiming with Aristophanes, Ποῖος Ζεὺς. The value of Cook's thirty-year-long devotion to this work will remain a permanent value for as long as the countless subjects which it develops and on which it touches are of interest to mankind. Some months before he died he gave to the Queens' College Library his own copy of *Zeus*, which contains a large number of personal, marginal additions such as may be of use to future students.

If a reader can be induced to exercise self-discipline enough to practise once the hardihood of ignoring *all* Cook's alluring footnotes, and then to read right through the three long 'essays' on Zeus in the *large* type of the work, he will indeed find a reward. The theme referred to above, that had opened volume i, and had in 1914 irritated some of Cook's critics, found its echo in the last paragraph of *Zeus*, vol. iii, in 1940. But a delicate change had occurred and earlier missionary evangelicalism had been purified into a calm and considered deist philosophy.

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