

Foundations of American Literature (II)

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A discourse setting forth evidences of the influence of the Word of God in and through the lives and works of the early American Pioneer leaders, writers, and thinkers.

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The Twentieth Century

(Part Two)

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“Understanding the Mind of Robert Frost”

— Introduction —

It is incumbent upon any writer who wishes to accomplish anything of scientific worth, when probing or analyzing the lives and works of literary men, to approach the particular artist concerned—first of all—from the standpoint of the artist's own personal and distinctive philosophies and beliefs: the philosophies and beliefs that have somehow come together in a unique combination and have resulted in molding the man's thinking, his character, his life, and his work. With this in mind, the present research has been undertaken. We shall consider not only what some of the many critics have written and said about Robert Frost, but also (and perhaps more important still as a key to understanding both the heart of the man and of his works) the things that Frost has revealed about himself through personal correspondence and contact with the closest of friends. Not until we have considered these points as a basis for what, how, and why the poet actually wrote as he did, will we then touch upon the evidences of Biblical influence among his works of distinction and perception approaching genius.

On January 20, 1961, protocol in the American political arena deviated considerably from the norm and a startling new feature was introduced into the ceremonies when Robert Lee Frost, at the mellow-ripe age of nearly eighty-seven, and only two years before his death, accepted the invitation to appear at the inauguration of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and to read from the platform his poem entitled “The

Gift Outright." A precedent-setting event from every aspect, it can only be described as both climactic and symbolic. Never before in the history of the United States had any literary figure been given such recognition before such a wide audience on such an auspicious occasion.

Who was this man, and what are the factors that contributed to catapulting so controversial a figure into such prominence? Certain elements which helped to provide an understanding of these questions were clearly manifest during the poet's life, and additional ones have come to light since his death. Still more are continually being uncovered. Hence it is reasonably possible to attempt to deal only with the most general aspects of Frost's life and work, and that in the light of such incontrovertible facts as are readily available to us. Other matters are but to be relegated to categories of mere speculation, and may never be answered—to the satisfaction of all the critics—during any of our lives.

It is the purpose of this essay to deal with some of the issues and events encompassing the life of this famous American, among which the most important have resolved themselves under the following headings:

- I. Frost the Man
- II. His Philosophy
 - A. Poetic
 - B. Socio-Political
 - C. Religious and Scientific
- III. Specific Evidences of Biblical Influence
in the Works of Robert Frost

Frost the Man

In spite of the fact that his ancestors had lived in New England since 1632, Frost was born and christened Robert Lee Frost on March 26, 1874 in San Francisco, California. There is amusing irony and near incongruity in the fact that he who was so strongly associated with the geography and people of cold New England should have been named "Robert Lee" in honor of that warm statesman-soldier from the South, with whose cause his dissenting father had heartily sympathized. The father was a congenital nonconformist—which fact contributes somewhat to understanding the craggy independence of his illustrious son. The tendency was simply inherited.

Before the birth of Robert, William Prescott Frost, Jr., father, left Republican Massachusetts to edit a Democratic newspaper in San Francisco. Upon the untimely death of William from the dread disease, consumption, Mother Frost (the Scottish-born Isabell Moodie) took young Robert back to New England where, except for his two years spent in England (1912-14), he spent the rest of his life.

It was his mother to whom Robert owed most for his religious upbringing, such

as it was, which later contributed greatly to his metaphysical and philosophical tendencies in poetry. She exerted a profound influence, in her own quiet and gentle way, on her son's personal and literary development. Her Scotch loyalties and intense religious inclinations doubtless produced the background which later gave rise to the blend of practicality and mysticism in her son's poetry.¹ But Isabell Frost had earlier given herself completely over to Swedenborgianism, one of the myriad cults and offshoots of truly Biblical Christianity. It is for this reason that much of the poet's life and work is sometimes viewed with feelings of sadness, with melancholy, and with sympathy for what "might have been" if both mother and son had only known "the truth as it is in Christ Jesus."²

At this point it must be stated that the writer has been unable to uncover any evidence—either from Frost's own writings or from personal comments made by the author to interviewers and friends—that Robert Frost can in any way be considered to have been Christian from the perspective of historic, orthodox, Biblical Christianity. We wish to make this clear from the beginning. We do not wish to impugn the man's motives, question his character, detract from the literary worth of his accomplishments, or usurp the place of God in judgment. We wish simply to state unequivocally that it is a sad commentary on the spiritual health and intelligence of our generation that so few have a truly Biblical apprehension of the term *Christian*. No man has a right to claim himself so, or to be so reckoned by others, who does not specifically measure up to the definition delineated by the Word of God.³ True Christian faith is neither "adherence to" a system of ethics nor "belonging to" any religious or

1 *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (Macropaedia), on page 749, states:

From the beginning of his literary career he endowed his rustic imagery with symbolic and even metaphysical meaning. As a consequence, his best poems subtly transcend immediate relationships of the outward individual to the interior self, to others, to nature, and to the universe in a way that illuminates the values on which his profoundly religious faith was built.

2 The quotation as such (from *Mukyokai's Uchimura*) does not actually appear in the canonical English Bible of 1611, although it is no doubt an allusion to Ephesians 4.21: "If so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, *as the truth is in Jesus...*"

This reference is more clearly apprehended in objective and unbiased comparison with other Scriptures (as are all the hard-to-understand places in the Bible, for the best Bible commentary is *the Bible itself*), among which are 1 Thessalonians 2.13:

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but *as it is in truth, the Word of God...*"

and John 17.17:

"Sanctify them through *Thy truth: Thy Word is truth.*"

Clearly then, "the truth as it is in Christ Jesus" refers *only* to the Word of God as we know it, specifically: *The Bible*.

3 "Except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3.3)

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be *saved*." (Acts 16.31)

"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be *saved*." For *with the heart man believeth* unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto *salvation*." (Romans 10.9, 10)

non-religious superstructure. *It is life*, both temporal and eternal, and it is to be found *only in the person of Christ*.¹

The works of Frost do reflect, nonetheless, abundant evidence of the influence of the Word of God. He is to be admired for speaking forthrightly on the things in which he sincerely believed to be essential fact and truth, and for being honest enough to say so whenever he found it impossible to comprehend all that he should like to have known concerning the future:

We dance round in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret² sits in the middle and knows.

It would require volumes to record and elucidate *in toto* the evidence of Biblical influence in question, and it is not my purpose to treat the subject comprehensively in this treatise. I shall but be able to choose the most salient examples for illustration, and leave more thorough and exhaustive research for subsequent date.

Frost's early life was not especially marked with any semblance of success, poetic or otherwise. Following two abortive beginnings at college (Dartmouth and Harvard), he married Elinor M. White on December 28, 1895, and settled down after a fashion in order to make some provision for his family. He has been commonly described as a wanderer, having held a series of jobs ranging from bobbin boy in the mills of Lawrence, Massachusetts, to shoemaking, to newspaper editing, to school teaching, and finally to farming. His grandfather had given him a farm near Derry, New Hampshire, in order to help the struggling young tinker with his wife and children, but only on condition that he retain and husband it for at least ten years. Frost accepted the gift with reluctance, and the grandfather lived to smart for his grandson's ingratitude. "The soil was so stubborn and the pastures so rocky," the younger Frost reported, "that we had to blast boulders to plant potatoes!"

After years of unsuccessful farming (he was not really a farmer at heart, either, but a botanist, a poet, a dreamer), Frost sold the farm immediately upon lapse of the ten-year obligation, uprooted himself, and with his wife and four small children settled near London in the English countryside in order that he might "write and be poor without further scandal in the family."

Capricious the move may have been, but it was here that certain fortuitous contacts in literary circles were about to be made (he found professional esteem and friendship with Rupert Brooke, Ezra Pound, Yeats, Amy Lowell, and with the critic Edward Thomas, among others), and he found himself with a new voice and vision of his own country from this new perspective. He wrote about New England in Old

¹ "Jesus said...I am (that) life." (John 14.6)

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and *this life is in His Son*. He that hath the son (Jesus) hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (1 John 5.11, 12)

² From *A Witness Tree* (1942). Capitalization clearly indicates reference to deity.

England, and his first two books (*A Boy's Will* in 1913 and *North of Boston* in 1914) were printed as submitted by the first English publisher whom Frost approached—Alfred Nutt. Grim irony indeed that one of the most American of American poets, unrecognized and rejected among his own countrymen, had to have his first two books published in a foreign country. These life experiences have unquestionably shaped the character of Frost, and have shown up indelibly in his poetry.

The outbreak of World War I brought him back to the United States in 1915 and to unexpected national acclaim. Up to this point, his verse was so unlike contemporary poetic diction that editors had almost unanimously rejected it. From nineteenth century English romanticist William Wordsworth he had learned, however, that common, everyday incidents and situations can be described lyrically using the vernacular understood by the man on the street, but this point of view had made his work seem “unpoetic” by comparison with the contrived and affected sentimental verse in vogue previously, and therefore unacceptable. Suddenly—and through no fault of his own—he had become a hero—a national hero! Editors and magazines who had once cold-shouldered him were falling all over themselves to get even the slightest morsel for publication. They were now literally cap in hand begging for his poems!

But Frost had not changed—the critics had.

This simple and unexpected incident from the life of Robert Frost is cited merely to illustrate positively his strength of character under adverse circumstances. And not only so, but there comes through also a clear negative indication of the opportunistic instability on the part of his critics and detractors—those not anchored to a principle-based philosophy of life, but changeable as wind and wave. How utterly fickle are the hearts of men, and the systems of this world to which they attach themselves.¹

From *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, page 193:

Frost's personal life was never easy. He demanded great loyalty and was quick to suspect friends of treachery. In 1938 his wife died, and in 1940 a son committed suicide. He was thwarted by never receiving the Nobel Prize...the reason may have been his determined provincialism. Nonethe-

¹ The Word of God records that Israel, before his decease, gathered his twelve sons and prophesied concerning the future for each of them, based on their character and past life. To Reuben, his firstborn, it is recorded that he said:

“Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel...” (Genesis 49.4)

James transcribed for us:

“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” (James 1.8)

Old Testament prophet Jeremiah also penned as the hand of God to us:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17.9)

The Japanese have a similar saying among their many excellent and richly philosophical proverbs, which goes something to the effect that “A woman's heart is as changeable as the autumn sky.” I am given to understand, however, that the word *woman's* did not appear in the original. It is reported, rather, to have read *man's*.

less, he was showered with honors. From being the most unrecognized poet in America during the days of his youth, he had become by far the most recognized. He lived about as long as Thomas Hardy, dying at the age of 88 on January 29, 1963.

George F. Whicher, commenting on the success and enduring nature of the man and his works, says :

He has received almost every form of public recognition that could be given a man of letters, except the Nobel Prize for literature.... Why has Frost survived so well? The sources of his power do not lie in his being the spokesman of any tendency or movement. He has never been committed to any program. He has faced contemporary currents of thought with a tough-minded skepticism. He has resisted classification. At one time or another he has been factory-hand, farmer, journalist, and teacher, but the one activity to which he has wholeheartedly devoted his energies is the writing of poetry. He has made common cause with no group or class except poets. Though deeply attached to neighborhood and nation, he has never been willing to acknowledge any allegiance to the particular age in which he lives. In that respect he is different from the literary set whom it is proper to label modernists.¹

He who would fathom the depths of soul in Robert Frost should ponder carefully not only his several creations, but also their titles as well. Their content is, of course, revealing, but the titles themselves are not without considerable significance in opening a mine of understanding into the mind of the poet-philosopher.

His Philosophy: Poetic

Elizabeth Jennings interprets Frost as being "primarily a philosophical poet and also a highly skilled practitioner of all the arts and artifices of verse." His works are sometimes hard to understand, but always easy to love. Although his rugged New England individualism comes through clearly in his poetry and places him in a unique category apart from others, yet he is not wholly independent of related schools of philosophy and outlook existing during his time and among his contemporaries. Emerson and Thoreau meant a great deal to him, and the writings of William James (especially *Varities of Religious Experience* and *The Will to Believe*) were constantly at his fingertips as major works of reference. His attitude toward the world puts him in a class with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emily Dickinson, for in their writings are found attempts to use the natural for purposes of eliciting spiritual truth embodied in it. He is metaphysical in this sense, but his imagery is less vivid than that of the older metaphysical poets. As in all great metaphysical poetry, however, tension increases between the simplicity of the natural incident and the mystery which surrounds it. Finally, in a flash of brilliance, the meaning bursts through. Frost's poetry often combines seriousness and raillery, satire, subtle ironies, terse, immediate images,

¹ From remarks by George F. Whicher in *Robert Frost: An Introduction*, p. 119-20.

and many complex levels of meaning. Untermeyer portrays it as :

...(contemplating) the world sometimes quizzically, sometimes critically, without tolerant pity, occasional amusement, but never without love ('I had a lover's quarrel with the world.'). It is a poetry that is a continual rediscovery. It surprises us by making us aware of the things we always had known but had forgotten we knew. It begins in delight and ends in wisdom.¹

In the same connection, Frost describes his own poetic theory :

...(A poem)...begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love. No one can really hold that the ecstasy should be static and stand still in one place. It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion. It has denouement. It has an outcome that though unforeseen was predestined from the first image of the original mood—and indeed from the very mood. It is but a trick poem and no poem at all if the best of it was thought of first and saved for the last. It finds its own name as it goes and discovers the best waiting for it in some final phrase at once wise and sad—the happy-sad blend of the drinking song.... For me the initial delight is in the surprise of remembering something I didn't know I knew....²

Unlike many modern artists who hold that a poem is a thing thought out and deliberately constructed, Frost held that a poem is *never* "...a put up job.... It begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a loneliness. It is never a thought to begin with. It is at its best when it is a tantalizing vagueness." Certainly this theory comes through in Frost's handiwork—curiosity is aroused at the outstart by Frost's subtle approach (using common objects of nature) and borne along with increasing excitement until the reader recognizes that physical objects have assumed a symbolic meaning, and that these, in turn, are but clues to an even deeper meaning. His best poems have been aptly described as "marvels of construction," and all the more exciting because their form seems to evolve before the reader's eyes and ears.

In 1971 Randall Jarrell commented :

Frost's virtues are extraordinary. No other living poet has written so well about the actions of ordinary men: his wonderful dramatic monologues or dramatic scenes come out of a knowledge of people that few poets have had, and they are written in a verse that uses, sometimes with absolute mastery, the rhythms of actual speech. Particularly in his blank verse there is a movement so characteristic, so unmistakably and overwhelmingly Frost's...³

1 Untermeyer, *Fifty Modern British and American Poets*, p. 228.

2 Perkins, *American Poetic Theory*, p. 209.

3 Greenberg and Hepburn, *Robert Frost: An Introduction*, p. 128.

A minister friend who did not especially like Frost's early style once attempted to help the young poet by suggesting that he give his "days and nights to the study of Sidney Lanier's mellifluous verse." Frost promptly discovered what it was that he so much disliked in Lanier's poetry: "All the tones of the human voice in natural speech are entirely eliminated, leaving the sound of sense without root in experience."

Neither critics nor well-wishers ever ceased to offer suggestions for helping get the aspiring young poet out of his rut and into the day's running. One such friend told Frost that his verse sounded "too much like talk." With characteristic stubbornness, Frost refused to change his style—realizing indeed that this tone was the very thing he had been striving to attain from the first. It was a rare compliment camouflaged by criticism!

Frost tremed the language of poetry "the renewal of words." He agreed with Emerson, who expressed in his essay entitled "The Poet" a striking insight into the mind of Frost:

"The etymologist finds the dead word to have been once a brilliant picture. *Language is fossil poetry.*" (Emphasis mine—RK)

Granville Hicks, writing of Frost's sense of tone and pitch as the main element in communication, and realizing that a perfect expression requires a particular rhythm for which no other can be substituted, opines:

Frost's poetry was like a man speaking. It was an easy, swinging, and cadenced line, responsive more to the movement of voice than of metre.... It is this conviction that the words were actually spoken...that confirms the mood of truthfulness in all Frost's verse. True things—in the sense of actual things that have not been changed, but only heightened by the imagination—are said in a true way.... Yet it is not alone the voice of New England, whether talking about apple-picking in a book of poems in New Hampshire orchards. It is also the mood of speech that is in vast sections of America, the easy, loose way of saying everything that sustains equally American humor and American poetry. It is part of the native genius of Robert Frost that he has caught this colloquial rhythm, and realized that, because it is both an honest and an expressive way of saying things, it is the surest medium for an American who wants to talk simply and strongly. That was the way Will Rogers talked in his cowboy jokes. That is also the way Robert Frost talks in poem after poem. He knows that "all the fun's in how you say a thing."¹

Those with whom we communicate in speech usually have control of the language at the sense level, but there is another level—the tonal—that results from the arrangement of words in sequences of sound. In all of Frost's poetry the meaning and significance is not truly realized unless this aspect of tone also is taken into consideration.

In a letter to John T. Bartlett dated February 22, 1914, Frost expresses his own

¹ Greenberg and Hepburn, op. cit., pp. 103-5.

determination to see incorporated into the reading and writing of poetry those natural, colloquial, sound patterns of speech so essential in conveying meaning :

It is so and not otherwise that we get the variety that makes it fun to write and to read. *The ear does it.* The ear is the only true writer and the only true reader. I have known people who could read without hearing the sentence sounds and they were the fastest readers. Eye readers we call them. They can get the meaning by glances. But they are bad readers because they miss the best part of what a good writer puts into his work.... Remember that the sentence sound often says more than the words. It may even as in irony convey a meaning opposite to the words.... To judge a poem or piece of prose you go the same way to work—(the) greatest test. You listen for the sentence sounds. If you find some of those not bookish, caught fresh from the mouths of people, some of them striking, all of them definite and recognizable, so recognizable that with a little trouble you can place them and even name them, you know you have found a writer....¹

The British were the first to take note of the breathtaking control with which Frost managed to combine poetic rhythm with the natural patterns of common speech. He somehow put life into a dead tradition, with poetry so seemingly strange and fresh when first written that it must have seemed almost unpublishable. Though trying out his ideas in the midst of excitement over free verse, yet he was still an old-fashioned poet and never abandoned conventional metrical forms ; he only complicated matters (but enriched his verse as a by-product) by combining traditional meter with the natural rhythm of common speech.

Frost may be thought of as a descriptive realist. Of this, Amy Lowell, commenting on *North of Boston*, made the following observation :

In England, even such a would-be realist as Masfield lights his stories with bursts of a very rare imagination. No such bursts flame over Mr. Frost's work. He tells you what he has seen *exactly* as he has seen it. And in the word *exactly* lies the half of his talent. The other half is a great and beautiful simplicity of phrase, the inheritance of a race brought up on the English Bible.²

Frost explained his own realism by saying :

There are two types of realist—the one who offers a good deal of dirt with his potato to show that it is a real one ; and the one who is satisfied with the potato brushed clean.... To me, the thing that art does for life is *to clean it*, to strip it to form. (Emphasis mine—RK)

How significant indeed that one thought to be such a non-conformist in his own day and generation should nevertheless hold so tenaciously to one of the fundamental principles of civilized artistic appreciation. His praiseworthy position on this burning

1 Perkins, op. cit., p. 216

2 Greenberg and Hepburn, op. cit., p. 49

moral issue is a far cry from that of today's licentious gutter-mongers!

Gorham B. Munson, writing in *Robert Frost*, has this to say;

He is a poet of the customary in man and nature, not the exploiter of the remarkably arresting and wonderful. Nor does his feeling for decorous proportion require argument beyond saying that he does not commit the mistake of the new-classicists who have been properly accused by Professor Babbit of confusing the language of the nobility with the nobility of language. Frost's people are humble, but they speak a language with utter feelings appropriate to them: they are restrained by conventions which are inherently worthy of respect, and the result is *decorum* in the true sense.¹

The truths he sought to present were always to be found innately embodied in the heart of man and in common objects. Just as the folksy Will Rogers a generation ago reached the level of the people and won their hearts with his good, clean jokes and down-to-earth humor, even so Robert Frost has consistently employed the language of the common man to press home his point and put across the underlying truth, but without exception against a background of ethical propriety.

It has been well said that "Simplicity is Truth's most becoming garb," and to this the works of Robert Frost do testify. God's rebuttal to Job illustrates the point well, when Frost makes him to say:

*"My forte is Truth...."*²

His Philosophy: Socio-Political

Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another. People say, "Why don't you say what you mean?" We never do that, do we, being all of us too much poets. We like to talk in parables and in hints and in indirections—whether from diffidence or some other instinct.³

Hating conformity and distrusting "collectivist love," Frost demands both of man as an individual and of man in society "a responsible individualism controlled by an inner mandate." Individuality is prominent throughout his writings, but this is not to say that he has divorced from this emphasis the real necessity for responsibility. It is rather like a true understanding of the idea of "freedom," so maligned and misunderstood in our day. In neither of these concepts can the hard fact of responsible duty ever be evaded.

From the *Saturday Review* of January 1, 1938, Bernard De Voto makes the following observation concerning this facet of Frost's philosophy:

1 Munson, *Robert Frost*, pp. 108-9

2 Lathem, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 480 (from "A Masque of Reason")

3 Coxe, and Latham, *Frost: Selected Prose*, pp. 37-7

Mr. Frost's poetry was first awarded critical approval because it was *thought* to be in revolt against something at a time when poetry must be in revolt.... Poetry must now not be anything like Imagism and must not even revolt, but must be the kind of poetry that Mr. Pound or, more purely and quintessentially, Mr. Eliot wrote.... It is quite true that Frost does not write like Eliot, Pound, Auden, or Spender. Fools may conclude that he is therefore a bad or an unimportant poet, but intelligent people look at the poetry he has written. When you do that, unless your nerves are sealed with wax, you immediately and overwhelmingly perceive that it is the work of an individual and integrated poet, a poet who is like no one else, a major poet not only in regard to this age but in regard to our whole literature, a great American poet.

Some twenty years later, Reginald Cook was to write of him :

Frost's independence is a very personal quality. It is at once in and of the grain; he is assertive. When aroused, he is a formidable opponent who rakes his antagonist with devastating raillery and reproof, mockery and slow quip, sly banter and trouncing wit. The vivid vigor of his attacking mind—tough, virile, sensitive, and longheaded—is a thing to behold! Like the rest of us, he has antipathies and distastes, prejudices and *bêtes noires*. He is a tormentingly aggressive opponent...He is also a fearless independent. A stubborn and spinal man, where his own rights and convictions are concerned, he is uncowed by mob appeal and sensitive (only) to inferior standards....¹

The varied experiences of Robert Frost in the not-always-pleasant "School of Hard Knocks" have doubtless conditioned him in philosophy and in his output as an artist. He knew what it was to feel himself storm-tossed and shaken. He was in his lifetime fully acquainted with the dark hours of loneliness resulting from misunderstanding and a lack of appreciation. If he were young again and with us today, some would readily classify him as a "victim" of underprivilege, poverty, and injustice. But Frost never expected to find this world an easy place...

Programs for the promulgation of social justice from Geneva, Moscow, or Washington never roused his enthusiasm. His social philosophy is expressed in an epigram that will bear long pondering: "*The opposite of Utopia is civilization.*" Edmund Burke would have understood this, even if the editors of the *New Republic* do not.²

It is interesting to note that Frost did not think of political progress as linear, but cyclical :

The cycle starts with absolute monarchy, passes to a limited monarchy, then to democracy, and finally to the mob, and from the mob to the hero-god, from which point it starts to rotate again. A relaxation of governmental will leads inevitably to a tyranny of individual wills and the encroachment of one will—

¹ Cook, *The Dimensions of Robert Frost*, p. 20

² From remarks by George F. Whicher in *Robert Frost: An Introduction*, p. 121.

presumably the stronger—upon another. Since the basis of government is justice and the basis of justice is law, there must be some attempt to balance the will of the many who are governed by the will of the few who govern... "Equal justice for all under law." ...When rulers rule lawfully, justice prevails and good government results.... So, he thinks, the hub of democracy should be "power divided against itself," illustrated in our government by the legislative body which checks the executive while the judiciary balances them both.¹

On the building of fences in "Mending Wall" from *North of Boston* (1914), his socio-political philosophy comes through clearly:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast....

And on the mending of them after thoughtless and destructive hunters add to the confusion of the elements, Frost describes the task as a kind of game:

Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."

There is more genuine, down-to-earth, common horse sense to that last line than most of us are willing to admit. Walls have been, are now, and will continue to be a very necessary part of our earthly existence—whether private and personal, domestic, social, political, national, or otherwise. This is predicated upon the assumption that the said wall, or fence, is established for the purpose of keeping bandits out and our persons and property protected from destruction, as opposed to the communistic practice of pile driving a barbed-wire-and-machinegun fortification prohibiting those who would flee reigns of terror by the mailed fist from seeking asylum (according to democratic preference) and freedom of the spirit-conscience from religio-political tyranny. The infamous Berlin Wall and all such approximations would then be excepted from the kinds of walls that make good neighbors!

Frost loathed any form of government by which individual personalities in God's universe are all lumped together into one big collectivist blob—or mob. He became more and more conservative with age, and considered any form of liberalism insanity. He believed in private initiative with no coddling. He realized something that modern

¹ Cook, op. cit., p. 180

western politicians don't seem to be able to realize: that *no freedom is ever*—and forever—*free*, but rather, that it is purchased at great cost in terms of *human lives, personal sacrifice, and eternal vigilance!*

In 1936, he was not reluctant to condemn the New Deal of Roosevelt's administration as "doing a little good too hastily," labeling it a panacean cure-all with too much "presto-change-o," and was persuaded that it would be only ameliorative at best—suicidal at worst. If hindsight is any criterion for assessing the poet's foresight, we may safely conclude that he has been 100% correct, judging from the bureaucratic jungle into which we have allowed ourselves to become enmeshed!

Robert Frost was death on communism. The humanitarian side of socialism (which some have termed "mercy") he looked upon not with disfavor, but he could not bring himself to the point of tolerating either the German or the Russian brands. This conflict with the two renowned champions of the game put him at odds with socialism in general, and with the Russian variety in particular. Left-leaning Malcolm Cowley, writing a description of Frost's critical inclinations in this direction, excoriates him without discrimination and without mercy:

New ideas seem worse to him if they come from abroad, and worst of all if they come from Russia. He is continually declaiming against the Russians of all categories: the pessimistic Russians, the revolutionary Russians, the collectivistic Russians, the five-year planning Russians: he seems to embrace them all in a global and historical dislike that extends from Dostoevsky to Dnieperstroy. He is horrified by the thought that New England might be exposed to the possibility of adopting any good or bad feature of the Russian program. Thus, after reading about a project for rural rehabilitation, he hastened to write:¹

It is in the news that all these pitiful kin
Are to be brought out and mercifully gathered in
To live in villages next to the theatre and store
Where they won't have to think for themselves any more;
While greedy good-doers, beneficent beasts of prey,
Swarm over their lives enforcing benefits
That are calculated to soothe them out of their wits,
And by teaching them how to sleep the sleep of day,
Destroy their sleeping at night the ancient way.

If we might extricate ourselves momentarily from the bigoted bias of the opinionated Mr. Cowley, and view from a more objective vantage point some of the prescient wisdom of Robert Frost, we might be inclined to draw some of the same conclusions as Frost concerning certain socio-political "fences" which God has instituted for man's survival and well-being. In the first place, Cowley's would-be reason-

1 Greenberg and Hepburn, op. cit., p. 113

ing is out of focus because he is apparently ignorant of such as the following :

“And (God) hath made of one blood all nations of men...to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, *and the bounds of their habitation....*” (Acts 17.26)

Here it is explicitly clear that God has appointed national boundaries (fences) for both nations and peoples.

Chapter 13 of Romans also would indicate God's approval of “fences” for the protection and preservation of social order :

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers...the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil... if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not *the sword*¹ in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” (Romans 13.1-4)

The combined wisdom of Peter, Paul, and Solomon attests to the necessity of “fences” for this life :

“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, *or as a busybody in other men's matters.*” (1 Peter 4.15)

“...we beseech you, brethren, that ye...study to be quiet, *and to do your own business*, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you...” (1 Thessalonians 3.10, 11)

“Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.” (Proverbs 25.17)

Among other and similar Biblical references, these clearly indicate the divine sanction of “fences” guaranteeing personal privacy as well as domestic and national tranquility. And so, we may reasonably conclude there is more truth than fiction in the wisdom that “Good fences make good neighbors.”

His Philosophy: Religious and Scientific

Frost's views on religion and science are so intertwined with his general philosophy and writings that it has been all but impossible to disentangle them. An informal address before a relaxed and friendly group of students at his own Dartmouth, only two months before his death, will serve to illustrate :

I was thinking of the extravagance of the universe. What an *extravagant* universe it is.... How stirring it is, the sun and everything. Take a telescope and look as far as you will. How much of a universe was wasted

1 Obvious reference to divine approval and justification for the death penalty, its Biblical appearance coming first in Genesis 9.6:

“Whoso *sheddeth man's blood* (murder), by *man* (government) shall his blood be shed (the murderer's life shall be taken).”

just to produce puny us.... people *think* (Emphasis mine—RK) that life is a *result* of certain atoms coming together, instead of being the *cause* that brings the atoms together.

Reginald Cook, writing in *Sixteen Modern American Authors*, states:

Raymond A. Cook boldly asserts that "in no poet since the invention of the telescope...do we find such preoccupation with celestial matters as in Frost." Jerome sees Frost as "the most modern and most difficult of modern poets because "he understood the scientific..., coped with it, and incorporated its wisdom in his response." Moreover, he had a scientific habit of thought, an instinctive skepticism and even a skepticism about science itself.¹

Scientifically speaking, Robert Frost was no fool. Neither was he gullibly insane over a mere guess by one Charles Darwin to the effect that "the evolution of species is governed by a mindless force called natural selection." *Mindless indeed!* When the cardinal law of scientific thought is in itself a primary argument for the existence of God the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, it would require a rather mindlessly blind individual to assert dogmatically that God does not exist.²

Frost was never opposed to *true science*,³ to wit: what we can *know* absolutely as irrefutable truth and fact by means of observation, testing, and proof. But he was first of all a thinker—a philosopher—and consequently rather skeptical when it came to the pronouncements of a "science" falsely so-called, which, like Darwin's "guess," he would always receive with reservation, and mull over with a grain of salt. In this connection, and writing again from a religio-political point of view, he says concerning antiestablishmentarianism (which he terms simply "grievances" as opposed to faith, or good faith, which he calls "patience"):

But for me, I don't like grievances.... Grievances are a form of impatience. Grievances are a form of patience....(and) since by throwing away patience and joining the impatient in one last rush on the citadel of evil, the hope is we may end the need of patience. There will be nothing left to be patient about. The day of perfection waits on unanimous social action. Two or three more good national elections should do the business.⁴ It has been similarly urged on us to give up courage, make cowardice a virtue, and see if that won't end war, and the need of courage. Desert religion and science, clean out the holes of the residual unknown, and there will be no more need of religion. (Religion is merely consolation for what we don't

1 Bryer, *Sixteen Modern American Authors*, p. 351

2 That law states simply that mind, purpose, and design are responsible for the existence of any created object, be it as microscopic as a tiny transistor or as gigantic as the three-storied "Beast" monster-computer system that covers a whole city block in Brussels! Things in the material world don't just happen, as the honest soul will find clearly delineated in Psalm 19.1-3.

3 Derivation of Latin *scientia*: *scire*, to know.

4 Note cynical satire

know.)¹ But suppose there was some mistake, and the evil stood siege, ... war didn't end, and something remained unknowable. *Our having disarmed would make our case worse than it had ever been before.* Nothing in the latest advices from Wall Street, the (United) Nations, or the Vatican incline me to give up my holdings in patient grief (i.e., faith).²

In a word, then, the patience of essential esteem in God was of greater importance to Frost than all the plans, pronouncements, or imaginings of men ("oppositions of science falsely so called")³ which militate against true Christian faith. Robert Burns expressed it well when he wrote:

The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley...

But the immutability of the nature of the Almighty⁴ allows for none of the restless caprice which has so characterized the thoughts of modern (and ancient!) man. How well Frost seemed to realize this, and it is praiseworthy that he had sufficient discreet wisdom and circumspection to reject the much-publicized "theory" of evolution, which turns out in reality to be, at best, only a mistaken hypothesis without the slightest basis as scientific truth. He ridicules one farmer who speaks of it admiringly, and sympathizes with another who stops him on the road to say:

The trouble with the Mid-Victorians
Seems to have been a man named John L. Darwin.⁵

Further elucidation appears in a poem called "The Rose Family" published in *West-Running Brook* (1928):

The rose is a rose,
And always was a rose,
But the *theory*⁶ now goes
That the apple's a rose,
And the pear is, and so's
The plum, I suppose.
And dear only knows
What will next prove a rose....

1 One of the common deceptions of an unbelieving heart

2 Perkins, op. cit., pp. 206-7.

3 Reference is made to 1 Timothy 6.20, 21, which reads:

"O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith."

4 "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (Malachi 3.6)

"...(with) the Father (God)...is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1.17)

5 From a poem entitled "New Hampshire," 1923

6 An obvious reference to Darwin's mistaken "guess"

Another enlightening bit of insight into Frost's penchant for ridiculing the ridiculous comes through vividly in something called "The White-Tailed Hornet" which appeared in *A Further Range* (1936):

Won't this whole instinct matter bear revision?
Won't almost any *theory* bear revision?
To err is human, not to, animal....
Our worship, humor, conscientiousness
Went long since to *the dogs under the table*.¹
And served us right for having instituted
Downward comparisons.² As long on earth
As our comparisons were stoutly upward
With gods and angels, we were men at least.
But *little lower than the...angels*.²
But once we were yielded downward,
Once we began to see our images
Reflected in the mud and even dust,
'Twas disillusion upon disillusion.
We were *lost piecemeal to the animals*,³
Like people thrown out to delay the wolves.

In contrast to Darwin's guess at happenstance by "natural selection," Frost argues for the existence of God, and for Creationism, from the standpoint of "Design," in a poem by the same name and appearing also in *A Further Range*:

What had that flower to do with being white,
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?
What brought the kindred spider to that height,
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
What but design of darkness to appall?—
If design govern in a thing so small.

Dr. Stewart Custer, distinguished scientist-philosopher-theologian and long-time friend of this writer, has recently authored an excellent new book in which he ex-

1 It has been surmised that Frost's English expression was greatly influenced by the immortal 1611 translation of the Bible, in which we find the Greek woman of Mark 7.28 answering Jesus with:

"Yes, LORD: yet *the dogs under the table* eat of the children's crumbs."

2 Frost was not greatly moved by the concepts of Freudian psychology. The Creationist, as opposed to the Evolutionist, holds that man is *not* animal, but a special creation of God on a level between angel and animal, as explicated in Psalm 8.5:

"For thou (God) hast made him (man) a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor..."

3 Or, "beasts," as in 1 Peter 5.8:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a *roaring lion*, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour..."

pounds and defends the Creationist theory:¹

The Milky Way Galaxy is an impressive location for man's planet, the earth. The immensity of the galaxy should cause man to look up and consider his Maker. "For the invisible things of Him (God) from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1.20). The vastness and complexity of the galaxy demands the First Cause. Only a divine Creator is an adequate explanation for such a galaxy. Impersonal force cannot explain *design* and loving provision. God has designed the universe to provide for mankind and all of His creation an adequate place in which to live.

Pressing his argument from the standpoint of design, he continues:

The entire universe is an example of design. It manifests structure and order that only the intelligent purpose of a personal Creator can account for. A famous astronomer once said, "The picture of the world, as drawn in existing physical theories, shows arrangement of the individual elements for which the odds are a *google* (one with one hundred zeros after it) to one *against* an origin by chance." He added that if someone could sweep all idea of personal design out of the universe, he could sweep it only so far. If he traveled far enough back in time, he would find the sweepings of design "all piled up like a high wall and forming a boundary—a beginning of time."² There is no adequate explanation for the design and structure of the universe other than the one Scripture gives: "In the beginning *God created* the heaven and the earth."

And on the amazing, absolute order and precision of things in the universe:

God has not created these galaxies in a haphazard manner. A great spiral galaxy such as M 101 *cannot* be the handiwork of a cold, impersonal force. Whether we view the largest or the smallest part of God's creation, we can observe His workmanship, His care, and His providence in it all. It took a great Designer to construct something of such a size as this galaxy, which would yet have such beauty. No one would think of attributing the workmanship of a fine watch or other timepiece to chance. Neither will chance explain the existence of such beautiful precision as this.

Climaxing his chapter on "The Design of the Universe," he concludes with this observation:

Our own planet, Earth, is a central nucleus with the moon revolving around it. Most of the planets such as Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and others have moons that revolve around them. But all the planets themselves are revolving around the sun, which is the central nucleus of the solar system. The sun, along with billions of other stars, is revolving around the central nucleus of our Milky Way Galaxy. The amazing complexity of so many systems within systems, each one complete in itself but still

1 Custer, *The Stars Speak: Astronomy in the Bible*, p. 143 ff.

2 Eddington, *Nature*, pp. 127, 447-453

comprising part of a larger system, is astounding evidence for the pattern that the great Designer of the universe has employed to give unity to His creation. "For every house is builded by some man, but He that built all things is God." (Hebrews 3.4)

Countering and at complete odds with the Creation theory, however, lies the evolutionary guess, against which the true scientific and logical mind *must be* at odds. The total *illogic* with which some supposedly intelligent human brains seem to be able to reject Creationism is beyond my power to comprehend. One "scientist," for example, said that he believed in evolution in order to avoid the necessity of accepting anything supernatural!

Consistency, thou art a rare and priceless gem indeed!

This pitiable "scientist" cannot, however, so easily get away from his dilemma, for he is trusting in a mere guess that does not in the least attempt to explain his chief difficulty: *the origin of life*. Many moderns do not seem to realize that before Charles Darwin wrote *The Origin of the Species* there was general belief in the creation of man by the direct act of God, and of the kinds (species) of animals and plants as they are found today. Then came the "doctrine of evolution," with its ultimate answers to everything. I am continually amazed that otherwise thinking and intelligent men can continue to gullibly gulp down such unproved and unproveable nonsense, and reject outright the most obvious answer of all as to our origin and destiny: *from God, to God*.¹

Frost continued taking Darwin to task and defending the Biblical account of creation in "The Literate Farmer and the Planet Venus," from *A Witness Tree* (1942):

...What's a star doing big as a baseball?
Between us two it's not a star at all.
It's a new patented electric light,
Put up on trial by *that Jerseyite*²
So much is being now expected of,
To give developments the final shove
And turn us into the next specie folks
Are going to be, unless these monkey jokes
Of the last fifty years are all a libel,
And Darwin's proved mistaken, not the Bible.
I s'pose you have your notions on the vexed
Question of what we're turning into next.

¹ After death, the state that obtains is described for us in Ecclesiastes 12.7:

"Then shall the dust (body) return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

² Scientist-inventor Thomas Alva Edison

Climaxing the whole of his argument with regard to the problem of "Evolution and the Bible," I quote in its entirety Frost's excellent masterpiece entitled "Accidentally on Purpose," from his final work, *In the Clearing*, published 1962. Note carefully his dexterous use of satire, ridicule, and contempt in verses two, three, four, and his masterful use of deductive logic in the two concluding verses:

The Universe is but the thing of things,
The things but balls all going round in rings.
Some of them mighty huge, some mighty tiny,
All of them radiant and mighty shiny.

They mean to tell us all was rolling blind
Till accidentally it hit on mind
In an albino monkey in a jungle,
And even then it had to grope and bungle,

Till Darwin came to earth upon a year
To show the evolution how to steer.
They mean to tell us, though, the Omnibus
Had no real purpose till it got to us.

Never believe it! At the very worst
It must have had the purpose from the first
To produce purpose as the fitter bred:
We were just purpose coming to a head.

Whose purpose was it? His or Hers or Its?
Let's leave that to the scientific wits.
Grant me *intention, purpose, and design*¹
That's near enough for me to the Divine.

And yet for all this help of head and brain
How happily instinctive we remain,
Our best guide upward further to the light,
Passionate preference such as *love at sight*.²

— To Be Continued —

1 Three of the most powerful arguments for the existence of the Creator of the universe. Scientific mind and logical reasoning are predicated upon the premise that the existence of an object necessitates also the existence of a creator having intelligence, design, and purpose back of the creation of that object. The universe is our prime example, for in Psalm 19.1-3 it is written:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament (earth) showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard."

2 Taken in context with the whole of his poem, there is nothing in this phrase which would indicate that Frost had anything in mind but his love of nature. From the Christian point of view, however, since man is a religious being, and intelligent above all creatures in the animal kingdom, he should logically deduce from the things that are seen (God's handiwork in heaven and earth) the fact that God does exist, and that all men should recognize, love, honor, obey, worship, and serve Him. (See also Romans 1 and Mark 12.29-31)

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