

The following poem by Multatuli (alias Eduard Douwes Dekker 1820-1887) was published in *De Dageraad* in 1860. The pseudonym Multatuli intended to mean 'I have suffered a lot'

## The Prayer of the Ignorant

translation: Inge van de Stadt

I don't know whether we have been created for a purpose...  
Or are here just by chance. Nor whether a God  
Or... gods, enjoy themselves with our sorrow, and gibe  
At the imperfection of our existence. If it were like that,  
It would be dreadful! Whom to blame  
For the weakness of the weak, the illness of the ill, and stupidity of the stupid?

If we have been made on purpose, to an end,  
And because of our imperfection do not reach it...  
Then no blame for all wrongs attaches to us  
Not to the *make*... but to the *Maker!* Call him Zeus,

Or Jupiter, Jehovah, Baäl, Jaö...whatever:  
He isn't there, or he *must be good*, and forgive  
That we don't understand him. It rested with him  
To reveal himself, and he did *not!* If he had,  
He'd have done it in such a way that nobody would doubt;  
That every one would say: 'I know him, feel him, and understand him' (\*)

Now, what others claim to know about that God...  
Doesn't help *me*... I do *not* understand him! I ask why  
He revealed himself to others, and not to me?  
Is the one child closer to the father than the other?...  
As long as one son of man doesn't know that God  
So long it is slander to believe in that God!  
The child that calls the father in vain, does no evil..  
The father, who lets his child call, acts cruel!  
And finer is the believe: there is no father,  
Than that he would be deaf to his child!

Maybe once we will be wiser! Once, may be  
We see, that He is there, that He watched us,  
And that his silence had cause, and reason... Well,  
As soon as we *know*, it is time for *praise*...  
But no sooner.. not *now!* It would grieve God,  
To perceive that we'd worship him without reason...  
And it is foolishness, wanting to brighten the dark ignorance of to-day  
With a light... that doesn't shine yet.

Serve him?... Foolishness! If He'd want service,  
He'd reveal to us: in what way...  
And it is absurd, that He expects of man  
Worship, service or praise... while He Himself  
About the way how to - left us in doubt.  
If we don't serve God to his liking...  
Then it is *His* fault... *his* fault...  
and it is *not* our fault!

In the mean time -until we will be wiser - is good and evil the same?

I don't see in what way a God serves us, in distinguishing  
Evil from good... On the contrary! He who does good  
In order that a God would repay him, turns, for that very reason  
The good into something bad, into commerce... And he who flees wickedness  
Out of fear for the disgrace of that God, is... a coward!

I don't know You, oh God! I invoked You, I searched,  
I beseeched an answer, and You were silent! I was so eager  
To do Your will... not out of fear for punishment, out of hope for pay,  
But like a child that does the will of his father... out of love!  
You were silent.. and all the time You were silent!

And I wander about, and gasp  
For the hour, that I will know that You exist...  
Then I will ask: Father, why now, for the first time  
Shown your child that it had a father?...

And that it was not alone in the struggle,  
The fierce struggle for humanity and justice?...  
Or were You certain, that I would do Your will  
Also without knowing it? That I, unconscious  
Of Your existence, would serve You, the way You want to be served?...  
Would that be true?...

Answer, Father, if You are there, answer...  
Don't let Your child despair... Father, don't remain mute  
To the bloody-extorted *lama sabacthani!*...(1)

That's the way the ignorant groans at his self-chosen cross  
And writhes of pain, and laments that he is thirsty...

The *wise* man - he who does know... who does know God - mocks the fool,  
And reaches gall to him, and jubilates: Ahear, he calls his father!  
And mutters: Athank, oh Lord, that I'm not like him!...(2)  
And sings a psalm: Ablessed is he who doesn't seek  
Evil counsel and does not walk upon the dirty path of the sinners... (3)

The *wise* man... sneaks to the Exchange, and barter integrals. (4)

The father is silent... Oh God, there is no God!

The Hague, 26 February 1861

(\*) Read: *I feel him, know him, and understand him*. Feeling should come first and that does happen to those who believe. But they do not get any further. They mistake their recruit for a soldier. The belief in God has not firmer base than the belief in ghosts.

- Would all those capable, scholarly, able people be mistaken?

My answer is simply: yes! And that is not so strange, considering Kepler. The great, mathematical thinking Kepler believed in witches. When his own mother was accused of witchcraft, he defended her, without basing himself on the *absurdity* of the charge. That *major* step seemed too risky for the man who dared to write his name upon our solar system.

When *believe* is involved, logic and science are silent. That is why one should impose silence upon belief, at least if we want to find *truth*.

## Notes

(1) My God, my God, why did you desert me? = The words that Christ spoke quoting Ps 22 (21) when in dying pain hanging at the cross. Bystanders mocked it and said: He call for Elias; they offered him acid wine for a drink (Mt. 27: 46-48)

(2) The farisee said that referring to the publican (Lk. 18:11)

(3) Ps 1:1 freely quoted

(4) securities of a certain kind of state debenture