



William Paley 1743-1805

Sarah and Katherine grew up in a house distinguished by the intellect and culture of its many guests. Henry Lonsdale gave some suggestion of the many eminent men who dined regularly with John Losh: 'Woodside possessed happy advantages in its social life, its intellectual gatherings, and pleasant amenities. Within good neighbourhood was Dr William Paley, the moral and political philosopher, who could elucidate natural-history forms with a morphological instinct, and be no less a preacher and propounder of the evidences of his faith. At Woodside, Paley was *en accord* with mine host, enjoyed his joke and bit of pleasantry, and never failed as a trencher-man. Then there were the eminent Laws, father and sons, all bishops in their time, Dean Milner, the Rev. Dr Carlyle, Sir Joseph Gilpin, Dr Heysham; and among distant visitors, the Earl of Dundonald, and John (afterwards Sir John) Leslie of Edinburgh, of European fame as a physicist,—all men of note in their respective walks, who laboured to extend the boundaries of human knowledge in the direction of history, statistics, divinity, and philosophy. Mingling with these superior men under the Losh roof-tree were the Blamire family of the Oaks, the Warwicks of Warwick Hall, the Grahams of Low House, and the leading gentry.'

Of these, Archdeacon William Paley was the most famous in his day. John Maynard Keynes considered that 'for a generation or more (Paley was) an intellectual influence on Cambridge only second to Newton'. William Paley's evident pleasure in the beauty of the world and his arguments for God as the maker delighted many and sustained them in their faith. His most famous argument for a creator - the argument from design - was founded on the complexity and wondrous nature of the world. Paley began his *Natural Theology*:

'In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a *stone*, and were asked how the stone came to be there; I might possibly answer, that, for any thing I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever . . . But suppose I had found a *watch* upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that, for any thing I knew, the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case, as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, viz. that, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e.g. that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that, if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, of a different size from what they are, or placed after any other manner, or in any other order, than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it. . . . This mechanism being observed . . . the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker; that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer: who comprehended its construction, and designed its use.'

In 1776, Bishop Edmund Law presented Paley with the vicarage at Dalston and the following year he was made vicar of Appleby. He divided his time equally between the two parishes. In 1782 he succeeded his friend John Law as Archdeacon of Carlisle and three years later he was made Chancellor of the diocese.

Paley 'was a short podgy man, with clever bushy brows, a snub nose, and projecting teeth. . . . His gait was awkward, his action ungraceful, his dialect coarsely provincial; but his arch smile was delightful and redeemed all. He seems to have been a warm-hearted, kind, sensible man, with a horror of professional humbug and, indeed, of all hypocrisy and false pretence.'

William Paley chose to spend his summers in Dalston, farming, fishing and gardening. His *Natural Theology* and his argument for the existence of God from the design of nature came from a man who was as much a natural historian as a theologian. He studied and observed the world around him with an insistent curiosity and a passion for the intricacy of life.

In 1793, he left Dalston to become Vicar of Stanwix and two years later he was granted the valuable living of Bishopwearmouth. He remained Archdeacon of Carlisle until his death in 1805.