

8th May

Memory Verse

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart;
and lean not unto thine own understanding.
In all thy ways acknowledge him,
and he shall direct thy paths.
Proverbs 3:5-6

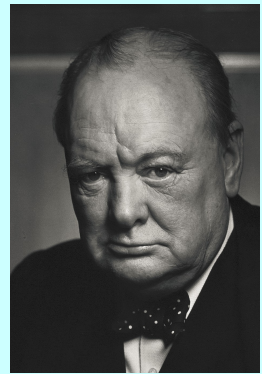
Something to think about

Today is VE Day, anniversary of the end of the struggle in Europe against Hitler's Nazi Germany. ¹

The German High Command will at once issue orders to all German military, naval and air authorities and to all forces under German control to cease active operations at 23.01 hours Central European time on 8 May 1945... (German Surrender Document)

God bless you all. This is your victory. In our long history, we have never seen a greater day than this. Everyone, man or woman, has done their best. (Winston Churchill)

We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing (as Japan) remains unsubdued... (Winston Churchill)



If you have any family members or friends who are old enough to remember VE day you might be able to ask them what they did on that day. Of course, it was not a day of unclouded happiness for many who had lost loved ones. Nor was the terrible anxiety removed for those who had family members away fighting against the Japanese. We can thank God today for the measure of freedom we still enjoy thanks to the victory of VE day.

But what was Nazism and where did it come from?



Hitler was influenced by the philosophy of Frederick Nietzsche (1844-1900).² Nietzsche was a younger contemporary of Charles Darwin³ and an enthusiastic evolutionist. He thought that warfare and eugenics would lead to the arrival of a “superman” (i.e. a superior type of man) or “super race”. Whereas Darwin postulated slow and gradual “natural” change, Nietzsche argued that the merciless extinction of inferior people and races would lead to the superman.

Another strong influence on Hitler was Ernst Haeckel (1843-1919). Haeckel thought out a development of Darwin's idea which he applied to society. Society itself, he said, was evolving. His ideas took root in German scientific and intellectual thought. Haeckel promoted an almost mystical belief in the “forces of nature” which he thought were the same as Darwin's idea of natural selection. He transferred Darwin's so called “laws” of biology literally into social and political life, combining

¹ I have drawn extensively on Henry Morris, *The Long War Against God* in preparing this lesson.

² See lesson for 15th October yet to come.

³ See lessons for April 19th and December 27th.

a romantic folkism with so-called “scientific” evolution. His ideas included *Kampf* “struggle” and competition. Natural selection was a kind of competition in which the fittest survived. He thought this was a fundamental law of nature. Haeckel thought human society itself followed this law too. He came up with a kind of religion of nature as a result of this thinking. Human beings, said Haeckel were ruled by their evolutionary destiny. They had no free will. To be happy one had to submit to the “eternal laws” of nature – i.e. evolution.

Hitler wrote his book, *Mein Kampf*, while in prison after his part in the 1923 Munich Putsch. The title means *My Struggle*. The word struggle is significant – it refers to the evolutionary idea of “struggle for existence” that Haeckel talked about. According to *Mein Kampf* the essence of history is the struggle between races. Politics was just war by other means; war was man’s highest destiny. The noblest of all human stocks was the Nordic or Aryan race. The Jews were a sub-human counter race, predestined by their biological heritage to evil. Once the world was redeemed from the poison of the Jews and released from the chains of Christianity (which was descended from Jewish religion) there would be an empire of unparalleled splendour which would be based on a racial hierarchy ordained by nature (evolution) herself.

If you read about Hitler's beliefs today you will find that the fact that he was not an atheist is mentioned, followed by the inference that he was a follower of some kind of Christianity and was brought up a Catholic. No doubt, like many people, Hitler's religious views changed during his life. It is important to remember, however, that when Hitler spoke of God he was not speaking of the God of the Bible. It is not an exaggeration to say that Hitler worshipped evolution as a force – as God – and that this explains his actions. He was totally convinced of the evolutionary principle of survival of the fittest and that the Aryan race was the fittest. He despised Christian ideas of charity to the poor and handicapped because these were polluting elements that would drag the German race down. Only the fittest should survive. He tried to manoeuvre the various German churches into line with his own religious system

How did all this theorising work out in practice? Nazis believed⁴ in the superiority of the *Herrenvolk* – the Master Race. These were the Aryans i.e. Germans and Germanic people. They thought the *Herrenvolk* needed to be purged from polluting elements such as the Jews and that the leaders of the *Herrenvolk* should be the Nazis. The first step on the road to the rise of the Master Race would be the overthrow of the Peace Settlement made after the First World War. This would restore Germany's greatness. All German speaking peoples should then be brought into the *Reich* – the German state. After that had been achieved, Germany should expand eastwards to provide *Lebensraum* (living space) at the expense of “lesser” races such as Slavs. This would possibly lead to conflict with the USSR in which communism would be destroyed.

This plan for German domination was all justified as an evolutionary progression, the inevitable working of nature.

I have marked some words in purple that you may want to look up in your dictionary.

The Bible tells us that all human beings are all descendants of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:20, Acts 17:26). After the flood Noah's family was the only family left on earth. All of us are also descendants of that one family. (Genesis 7:23; 9:1). Terrible suffering and war was the result of trying to deny this simple truth.

4 Like many bad, unbiblical theories Nazism is not dead. It is still a force to be reckoned with especially in areas of Eastern Europe once ruled by the Communist Soviet union.

Bird watching⁵

Do you know this old cuckoo rhyme? It is an easy one to learn by heart:

In April,
Come he will.
In May,
He sings all day.
In June,
He changes his tune.
In July,
He prepares to fly.
In August,
Go he must.

In 1871, the Rev. Francis Kilvert wrote in his diary on 8th May:

It was very hot this morning, burning hot as I was in the garden tying up 3 or 4 dozen lettuces. A cuckoo sat in the broken elm overhead, moaning and chuckling and making an odd noise like a dog.

This may surprise you if you think you know what sound a cuckoo makes! Chuckling? Like a dog? But the female cuckoo has a good reason (well, a reason anyway, perhaps “good” is not quite the right word) for making quite a different sound to the male.

As you probably know, Mrs Cuckoo lays her egg in the nest of another bird such as a dunnock or meadow pipit. I'm sorry to say that the baby cuckoo grows fast, pushes the other birds or eggs out of the nest and greedily eats all the food provided by its foster parents! Some small birds are aware that cuckoos have this bad behaviour. They keep a look out for cuckoos and mob them when they see them. The cuckoo therefore needs a way of keeping the small birds away from their nest so that she can approach and quickly lay her egg which will be coloured to mimic the little birds own eggs. The cuckoo's trick is to make a chuckling sound. This sounds like the call of a hunting sparrowhawk to small birds such as reed warblers or dunnocks. It does not sound very much like a sparrowhawk to human ears though; the Rev. Francis Kilvert clearly did not think of a sparrow hawk when he heard the sound! The poor little birds are deceived, however, and keep away while the mother cuckoo lays her egg.

Something to do

Today would be a good day for some bird watching. Rev. Francis Kilvert observed the cuckoo in his own garden. You may not be able to see a cuckoo but you will probably be surprised how many different birds you see in your garden if you are patient. Watch very quietly and keep still. Use a good bird book to identify what you see.

What about the weather today? Is it “burning hot” as it was in 1871? Don't forget to keep your weather chart up to date if you started one in January⁶ or at the end of March⁷. If you are already

5 Information from <https://arstechnica.com/science/2017/09/cuckoo-calls-sound-like-hawks-to-distract-the-birds-theyre-preying-on/> and other sources.

6 See the lesson for January 24th.

7 See the lesson for March 30th.

making one perhaps you could derive some statistics from your chart today. Which month had the most rainy days, for instance? Start a weather chart today if you are not doing one already and see how many “burning hot” days we have this year! Full instructions for making a weather chart are in the lesson for 30th March. Charts for successive years are fascinating too as you can compare the weather. If you did a chart last year get it out now. How did the weather on 8th May last year compare with today's weather?

A lesson from science⁸



Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier (1743 – 1794), a scientist who made a very important discovery, was a victim of the guillotine during the French Revolution⁹ on 8th May. His execution at the hands of the Paris mob was a sad loss to science. You can see him with his wife in the picture on the left. His most important discovery was all to do with fire and, although he was correct, people took some convincing before they would believe him.

What exactly is fire? What is going on when something burns? This is an interesting question and one that fascinated scientists. Robert Boyle (1627-1691) had discovered that things would not burn in a vacuum – in other words air was needed for burning things. Noticing that living things such as birds died if placed in a vacuum, he put two and two together and decided that there was some similarity between breathing and burning or, to use more scientific terms, respiration and combustion.

Then a German chemist, Georg Ernst Stahl (1659–1734), got to work and produced a theory of what was happening when things burned. It was a good theory in many ways. It seemed to explain the observable facts. All matter – everything – is made up of three things, said Stahl. They are: the substance itself in its pure form, the essence of fire or *phlogiston* and any impurities that happen to be present. Stahl's theory was that when something burns this is simply the phlogiston being released into the air. The flames are the whirling motion of the air as the phlogiston is released. So when a piece of wood, for instance, burned, the ash that remained was the substance itself along with any contaminating substances. The difference between this and unburnt wood was simply the presence or absence of phlogiston. Different substances had different proportions of phlogiston in them, he thought. Substances that burn well, such as wood, had a high proportion of phlogiston. Substances that did not burn well, such as rock, had a low proportion.

The phlogiston theory explained many natural phenomena such as the smelting and rusting of metals, and fermentation. There were inconsistencies, however. Wood ash weighs less than the original wood but metals roasted in air tended to weigh more than the original substance. What did phlogiston weigh then? French chemist Guyton de Morveau (1737–1816) decided that phlogiston in the case of metals had a quality he called “levity” which made the metals lighter when the phlogiston was in them.

Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier thought this was a crazy idea. He repeated many of the other scientists' experiments himself. He was very careful and accurate. He came to a revolutionary conclusion: there was no such thing as phlogiston!

Today we know that what Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier's fellow scientists called ‘dephlogisticated air’ is the element oxygen. We understand combustion in general to be a process in which oxygen

⁸ Information from <https://creation.com/phlogiston> and other sources.

⁹ See the lesson for 14th July for more about the French Revolution.

combines with other elements in the material, sometimes producing various gases and at other times solids, releasing energy in the form of heat. More about oxygen tomorrow.

It is easy to laugh at scientists of the past because of wrong ideas like phlogiston. But we should be careful. It was a plausible theory and it did explain some things. Scientists did not adopt it because they were less intelligent than we are.

Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier began a one man revolution in the science of chemistry. Chemists said there were only four elements, earth, air, fire and water. Wrong! said Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier and he identified 33.¹⁰ Chemists had a host of beautiful but not very helpful names for various chemicals such as “butter of antimony”, “jovial bezoar”, and “sugar of lead”. Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier swept these all away and replaced them with the systematic names still used today. This revolutionary step enabled future chemists to go on to manipulate chemical symbols like algebra and so predict what would happen in chemical reactions.

But not everyone was willing to give up phlogiston. For around a hundred years it had been the scientific consensus. But the more knowledge advanced the more the theory had to be adapted to fit the facts. Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier complained :

... chemists have turned phlogiston into a vague principle, ... which consequently adapts itself to all the explanations for which it may be required. Sometimes this principle has weight, and sometimes it has not; sometimes it is free fire and sometimes it is fire combined with the earthy element; sometimes it passes through the pores of vessels; sometimes these are impervious to it; it explains both causticity and non-causticity, transparency and opacity, colours and their absence, it is a veritable Proteus¹¹ changing in form at every instant.

Something to think about

What would have happened if scientists had refused to give up the consensus idea of phlogiston even in the face of the facts? It would have been a disaster for science, hampering progress at every turn. The theory itself would have to become more and more amorphous¹² (as indeed was already happening) to prevent a point being reached where no further progress was possible in any discipline upon which the theory touched. Any scientists who ventured to question phlogiston's existence would have to be ruthlessly silenced. An enormous education program would be needed to keep belief in phlogiston alive. Ordinary people would begin to distrust the pronouncements of scientists.

The phlogiston consensus was eventually abandoned. After all, it had no impact on people's morals or way of life, only on the prestige of the scientists who had supported it. But what of a theory that has the whole of atheism resting on it? A theory that if let go of would leave society no alternative to belief in God? Would it prove more difficult to dislodge?¹³

10 Scientists have now identified many more elements. See the lesson for 1st November.

11 Greek sea god who could change his shape and form.

12 shapeless

13 We have such a theory today: evolution!