

MAN—BUILDER AND WRECKER*

A WORLD of chaos must have been a dull place for man to make his start in life. What he found when he began the journey is described in the Book of Genesis vividly and in shorter space than any of the scientists of the day have been able to produce. With little schooling in the arts of investigation, the ancient historian covered the transition from chaos to the essentials of order. A remarkable performance, once deeply appreciated but now regarded as wholly unsatisfactory as a scientific document.

Notwithstanding the knowledge of the superior person, it must be admitted that there was nothing much for man to destroy when he came upon the scene. Therefore, we may infer (if Professor Julian Huxley will permit such a breach of scientific etiquette) that there was no alternative for man but to produce and build. Can you

imagine the first human creature (whether he was really upright in stature or not) looking out upon the scene and saying to himself, "This means work"?

There was no humanitarian nearby to coddle him and no labor-saving appliances to make things easy for him. Indeed, we may infer there was no landlord or capitalist on the spot to provide labor for him. Strangely enough, he had to set to and work for himself, by himself, and I suppose, at first, even without the aid of a tool. What an extraordinary creature he must have been! Imagine! Landlord, politician, laborer, capitalist, inventor, and architect combined! There has never been such a person since that day. I do wish that Professor Huxley and his socially-minded friends would give a little more thought to the wonders of the period when man combined in himself all the economic categories which, as separate and contending elements, have brought so much trouble to the world.

When Dr. Huxley spoke to the American Association for the Advancement of Science two years ago, he told us that we had reached the evolutionary stage of the almost brainless dinosaurs, which vanished from the earth millions of years ago. Then he went on:

The present refugee problem and the distortion of truth in science and in propaganda of the nations involved in war indicate that the brains of totalitarian states' rulers are about at the stage of the giant mesozoic reptiles. They have might and power but do not know how to use it.

This is a sad reflection upon the work of man as a builder for, within Dr. Huxley's lifetime, he has expended his energies in many parts of the world in wrecking what he has built, without any purpose of a positive nature. Since the French Revolution, there have been so many wrecking adventures that the figures run into the hundreds. It is a sad story and, if the intention at the beginning was that man should be a builder, is it not time for some of the great scientists to tell us why he gave up that job and took to the business of demolishing what he had wrought?

Some authorities state that it has taken half a million years to reach the present stage which, according to other authorities, seems to reveal a tendency to revert to the original conditions. Half a million years, even in this day of astronomical figures, really is a long time but, no doubt, the Peking Man was not the earliest settler who was faced with the purposive task of bringing order out of chaos. Those who come after us, should they take any interest in studies

of anthropology and archaeology, will learn that the Peking Man was somewhat modern, for he had succeeded in making of himself an agriculturist and something of an inventor.

I know that it is not quite the thing, in lecturing to a body of scientists, to use the terms "purpose" and "intention" but then I am not a scientist, and I may be forgiven for transgressing when I merely remind my friends that the word "purpose" in connection with creation, which followed chaos, was once hallowed by some of the greatest thinkers; and that the word "intention," in that respect also, was accepted seriously even as late as my own boyhood.

If we begin with chaos and admit that there could have been little to destroy, then I think we are justified, in a philosophical sense, when we infer that man began as a builder. He not only had to raise himself physically and spiritually; at the same time he had to build a habitation. He found none ready made. Caves there were, but he did not make them. Nature provided such places for man and beast. It is just as well to reflect on this important matter in these days of destruction.

When I was a young man, a valuable series of works was published under the title of "The Contemporary Science Series." I found the vol-

umes of great interest to an amateur. Men who contributed to this unique library were Dr. Isaac Taylor,¹ Élie Reclus,² Professor Alfred Haddon,³ Dr. J. Deniker,⁴ and Professor Sergi.⁵ One of the most interesting of the books was a study of industry among primitive peoples. It was written by Otis T. Mason, Curator of the Department of Ethnology in the United States National Museum.⁶

The reason for mentioning "The Contemporary Science Series" in this place is that it coincides with an idea that came to me many years ago: Why should we not have a morphology of man, which would combine all the activities of the creature as well as his physical and spiritual development? We have a good many of the essential facts at hand already. But what is really required is an integration, a correlation of the data discovered in the various branches of the sciences. This is a work that might be undertaken by the anthropologist and the archaeologist working together. They would cover the entire field.

What has been attempted for history by Spengler in *The Decline of the West*⁷ gives us a hint of what might be done for man. However, before such a task could be entered upon with any hope of success, it would be necessary to interrelate

the departments of knowledge, not by breaking down the frontiers erected by the sciences, but by inviting the experts to unite in contributing their knowledge to one vast scheme embodying the history of man himself and his activities. What Spengler did for history surely can be done for man. If one individual can produce such a work as *The Decline of the West*, what could many individuals do when charged with the same dynamic impulse that impelled Spengler in producing his cathedraic work?

I shall be reminded that there have been innumerable books, given to us in recent years, in which authors have attempted to unify many separate departments of knowledge. I could name several that have been published during the past twenty years but, although these books are good and useful, not one attempts to portray man as the central figure of history. I am seeking the work which will do for man what Lange,⁸ in his monumental history, did for materialism.

First, let us dispense with Aristotle's political animal and place man in his functional capacity as an economic animal who, through economic necessity, has produced the wonders of the world. A start has been made in this direction by anthropologists and archaeologists. The discoveries at Choukoutien led Professor Franz Weiden-

reich of the Peking Union Medical College to declare that "the real beginning of the history of human culture must, with incontestable certainty, be a good deal older than we thought before."⁹

In *The Birth of China*, a work written by Dr. Herrlee Glessner Creel, Instructor in Chinese History and Language at the University of Chicago, I find a most illuminating passage that describes the conditions under which the Peking Man lived and, at the same time, the economic and cultural activities of the creature. Dr. Creel says:

Speaking in the most general terms, we can divide late Neolithic culture in north China into three types. The first has comparatively little to distinguish it from that basic type of Neolithic civilization which spread itself, so widely and so mysteriously, over most of the known world, including America as well as Eurasia. *The men of this civilization hunted and fished, but they were primarily agriculturalists.* They raised millet, and possibly other grains and vegetables. They made meal, grinding it on "mealing-stones." The pig and the dog are the only domestic animals which they knew in the earlier period; large numbers of both were raised for their meat. Like Neolithic men everywhere they made tools and weapons, chiefly knives and axes, of stone which they ground to a smooth surface and polished. They used the bow and arrow, wove bas-

kets and cloth, and sewed with bone needles. They made a great deal of pottery. In the earlier period most of it was of rather poor quality and greyish in colour; designs, sometimes of no little beauty, were often pressed into the wet clay.¹⁰ (*italics mine*)

Here, in this statement, we find an epitome of the scheme of a more general knowledge than is usually revealed by the departmental scientist. This touches the economic, the inventive, and the artistic activities of early man. Indeed, it gives to the word culture a far deeper significance than is usual.

In another work (little known to the people of this country) I gather an understanding of the physical and spiritual development of man, which is somewhat new in our literature. This work, *The Dawn of the Human Mind, a Study of Palaeolithic Man*, is by Dr. R. R. Schmidt.¹¹ For years I have been curious to learn why and how this strange creature—man—developed into a builder of extraordinary genius and power. Many times I have wondered how it was possible for the person pictured by the anthropologists to shape himself physically as an Apollo Belvedere and, at the same time, produce by brain and hand things of eternal beauty. Here are one or two passages I should like to bring to you from Dr. Schmidt's book:

But the forms of external material culture are only the expression of the fashion of the soul within. The flame must be watched, the fire must be fed. This calls imperatively for a concentration of the senses; and the new fundamental impulse of *care* is awakened. Man alone *cares* for the morrow—food, fire, work, undertakings, these join link to link, in a chain which never ends. This is what life demands of man, whose being is now set upon its pedestal; it is the higher tension of self-consciousness, slowly gaining force.¹²

Further on, he deals with the relationship of the tool to the hand, and says:

This first shaped tool is proportioned to its prototype, the human hand (proportion of length to breadth about 1:2). From a correspondence with the human hand, with its rounded base and the projecting point of the finger, it derives its pointed oval-form. To the hollow palm of the hand corresponds the thickened body of the tool. Here we find ourselves in the presence of a morphological law: the first *shaping*, in handicraft as in art, is based upon the discriminative outlook of man upon his surroundings. Thus the first formed tool, with its complete adaptability to the grasp, is the antitype of the hand and of its efficiency. . . .¹³

One of the most significant passages in this work concerns the spiritual struggles of early man and suggests how deeply embedded in the

soul of man are the first clamorings of his relationship to the supernatural:

From the depths of the primeval soul there rises the world of myth, the illimitable "knowledge by revelation" possessed by mankind. As years passed in their thousands, and the experiences which they brought were contemplated, the foundations of accepted forms of belief were laid, which expressed a creative conception of the Divine. . . .¹⁴

Here we have, in the three works I have mentioned, all the elements for such a work on man as I have suggested. There is not one vital, essential factor overlooked.

May I be permitted to say that we have narrowed the scope of our researches to such an extent that the catholic layman who is seeking a general knowledge of life's activities finds that many of the departments have become cloisters which only the initiated may enter. There is no passage that I know of which leads from anthropology to archaeology or, indeed, vice versa. This condition forces the amateur to imagine that the wonderful reports of the scientists are for the elect, for the savant, and that the uninitiated may go play. I know that the specialist fears popular works on precious subjects. Popularization is, to my mind, all that has been said against it. It has raised a school of sciolists who

patter their smatterings with a glibness that is most embarrassing. But I am not suggesting here that the work of the anthropologist and the archaeologist combined should be popularized.

Turning again for a moment to history, may I ask if it would be possible to reveal man, the builder and the wrecker, in some such way as *The Cambridge Medieval History*¹⁵ presents the Middle Ages. In that wonderful work of scholars chosen from many seats of learning in Europe, we have a complete panorama of what is called "the Christian era." Scores of men combined their efforts to produce this imperishable document.

The other night I spent a most enjoyable hour in rereading John Burnet's introduction to his *Early Greek Philosophy*, and I found this exceedingly interesting statement:

. . . It was only after the coming of the Achaians that the Greeks were able to establish their settlements on the coast of Asia Minor, which had been closed to them by the Hittites, and there was no traditional background there at all. . . .¹⁶

If the learned Greek of St. Andrews means that there was no Greek traditional background, I assume he is on safe ground, but if, on the other hand, he means that there was no Hittite tradi-

tional background, I think it is a pity that he passed away before the discovery and interpretation of the Hittite archives.¹⁷

To my mind, it will be necessary, in a synthesis, such as I suggest, to revise and amend the whole view now accepted of the part taken by religion in man's cultural development.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the term "religion" has lost its ancient meaning and it is used by many authorities in place of the words "cults," "rites," and "sects." Religion, however, is of far earlier origin than the priest. For a period of something like 400 years—let us say from Cicero to the time of Lactantius—the word was a subject of keen controversy. No thinker defined it clearly until Lactantius set it in a crystal so bright that no one can mistake its meaning. He says: "Religion is that which binds man to an invisible Creator."

Of course, the definition was not accepted by the Early Fathers because they were quick to realize that cults, rites, sects, and priests were quite unnecessary for the truly religious man. The definition of Lactantius, however, was strictly in accordance with the view of Jesus, but it did not suit the makers of churches who based their missionary work of conversion from paganism on the assumption of the necessity of a Messiah and a Redeemer.

Now what has this to do with archaeology? I suggest that it goes straight to the core of the cultural beginnings of man's springtime. The way I reason it out: it leads not only to the shaping of the first altar but to the reasons why man erected it. We cannot dissociate the altar as a symbol of man's spiritual development from his other achievements in architecture. I admit that the classical writers were more deeply interested in this subject than we are. No matter where we look, among the poets of the ancient civilizations, we find this striking note, repeated over and over again, that man's first religious observance was one of thanksgiving to a beneficent Creator. I could quote scores of instances from the records, but let this one from Plutarch suffice:

For always sun and moon and the remaining constellations moving in their orbits under the earth rise alike as to tints, and even as to measures, both as to identity of spaces and time. Therefore, those who established the tradition of the worship concerned with the gods did bring it forward to us through three forms: first, through the form of nature; second, through the form of legends; and third, from that form which has derived its evidence from (communal usages) laws. And the nature-form (of worship) is taught by the philosopher, and the legendary (or mythical) by the poets, and the statutory is enacted by each commonwealth.

In recent years the work of the anthropologist and the archaeologist has proved the correctness of the observations of Plutarch. We know now the established tradition in popular worship was firmament (Father) and earth (Mother), because the former poured down water, and so had the disposition of seeds and brought them to birth. Indeed, the Stoics held that the idea of God, set alight in the souls of men, came from their contemplation of the sublime order and majesty in nature.

If my brief analysis of this question is approximately right, it will be necessary, in the synthesis that I suggest, to make a new beginning. We must do what we are doing now in anthropology and archaeology; we must go back, far back, for we know that man is older now than when Frazer was working on fears, cults, rites, and sects. We want to seek the hinterland of the myth.

In all probability, I shall be reminded that when Moses led the Israelites from bondage, he found it necessary to install a priest. That was so; but it should be remembered that the occasion called for one. The children of Israel had been a long time in Egypt—a land of priests, and it was something of a wrench to take them suddenly on a long journey and leave all the priests behind. At any rate, it should be observed that Aaron was

not by any means an ecclesiastical success. Be that as it may, Moses came very late upon the scene to make the most glorious attempt the records reveal to unite man to an invisible Creator. The first altar was a token of thanksgiving for benefits received. These benefits were the sustenance of man which came, through his toil, from the earth.

In passing, I must remark that some of the most interesting revelations that have come from the reports of the archaeologists in recent years are the verifications of the foundations of Bible history. The discoveries at Jericho, Megiddo, and other Palestinian sites have done more to restore interest in the historical narratives of the Bible than any of the services rendered by the ecclesiastics themselves. I often wonder what my old friend, John Robertson, who wrote *Pagan Christs*, would say if he were living today and knew of the work that had been done by the universities of Liverpool and Chicago, a work of substantiation of the historical narratives of the Bible.

The question of when man became a warrior and wrecker has not been determined, and it seems to me that it is necessary for us to know when and why this change took place. It is not sufficient that he became a destroyer when he became a "political animal," to use Aristotle's

phrase. And it is not satisfying to say that the state was born of conquest. When we turn to the *Eddas*, the *Gathas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Vedas*, and other oriental poems, we find innumerable references to the attacks of marauders upon pastoral communities and the desolated folk bound in servitude.¹⁹ The first appeal in the *Gathas* is for justice:

On me comes the assault of wrath and of violent power, the blow of desolation, audacious insolence, and (thievish) might. None other pasture-giver have I than you, therefore do ye teach me good (tillage) for the fields (my only hope of welfare)!

This piteous cry for justice is echoed again and again in the oriental literature. Indeed, I do not know any ancient poem without it. Therefore, a new task presents itself to us, and we should not neglect it. Dr. Garstang, in a remarkable passage in his book, *The Story of Jericho*, in dealing with the culture of the Neolithic community, said:

. . . It seems as though warfare was so little known as to call for no special weapons or organization. Truly this was in those days the "Land of God"; and it was so named by the Egyptians from earliest times.²⁰

Now this enlightening statement seems to me to corroborate the ideas set forth by Hesiod and

Pindar, to name only two ancient poets, who clung to the memory of a race of men who knew not strife. The Greeks believed in a world of fair delight where people "dwelt in continual bliss, and enjoyed a never-ending springtide." The Hyperboreans were "exempt from disease, old age, and death."

Call them fancies—what you will—but we cannot get away from the fact that these dreams were a heritage which came down to all the old races from the earliest times. When was the dream broken and why and how was it shattered? In some of the old western sagas there is a strong hint given out that it came with the shaping of the sword. In an old poem, the name of which I cannot recall, there is a reference to the trumpet calling men from their work in the fields. Whether it was the sword or the trumpet—whatever it was—it marks a time in the history of man when he became both builder and wrecker, a producer and a destroyer. This reminds me of a story in the *Percy Anecdotes*:

Plutarch tells us of a magpie, belonging to a barber at Rome, which could imitate to a nicety almost every word it heard. Some trumpets happened one day to be sounded before the shop, and for a day or two afterwards the magpie was quite mute, and seemed pensive and melancholy. All who

knew it were greatly surprised at its silence; and it was supposed that the sound of the trumpets had so stunned it as to deprive it at once of both voice and hearing. It soon appeared, however, that this was far from being the case; for, says Plutarch, the bird had been all the time occupied in profound meditation, studying how to imitate the sound of the trumpets; and when at last master of it, the magpie, to the astonishment of all its friends, suddenly broke its long silence by a perfect imitation of the flourish of trumpets it had heard, observing with the greatest exactness all the repetitions, stops, and changes. *The acquisition of this lesson had, however, exhausted the whole of the magpie's stock of intellect, for it made it forget everything it had learned before.*

I find this singularly appropriate for, undoubtedly since man has learned to blow the martial trumpet, he has forgotten many of the lessons of his early struggles with nature.

I wonder what Sir Thomas Browne, the author of *Urn Burial*, would say if he were alive today. He imagined there was little to be gained in uncovering antiquities of man's buried past. It is certainly worth while for archaeologists and anthropologists to turn to Browne again and read his inimitable work which contains some of the finest English ever penned. He says:

When the Funerall pyre was out, and the last valediction over, men took a lasting adieu of their

interred Friends, little expecting the curiosity of future ages should comment upon their ashes, and, having no old experience of the duration of their Reliques, held no opinion of such after-considerations.²¹

How wonderful it is that the anthropologists and the archaeologists are making dreams come true! They are revitalizing myths; indeed, they are calling the soul of the past back to us. The threads of broken memory of the race are being picked up and passed on to us again, restoring in our minds the memory that is really our life, our belief in the imperishable goodness of a Creator who has lavishly provided the means for the sustenance of all. If we can determine when and how, as it is possible in the case of Jericho and Mersin, man's pastoral Elysium was brutally destroyed and the yoke of servitude was placed upon him, we shall have taken a great step toward reconstructing his history so that it might be understood by the layman. Let us get over the cowardly attitude of sneering at economic ideals contained in the myths and remember that man is the myth-maker and his memory, generation after generation, millennium after millennium, is the channel through which the myth flows and animates his soul.

The searchers in the wreckage of man's defeats will unearth the glories of his triumphs, and it is to them the students of the future must look for the main threads of the story of man's destiny. Fate sets the seal of vanity upon his hopes for an earthly Elysium, the boundaries of which were often within reach in his dream periods. The Isles of the Blest, the shores of the Hyperboreans were fancies that sprang from hours when joy was so close to him that he could warm himself in the sunshine of happy notions. Even when the melancholy of withering hope set in to blight the Greek yearning for love and beauty, Hesiod turned his mind's eye back to the memory of past days and he wrote of "a golden race of mortal men who lived like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief, who had all good things, dwelling in ease and peace upon their lands."

No matter where we search in the ancient poems, whether of China, India, Egypt, Persia, Greece, or Rome, we find the same memory lingering in the thought of the folk. The Royal Regulations in the *Lí Kí* declare: "Then the people had rest in their dwellings, did joyfully what they had to do. . . ." ²²

But of all the memories of Elysium to which

man clung, where will we find a finer one than that in the sixty-fifth chapter of Isaiah?

Is it not remarkable how this idea of an Elysium dwelt in the memories of races which had little or no means of communication with one another?

"Memory is life," Butler says in *Life and Habit*,²³ and now that we know more (thanks to Butler) of the inspiration of Lamarck—that sense of need is the primary impulse of the creature—we should turn our thoughts back, back to the halcyon springs of civilizations in which men "dwelt in ease and peace upon their lands." It is not enough to uncover the monuments of man's autumn days for they are fatal evidence of his decline. They appear when he has passed the summer of his best years. The greater the palace, the deeper the poverty.

Socrates in the *Republic* shows clearly how the de luxe state is the beginning of the end. Luxury is the sign of decay. Yet some of our very young lawyers scoff at the notion of the Roman jurists who were searchers for "a type of perfect law." They do not know the tale revealed in the labors of the archaeologist and anthropologist concerning man's primitive beginnings and his gradual ascent to betterment, then to be followed by a slow, despairing decline which at last over-

whelms all and buries rich and poor in desert graves. This story of his joys and sorrows is for those who delve into his past, who uncover the history of his rise and fall, who translate into characters we can read the petitions of his tragic career. Alas, we have forgotten his cherished dreams, his hopes for that fair land.

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

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¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

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¹⁷ Garstang, *The Hittite Empire* (New York: Richard R. Smith Inc., 1930); *The Land of the Hittites* (London, 1911).

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¹⁹ "The Sacred Books of the East," trans. by various Oriental Scholars, and edited by F. Max Müller (49 vols.; Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1879-94); esp. vols. IV, XV, XXIII, XXVII, XXVIII, and XXXI.

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²² "Sacred Books . . .," *The Sacred Books of China: The Li Ki*, trans. by James Legge, XXVII, Bk. III (The Royal Regulations), Sec. III, p. 230, par. 15.

²³ *Works of Samuel Butler*, The Shrewsbury Edition, ed. by Henry Festing Jones and A. T. Bartholomew (London: Jonathan Cape; New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1923), IV.