

WORLD HISTORY

“THE new linking up of all parts of the world inevitably affects our view of history. In a sense, world history has just begun. Before, it was the history of more or less isolated groups: now, we must think in wider terms, we must emerge from our nation-caves into the wider world of to-day and to-morrow.” In these admirable sentences the authors of the most recent *World History*¹ sum up their survey of human history from palæolithic beginnings to the Manchurian question, with which they bring it to a close: most fittingly, as they say, “since of all the problems of world history that of the relations of East and West, of European and Asiatic peoples, is perhaps the most important for the future of mankind.”

Messrs. R. Flenley and W. N. Weech have indeed provided us with a *World History* in a single volume, which compares most favourably with any similar attempt made hitherto. It not only tells the whole story—which is not merely one of conquests and defeats, but of cultural development, social changes, artistic and scientific achievements—but it tells it impartially and tells it remarkably well: concise and encyclopædic though it be, it can be read with real pleasure and sustained interest from cover to cover.² Yet, judged in the light of the book’s concluding sentences, above quoted, it must be frankly admitted that it has failed: whatever the guiding idea, with which the authors started, in actual realization, the sub-title has usurped the place of the title, and *World History* after all is only made to tell “The Growth of Western Civilization.” Of the twelve parts, into

¹ *World History. The Growth of Western Civilization.* By R. Flenley and W. N. Weech. (London, 1936. J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd.; 12/6.)

² Add to this the 300 odd illustrations in tone and line and in full colour, the 32 pages of coloured maps and the time-chart: and it will be admitted that, in presenting to the reader this book of 800 pages in handy format for the price of 12/6, the publishers have in a remarkable manner seconded the literary and historical skill of the authors.

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which the book is divided, only the first deals with the "Kingdoms of the East": thereafter Europe becomes the sole concern. India, for instance, after a bare mention of Asoka, disappears altogether from view, until it is, quite parenthetically, referred to again in connection with Moslem expansion: thereafter it must content itself to come into the story as an objective of European imperialism—and even so, less space is devoted to it than, for example, to Canada.

And the first part itself is by far the least satisfactory. Again, the "Conclusion" states the truth most admirably, that "the great increase in our knowledge of earlier civilizations through archaeology, and the development of sciences such as anthropology, have reduced the relative importance of recent western history in the story of the whole of mankind": but the whole point of view of this first part of the book is curiously antiquated and quite unaffected by the results of the latest excavations and indeed runs counter to the whole trend of that new science, historical ethnology. One is amazed to find that Mr. Weech still repeats the outworn Victorian view that "the primitive mind is crushed beneath the terrors which haunt it" and that "man is a quarrelsome animal, who inherits the fighting instincts from his blood-stained past." Well as this sort of thing used to fit in with the preconceived notions of the evolutionism of a past century, it is a commonplace to-day that there is no evidence whatever warranting such a view, but that, quite on the contrary, the true Primitive, i.e. man in the food-collecting stage, anterior to civilization, is a harmless, sociable, joyous and childlike creature, such as trained observers have shown us the Semangs, the Ituri Pygmies, the Patagonians, etc., still to be. But, as a recent writer says, "a socially convenient misstatement dressed up as a Natural Law takes long to die."

As a consequence, popular fancy still pictures "the cave-man as clubbing his neighbour and bullying his family, until some son is strong enough to kick him out and take his wives," instead of realizing the manifest, common-sense fact that "man is a highly social animal, sensitive, suggestible and affectionate, one who requires co-operative help,

moral support, praise, advice, encouragement and criticism." The quotations we have made are from another recent publication, Mr. Gerald Heard's *The Source of Civilization*,³ the main thesis of which, as a matter of fact, we consider to be little short of preposterous: this however by no means invalidates the correctness of the passages quoted, any more than our strictures on one-twelfth of Messrs. Flenley and Weech's book contradict our high praise of the other eleven-twelfths.

Mr. Heard is absolutely right in saying that man is not warlike by nature, any more than any animal is warlike. No animal species tries to exterminate its own kind: though fighting bouts between individuals, especially at the mating season, do of course occur. War is something altogether unnatural, abnormal, pathological. It is the result of a nervous disorder, "a neurosis or abnormal state of mind, whereby the individual shows aversion to, fear or hatred of human life," a disease which has recently been labelled "anthropophobia."⁴

Moreover, the latest excavations in India, Iran and elsewhere prove the comparatively late emergence of war in human protohistory. All the evidence goes to show that war is a human invention, like any other, a phenomenon of social degeneration setting in about 3000 B.C. and diffused with growing rapidity in the succeeding two millenia throughout the world. Since then war has ceased to be epidemic and has become endemic, changing characteristics with changing civilizations. Its origin goes back to raids made by the nomadic horsemen of the Steppes on the pacific peasant societies of the Archaic Civilization type, which had developed along the valleys of tropical and sub-tropical rivers, such as the Indus, Nile, Euphrates and Tigris, etc., where the periodical flooding of these river-basins had given rise to the artificial cultivation of cereals, man utilizing at first

³ London, 1935; pp. 431. Jonathan Cape; 12/6. To put its contention into a nutshell, Mr. Heard believes that only Yoga practices can make the world safe for—Peace.

⁴ Dr. C. A. Bentley in the *British Medical Journal* of March 21, 1936.

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the natural inundations and later reproducing them artificially by way of irrigation. Man thus had taken the immense step forward from food-collecting to food-producing, and thereby from primitive to civilized stage. His mental outlook changed accordingly and became increasingly that of a magical fertility cult: a Mother-Goddess, the Earth, who nourished all her children and periodically slew them. These latter were in a most real sense *adscripti glebae*: human society as a whole was merely a function of the Great Mother—becoming ever more complex, specialized, efficient and civilized, yet being all that only in the sense of a human termitary, centring around its Queen, recking nought of the individuals that compose it. Thus ever more efficiently producing food, this archaic society soon produced a surplus, delivered to and kept by the Great Mother at her shrine which formed the centre of the whole community. This surplus fed specialists, who plied handicrafts, instead of having themselves to produce food, and who thus supplied—primarily for the cult of the Great Lady—the products of building, weaving, pottery, metal-work and all the rest of the arts and crafts, which in due course of time were put to more utilitarian uses in the everyday life of everybody.⁵

It is in this manner too that the domestication of animals, from being sacred to the Goddess, became a means of serving utilitarian ends and was put ever more widely to profane uses. Finally, the surplus of food produced enabled the stewards of the Goddess, i.e. the priests, to barter part of this surplus for other goods, which hangers-on from outside might be glad to offer. These people might be primitives from the jungle, who had specialized in the chase and thus developed another and rather inferior type of civilization; they might be nomads from the Steppes, who had solved the problem of food-production by making themselves the mas-

⁵ Mr. Christopher Dawson in his *Age of the Gods* (London, 1933. Sheed & Ward) has most successfully described and analyzed this Archaic Civilization. Curiously enough, Mr. Weech never mentions this outstanding example of *haute vulgarisation*, when expounding the origins of human civilization: which is all the more strange, as Mr. Flenley on his part does not fail to recommend for further reading Mr. Dawson's *Making of Europe*.

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ters of flocks and herds, whose milk and meat would provide their sustenance and capital. Necessarily roaming the steppes in search of fresh pastures, these nomads had not been able to develop any high civilization as had their rich sedentary cousins in the river-valleys. Seasonal migrations might bring them into closer proximity at times, but always at first they would be a sort of poor relatives, a bit of a nuisance, like our modern Gipsies, and, like them, not drawing too sharp a line between barter and theft. The change came, when newcomers in Central Asia, arriving from the Sarmatian steppes, turned the horse into their general means of transportation, which incidentally enabled them to thieve on a far larger and more ambitious scale, and to prey systematically and safely on the sedentary folk of the Archaic Civilization.

The defenceless Indus Civilization seems to have been completely destroyed by an onslaught of these "Aryan" brigands from Central Asia: in the Ganges Valley they became merged into the existing society, profoundly modifying it by this symbiosis, which placed the whilom brigands on top of the peasant society, as ruling caste of professional warriors. Their "cushy job" was naturally envied by those nomads who still remained behind on the steppes and as a consequence they duly organized further raids, to wrest from this caste of fellow-warriors their monopoly of living on the peasantry. And so the "profession" of war was duly established and the attempts of one set of cavaliers trying to oust another one has become the main theme of human history. For if the Archaic Peasant Civilization had spread from Middle and Near East along the Danube right into Europe, it was everywhere flanked by hordes of barbarians, who descended upon them like voracious locusts, as soon as they had acquired the technique of war. Thus the Kassites, the Mitanni, the men of Gutium preyed upon and finally militarized the civilizations of Mesopotamia; the Old Kingdom of Egypt went down before the Hyksos; Anatolia and Syria became the domain of the Hittite invader; the Minoan civilization was smashed up by the forbears of the later Greeks. Where civilization recovered, it was no longer pacific, but

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was one that had made of war an integral part of itself. But always war bred more war; the success of one invader provoked fresh invasions. The Macedonian Empire mops up the Persian; the Roman Empire Macedon; the Germanic supersedes the Roman. There are unsuccessful attempts at world-empire such as those of Arabs, Turks, Huns, Mongols: but always the "glittering prizes" of the war-game go on urging one set of adventurers after the other to pursue it.

Yet it would be wrong not to realize that the lawlessness of these robber-bands did let in some fresh air into the stifling atmosphere of the servile state—highly civilized, highly efficient, yet also utterly inhuman. The law, the authority, the citizenship that it produced, would have turned into monstrosities had the martial mentality of the nomad invaders not balanced them by their characteristic traits of personal loyalty, freedom and comradeship. How to harmonize these two concepts of Freedom and Authority—that is the agelong problem and, one might say, the deeper background of all history of the last five thousand years.

As for that fateful human, not to say diabolical, invention, War, it cannot be, it will never be, abolished, as long as there are people "inside," defending themselves against attacks from people "outside." Only when all the people of the earth form a single unit, ruled by an authority superior to them, will war cease. A *contrat social* of Sovereign States, pretending to be independent, certainly cannot do it.

World History in the true sense, showing that Humanity has ever been one, whether consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, could do much to prepare us for the psychological orientation which alone would make a Federation of the World, a Parliament of Man, a practical possibility. Alas, it yet remains unwritten.

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