Interpreting the Orient*

BY JAMES H. BREASTED

IN undertaking his monumental universal history, begun in 1880, the great Ranke regarded the origins of human society as no longer recoverable and the ancient civilizations of the Near East as wholly unconnected with the main stream of history. Since Ranke's huge work, however, there have been several important efforts to produce a comprehensive history of civilization beginning with the earliest surviving traces of man. Notable among these have been the great series of Cambridge histories begun by Lord Acton and still unfinished; and a similar series on human evolution (L'Évolution de l'Humanité) by French scholars. These surveys of human development have been cooperative efforts by a group of men each having special knowledge of some particular civilization. Such composite works by individual specialists, while they gain substantially in authoritative character, are seriously lacking in correlation and are not written from a common harmonious point of view. As a result they do not present a coherent survey of the rise of man.

Keystone

JAMES H. BREASTED (*Right*)
With President Robert M. Hutchins of the University of Chicago, opening the new Oriental Institute.

Eduard Meyer, my old friend of many years, used to condemn without mercy the narrowness of specialists and to insist on the inspiring and broadening value of wide and inclusive surveys of human life. It was his belief that no historian could gain adequate breadth of vision without undertaking a sweeping survey of human development everywhere. I recall very vividly, apropos of Hermann Schneider's "The Civilization and Thought of the Ancient Egyptians," his remarks on the kind of limitation and error inevitable in the work of a non-Orientalist approaching a great oriental civilization for the first time and unable to read its original records. Schneider was then and still is a professor of philosophy at Leipzig. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Dr. Durant, himself a philosopher, has likewise been led to undertake an ambitious history of civilization. Although he draws heavily on Schneider and is much influenced by him, Durant is without Schneider's acquaintance with the technique of the process by which such a historical treatise must be produced. Nevertheless Durant is even more ambitious and vastly more detailed than Schneider. For his book is a treatise on "Our Oriental Heritage" containing 1049 pages. This ponderous and detailed work, covering the Far East from the Pekin Man to the Japanese conquest of Manchukuo, and the Near East from the appearance of man down to Alexander the Great, is but the first in a proposed series of five volumes intended to form a comprehensive history of civilization, treating all the important civilizations. A student of history recognizes at once that the elaborate effort to include so much detail has involved the author in disastrous difficulties.

To produce a work of this scope and character is a noble, but at the same time, a very daring ambition. In his effort to gratify this ambition Dr. Durant has my full sympathy. I can hardly believe, however, that his experience was sufficient to make him fully aware of the overwhelming difficulties confronting any historian with the courage to undertake such a colossal task. The possibilities for frequent and disastrous error in detail are infinite, for the enormous bulk of the facts and materials which must be mastered demands penetrating and persistent analysis combined with mature contemplation for long periods of time before conclusions can be reached which will enable the historian to draw successfully a great interpretative picture.

Let us take a few examples, beginning with so simple a matter as the place of the horse in early civilization.

> Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

This admonition from the moral code of the early Hebrews, which some of us older ones learned in Sunday school as one of the "Ten Commandments," makes it pretty clear that, among the early Hebrews, one's neighbor possessed an ox and an ass, but no horse. While the horse had occupied an important place in human life in Western Asia for over a thousand years when this commandment was written, the animal was used solely in warfare and did not become a beast of burden for carrying merchandise until the Christian era, far more than a thousand years after the appearance of this commandment. But in "Our Oriental Heritage" we are told regarding early Egypt that "on land goods were transported by human muscle, later by donkeys, later by horses." It was because the horse served only in the king's chariotry and

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* *THE STORY OF CIVILIZATION. I. Our Oriental Heritage. By Will Durant. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1935. $5.*

THE FURYS
By JAMES HANLEY
Reviewed by George Dangerfield

MODERN CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION
By HARRY SODERMAN and J. J. O'CONNELL
Reviewed by Courtney Ryley Cooper

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COLOSSI OF RAMSES II, AT THE CAVE TEMPLE OF ABU SIMBEL
Photo by Ewing Galloway, from "Our Oriental Heritage"

cavalry that he was bred and maintained in royal stables. For this reason he was not listed in the Hebrew commandment along with the ox and the ass among an humble neighbor's household animals. Never in the early world was it true that "goods were transported . . . by horses."

A catalogue of the appurtenances of daily material life in the ancient Orient forms a very long list and one with which the investigator does not easily familiarize himself. Textiles and clothing alone are a very extensive subject. Dr. Durant finds "our oldest historical reference to cotton in Herodotus," who mentions "certain wild trees that bear wool." It has been a matter of common knowledge, long ago incorporated in our current histories, that cotton was introduced into Assyria nearly three centuries earlier than the reference to it by Herodotus, as shown by the great Assyrian king Sennacherib's statement: "trees that bear fleeces they sheared and they shredded it for garments." This inscription of Sennacherib was published over twenty-five years ago.

The introduction of metal casting is based by Dr. Durant on Rickard in his "Man and Metals," where he cites as evidence certain paintings in the tomb of "Rekh-mara." Dr. Durant dates this evidence as "toward 2000 B.C.," thus placing an important event like the introduction of metal casting over five hundred years too early, for my old friend Rickard correctly states that this tomb belongs in the reign of Thutmose III, which has long been known to have begun about 1500 B.C.

Reverting again to transportation, we have long known that the width of ancient Egyptian ships was regularly one-third of their length; but the author tells us that "ships a hundred feet long by half a hundred feet wide plied the Nile and the Red Sea," although he later quotes a translation from the original Egyptian tale of Sindebad showing that this adventurer's ship was "180 feet in length and 60 feet in breadth." These two passages are only fifteen pages apart in "Our Oriental Heritage."

We are told by Mr. Durant in the matter of buildings that "by the Twelfth Dynasty the pyramid had ceased to be the fashionable form of sepulture," although all the kings of this dynasty without exception were buried in pyramids. Regarding the front of one of the most famous tombs along the Nile, we are informed that its owner had chosen "the quieter form of a colonnade built into the mountain side." The entire tomb is hewn into rock of the mountain side and contains no built masonry whatever.

These few examples will illustrate how easy it is to go astray even in the simplest matters of material life. In less tangible but more important aspects of human life, misunderstanding and error are much more likely. The errors cited above are clear indications of hurried production, which allowed no time for careful study. Thus in the study of the architecture of the Nile as compared with that of the Tigris and Euphrates we look in vain for such a simple contrast as the fact that the colonnades supporting the roof of an Egyptian building gave the architect an opportunity to treat the *interior void*, whereas the Babylonian architect with his panels, pilasters, and recesses, treated the *exterior of the mass*. In the summary estimate of Egyptian architecture we find simply a series of superficial terms like "grandeur, sublimity, majesty, power." There has been no time to make any penetrating analyses.

The same is true of developing characteristics in the successive stages of human life and government along the Nile. The speed with which the work has had to be done has prevented mature study and ripe conclusions. On the surface this haste is at once betrayed by such inconsistencies as the information in summarizing the life of Ramses II, that at his death he had been "alive for ninety-nine years" whereas on page 214 we find the statement that Ramses II "yielded up his life in 1225 B.C., aged *ninety*." We are therefore not surprised that an historical estimate of Ramses II is summed up in the phrase "one of the most fascinating figures in history." It is more difficult to understand how it was possible to refer to the time "when the Moors marched into it [Egypt], built Cairo (ca. 650 A.D.) with the ruins of Memphis." It may be supposed that we are to read "Arabs" for "Moors," whose home in northwest Africa would have been rather inconveniently remote for an invasion of Egypt.

These are important historical matters. I have not attempted to enumerate the passages in which a wall inscription becomes a roll of papyrus, or a mine in Sinai becomes "a little hamlet in Syria." It is curious, however, that the tomb of an Egyptian noble named Nakht or Nacht, and designated in a German publication as "Grab des Nacht," should be cited by Mr. Durant under one of the illustrations as the "Tomb of Night."

Under these circumstances I have found the writing of this review a very ungracious and unwelcome task; for it is not a little distressing to criticize thus the work of a writer of unusual literary gifts who has, seemingly all unawares, involved himself in such insuperable difficulties. An examination of the sources employed makes it evident that no other result was possible. As far as statements of fact are concerned, the entire treatment is a compilation drawn from the treatises of other men. If these had always been wisely chosen and the author's charming and genial comments had therefore been more successfully documented, his book would have been a safer record of the state of modern knowledge of early man. We find among the author's sources De Morgan, an archeologizing engineer, but quoted as an authority on languages and hieroglyphics! Rickard, an able metallurgical engineer and an excellent authority on technical processes, appears as the source for early oriental dates, all of which Rickard had of course drawn from the Orientalists. All dates taken by Durant from Rickard's book on "Man and Metals" are, of course, employed at *third hand.*

In the same way Baikie, an English clergyman now dead, who was in his time an amiable and entertaining dabbler in archeology, and Weigall, whose writings gradually shifted into the world of fiction, are conscientiously cited among the author's sources. The tragic end of Ikhnaton, the earliest monotheist, as described in Dr. Durant's narrative, is not fiction based on original sources, but fiction based on fiction. It is quite evident that the author has no clear idea how such books are produced. He offers an impor-

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Twelve Good Men and True

THE JURY. By Gerald Bullett. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1935. $2.50.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

HERE is a book clever, but more than clever, ingenious, the tale of a murder trial which though it holds its tension taut to the end, revolves less about the mystery attaching to its crime than around the psychological reactions of its characters. Writing of it, the critic must proceed warily less indiscretion betray the surprise Mr. Bullett springs in the last chapter and so destroy the effectiveness of a conclusion as neat as it is unexpected. It is so rarely that an author conceives a situation at once so fresh and plausible as that which brings "The Jury" to a close, or clothes in so much body and substance a theme which the detective story writer has long since rendered trite, that it would be a pity indeed to detract from its force by giving in more than scantiest outline the incidents of the tale.

In brief it is the story of Roderick Strood, his marital relations, and the murder charge on which he is brought to trial because of them. Mr. Bullett opens his book with a portrayal of Roderick's wife philandering before she has realized her husband's defection from her, and advances from that to a succession of brief, unrelated episodes, vignettes of personality and bits of life history which suddenly swing into focus as characterizations of the men and women who compose the jury sitting in trial on Roderick Strood and of the friends who support him in that ordeal. Each of these short narratives, complete in itself, has a life independent of the life of the novel, yet each is a logical part of the pattern of the story.

GERALD BULLETT

All of us who have followed murder trials in the newspapers must have wondered at times what passes in the minds of the juries that try them, what personal experiences color their reactions and condition their judgments.It is here presented with complete plausibility in the conversation and comments of the mixed group which debates the problem of guilt as it is to be drawn from the arguments of lawyers and the charge of the jurist. Mr. Bullett sets forth with humor and subtlety the attitude of his "twelve good men and true" (two of his men are women). He is adroit, convincing, and impressive, holding his material admirably in hand, turning the spotlight now on one person, now on another, never allowing the prisoner to lose the center of the stage and yet reflecting him through the eyes of the jury.

There is sound psychology in this story, and there are sympathy and understanding. A book that holds the attention steadily fascinated by interest of plot and uncertainty of outcome, "The Jury" remains in the memory by virtue of excellent craftsmanship, and by something beyond craftsmanship—originality.

Revising Scripture

SOLOMON, MY SON! By John Erskine. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1935. $2.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

SOLOMON may have been a great and wise king but he was a puzzled young man, and Abishag was the young virgin the doctors had brought to warm old King David who was beyond warming. Pharoah's daughter was one of Solomon's wives, and Solomon's mother was Bathsheba, who bathed upon a housetop and who, Mr. Erskine would have us believe, was not merely careless about the high place in which she chose to bathe. And there was, of course, the Queen of Sheba and a less familiar figure, young red-headed Hiram, son by the left hand of old Hiram, King of Tyre. With such a company Mr. Erskine presents his newest version of the past behind us which, as usual, is so full of the present about us. But clever as are the uses of Mr. Erskine's scholarship, amusing as the book sometimes is, a reader who has followed Mr. Erskine from Troy to Eden to Camelot cannot escape the feeling that beyond authorship he has become something like the manager of a repertoire company whose actors have a variety of costumes but know the lines of only a single play.

Of course, it would be unfair to expect that the familiar Erskine method with men and women and history, in which Solomon's story is written, should be as fresh as it was when he first made whimsey in legend of the grand tale of Troy. And apparently Mr. Erskine realizes that it would be unfair of him to give us nothing more. But he seems uncertain whether to give us the frankly romantic and melodramatic, as in Abishag's solemn and sentimental giving of all for love, or to go in the direction of mockery of our own New Deal in the public works project of building a temple with which Solomon marked his reign. Certainly no other American could have written in more delicate jibe at our current political preoccupations than Mr. Erskine if he had stuck to the line of Benaiah's protest to Solomon that

JOHN ERSKINE

> if ever the temple is finished, it will doubtless be for the glory of God, but first it will disrupt society. The lower class are seduced by this opportunity to work for the state. Shimei never gave his servants what they'll get if Hiram lets them chip away at his cedar logs. Of course Shimei has thought it out—though he loses their aid, yet through extra taxes he will be providing them with double pay.

But such satire is merely a flash in a book which seems written in uncertainty and with less jest than Mr. Erskine has taught us to expect from him.

Perhaps in Solomon and the Shulamite Mr. Erskine has not chosen his subjects as wisely as he might have done. Of course, there was Adam, as precedent, but Menelaus and Launcelot were cloaked with a dignity that it was funny to tear off. But Solomon, about whose wisdom legend has grown, has also been made the figure for ludicrous legend before. There are no thousand wives in Mr. Erskine's tale. Perhaps being cruder in spirit than Mr. Erskine I missed them.

Nevertheless I still cling in preference to that pre-Erskine version about King David and King Solomon and their youth and "their many, many wives." But when —you remember—their age came on with its "many, many qualms"—

> King Solomon wrote the proverbs,
> And King David wrote the psalms.

Jonathan Daniels is the author of "Clash of Angels," a satirical novel drawn from Biblical sources.

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