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Prehistoric Man

The Scottish archaeologist and anthropologist Daniel Wilson (1816–92) spent the latter part of his life in Canada. Published in 1862, this is a seminal work in the study of early man in which Wilson utilises studies of native tribes 'still seen there in a condition which seems to reproduce some of the most familiar phases ascribed to the infancy of the unhistoric world'. He believed that civilisations initially developed in mild climates and judged the Mayans to have been the most advanced civilisation in the New World. Twentieth-century anthropologist Bruce Trigger argued that Wilson 'interpreted evidence about human behaviour in a way that is far more in accord with modern thinking than are the racist views of Darwin and Lubbock', and it is in this light that this two-volume work can be judged. Volume 1 covers such important areas as the development and use of metals and 'the architectural instinct'.

Prehistoric Man

Researches into the Origin of Civilisation in the Old and the New World

VOLUME 1

DANIEL WILSON

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PREHISTORIC MAN.

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CHIMPSEYAN CHIEF

Drawn by D. Wilson, LL.D ... from sketches by Paul Kane.

PREHISTORIC MAN

RESEARCHES INTO THE ORIGIN OF CIVILISATION IN THE OLD AND THE NEW WORLD

BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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IN FOND MEMORIAL

OF A BROTHER'S LIFE-LONG SYMPATHY

IN MANY FAVOURITE RESEARCHES

THESE VOLUMES

DEPRIVED BY DEATH OF THEIR PURPOSED DEDICATION

ARE INSCRIBED WITH THE LOVED NAME OF

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PREFACE.

THE object aimed at in the following work is to view Man, as far as possible, unaffected by those modifying influences which accompany the development of nations and the maturity of a true historic period, in order thereby to ascertain the sources from whence such development and maturity proceed. These researches into the origin of civilisation have accordingly been pursued under the belief which influenced the author in previous inquiries, that the investigations of the archæologist, when carried on in an enlightened spirit, are replete with interest in relation to some of the most important problems of modern science. To confine our studies to mere antiquities is like reading by candle-light at noonday; but to reject the aid of archæology in the progress of science, and especially of ethnological science, is to extinguish the lamp of the student when most dependent on its borrowed rays. This is impressed on the mind with renewed force by the novel phases in which the problems affecting man's being are reproduced. We are no longer permitted to discuss merely the diversities of existing races. It seems as if the whole comprehensive question of man's origin must be reopened, and determined afresh in its relations to modern science. To the naturalist who turns from the study of inferior

orders of life, man civilized, or even brought into close contact with civilisation, seems an essentially artificial product of many extraneous influences: a being "from nature rising slow to art." Nor has the verdict of the philosopher invariably conflicted with the fancy of the poet, that man devoid of all civilisation is in a state of nature, and the true type of man primeval. Against such an idea, however, all the higher attributes of his nature seem to cry out. Tested by every moral standard he is found to have deteriorated far below his normal capacities, and "the noble savage" proves at last but a poet's dream.

But have we then no alternative between man *plus* the artificialities of civilisation, and man *minus* the influential operation of moral laws which have their efficient equivalents in the instincts of all other animals; or can we not realize even in theory an intermediate normal condition? Such questions are replete with interest whatever be the value of answers rendered here to some of the difficulties they suggest. The ethnologist does indeed study man from the same point of view as the mere naturalist; but to do so to any good purpose this essential difference between man and all other animals must be kept in view: that in him a being appears for the first time among the multitude of animated organizations, subject to natural laws as they are, but including within himself the power of interpreting and controlling the operation of those laws; of accumulating and transmitting experience; and, above all, of looking in upon the workings of his own mind, and recognising as part of his nature a system of moral government which he may

obey or resist, though not with impunity. Our aim, therefore, is to isolate him from extraneous influences, and look, if possible, on man *per se*; or at least where he can be shown to have attained maturity, exposed only to such influences as are the offspring of his own progress. In so far as this is possible may we hope to recover some means of testing man's innate capacity, and of determining by comparison what is common to the race.

Where, then, is man to be thus found? In the days of Herodotus, Transalpine Europe was a greater mystery to the nations on the shores of the Mediterranean than Central Africa is to us. To the Romans of four centuries later, Britain was still almost another world; and the great northern hive from whence the spoilers of the dismembered empire of the Cæsars were speedily to emerge, was so entirely unknown to them, that, as Dr. Arnold has remarked in his inaugural lecture: "The Roman colonies along the banks of the Rhine and the Danube looked out on the country beyond those rivers as we look up at the stars, and actually see with our eyes a world of which we know nothing." Nevertheless, the civilisation of the historic centres of the ancient world around the Mediterranean was not without some influence on the germs of modern nations, then nursing the hardihood of a vigorous infancy beyond the Danube and the Baltic. The shores of the Atlantic and German oceans, and the islands of the British seas, had long before yielded tribute to the Phœnician mariner; and as the archæologist and the ethnologist pursue their researches, and restore to light memorials of Europe's infancy and early youth, they are more frequently startled

with affinities to the ancient historic nations, in language, arts, and rites, than by the recovery of evidence of a wholly unfamiliar past.

But it is altogether different with the New World which Columbus revealed. Superficial students of its monuments have indeed misinterpreted intellectual characteristics pertaining to the infantile instincts common to human thought into fancied analogies with the arts of Egypt; and more than one ingenious philosopher has traced out affinities with the mythology and astronomical science of the ancient East: but the western continent still stands a world apart, with a peculiar people, and with languages, arts, and customs essentially its own. To whatever source the American nations may be traced, they had remained shut in for unnumbered centuries by ocean barriers from all the influences of the historic hemisphere. Yet there the first European explorers found man so little dissimilar to all with which they were already familiar, that the name of Indian originated in the belief, retained by the great cosmographer to the last, that the American continent was no new world, but only the eastern confines of Asia.

Such, then, is a continent where man may be studied under circumstances which seem to furnish the best guarantee of his independent development. No reflex light of Grecian or Roman civilisation has guided him on his way. The great sources of religious and moral suasion which have given form to mediæval and modern Europe, and so largely influenced the polity and culture of Asia, and even of Africa, were effectually excluded; and however prolonged the period of occupation of the western hemisphere by its own American nations may

have been, man is still seen there in a condition which seems to reproduce some of the most familiar phases ascribed to the infancy of the unhistoric world. The records of its childhood are not obscured, as in Europe, by later chroniclings; where, in every attempt to decipher the traces of an earlier history, we have to spell out a nearly obliterated palimpsest. Amid the simplicity of its palæography, the aphorism, by which alone the Roman could claim to be among the world's ancient races, acquires a new force: "antiquitas seculi, juventus mundi." The revolutions of modern history, and the frequent intercourse of the nineteenth century, have indeed conjoined the western continent to ancient Christendom; and attracted attention to it most frequently as an arena whereon old political systems and religious theories are reproduced and tested anew by nations of European descent. But in the sixteenth century the absolute isolation of this "world apart" was strongly felt. Sir Thomas More was already in the household of Cardinal Morton, to which he was admitted in 1495, when the first rumours of the discovery of America reached his ears; and within twenty years thereafter he produced his platonic commonwealth of Utopia, an imaginary island visited by Raphael Hythloday, a companion, as he feigned, of Amerigo Vespucci, from whom the wondrous narrative was derived during a visit to Antwerp. Another century had nearly completed its cycle since the eye of Columbus beheld the long-expected land, when in 1590, Edmund Spenser crossed the Irish Channel, bearing with him the first three books of the "*Faërie Queen*," in the introduction to the second of which he thus defends the verisimili

tude of the fairy-land in which the scenes of his "famous antique history" are laid :—

"Who ever heard of th' Indian Peru ?
Or who in venturous vessel measured
The Amazon huge river, now found true ?
Or fruitfullest Virginia who did ever view ?

Yet all these were, when no man did them know,
Yet have from wisest ages hidden been ;
And later times things more unknown shall show ;
Why then should witless man so much misween
That nothing is but that which he hath seen ?
What if within the moon's fair shining sphere ;
What if in every other star unseen,
Of other worlds he happily should hear ?
He wonder would much more ; yet such to some appear."

It was by the advice of Raleigh, his "shepherd of the ocean," that the poet visited England with the unpublished poem ; yet it is obvious that to his fancy the western hemisphere was still almost as much a world apart, as if the discoverers of Virginia had sailed up the blue vault of heaven, and brought back the story of another planet on which it had been their fortune to alight.

Here then appears to be a point from whence it seems possible to obtain, as it were, a parallax of man, already viewed in Europe's prehistoric dawn ; to look on him as on the stars seen from Teneriffe above the clouds ; and to test anew what essentially pertains to him, and what has been artificially, or even accidentally superadded by external circumstances. Such, at least, has been the author's aim in turning to account the opportunities afforded by a prolonged residence on some of the newest sites of the New World ; and to the

use made of these must be mainly due whatever value pertains to the glimpses of a remote past which the following pages attempt to disclose. But though thus far dependent on American researches, they refer no less to the origin of man and the beginnings of his history in the Old World than in the New. The author had already familiarized himself with the unwritten chronicles of Europe's infancy and youth, when unexpectedly transplanted among the colonists of another continent, and within reach of aboriginal tribes of the American forests. "The eye sees what it brings the power to see;" and in these he discovered objects of interest on many grounds, but chiefly from the fact that he soon perceived he had already realized much in relation to a long obliterated past of Britain's and Europe's infancy, which was here reproduced in living reality before his eyes. In 1853, he received the appointment to the chair of History and English literature in University College, Toronto, and before the year drew to a close had commenced observations, the results of which are embodied in these volumes. Whatever may be their worth, they set forth the fruits of patient and conscientious investigation, and concentrate into brief space deductions arrived at after much labour and research. His vacations have afforded opportunities for witnessing the Red Man as he is still to be seen beyond the outskirts of modern civilisation, and for exploring the buried memorials of extinct nations on older sites. He has also twice visited Philadelphia, and minutely studied the collections formed by the author of the *Crania Americana*, with the additions made to that valuable ethnological department of the Academy of Natural

Sciences. Repeated references in the following pages indicate other American collections in Washington, Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Albany, etc., as well as those of Canada, which have also furnished useful materials.

In carrying out his researches, the author has been placed under many obligations to scientific friends. To Dr. Henry, the learned Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution at Washington; Dr. J. Aitken Meigs, the Librarian of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia; Dr. J. C. White, the Secretary of the Boston Natural History Society; Mr. Thomas Fenwick and Dr. E. H. Davis of the American Ethnological Society; and the Hon. George Folsom of the Historical Society of New York: he is specially indebted for the liberality with which Museums and Libraries have been placed at his command. On two different visits to Philadelphia to examine the Collection of Crania formed by Dr. Morton, the keys of the cases were freely intrusted to him, and some of the many liberal services rendered in furtherance of his investigations by their experienced curator, Dr. J. Aitken Meigs, are acknowledged in the following pages. With equally unrestricted freedom, the collections of the Historical Society of New York, and the cabinets of the Natural History Society of Boston, as well as the private collections of Dr. J. Mason Warren, Mr. J. H. Blake, Dr. E. H. Davis, and others referred to, were thrown open to him; and repeated experience confirms him in the belief, that in no country in the world are public and private libraries and collections made available to the scientific inquirer with the same unrestricted freedom as in the United States. To J. H. Blake, Esq. of Boston, the author is specially indebted

for the liberality with which he has placed at his disposal notes of travel in Peru; drawings of objects observed there; and the valuable collection of mummies, crania, and Peruvian antiquities brought home by him, and repeatedly referred to in the following pages. To Dr. E. H. Davis, one of the authors of the *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*, he is under great obligations, not only for access to the collections from which the illustrations of that work were derived, but for casts and photographs of special objects calculated to aid him in his researches. Among his Canadian friends, he owes special thanks to his colleague, Professor Croft, for carefully executed analyses of Peruvian bronzes; to Dr. Bovell and Dr. Hodder, for free use of their collections of Indian crania; to Mr. Paul Kane, the author of *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America*, for sketches made during his travels, as well as for information derived from recollections of the incidents and observations of a highly-privileged sojourner among the Indian tribes of the Hudson's Bay territory; and to the Hon. G. W. Allan, whose ethnological collections now include the numerous objects obtained by Mr. Kane during his wanderings. Older friends at home, and especially Mr. T. B. Johnston, the Treasurer of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and Mr. Robert Cox, W.S., of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society, have largely aided in renewed references to the familiar collections of those Societies.

To the sympathy manifested in the author's researches by his Excellency Sir Edmund W. Head, Bart., while Governor-General of the Province, he is indebted for instructions forwarded to the various officers and super-

intendents of the Indian Department, whereby he has been able to obtain valuable statistics illustrating questions which affect the present condition and future prospects of the Indians of British North America, and which are discussed here in their relations to the main subject of investigation.

It only remains to be added, that while the facilities for research into the origin of civilisation and the condition of primitive races, afforded by a residence in the New World, are great, they are accompanied by one important drawback, in the want of adequate libraries or books of reference, inevitable in a young colony. As, moreover, the author has been prevented, by the impediments which the Atlantic interposes between him and his publishers from revising the proof-sheets of the following pages, he must crave the intelligent forbearance of the critic should any notable blunders escape the eye of the press-reader; and if, as may not improbably prove to be the case, some of his observations have been anticipated or disproved in recent publications, or even by the mere lapse of time, it may be added that the MS. was in the hands of the publishers in January 1861, and the subsequent delay in the publication of these volumes has originated in causes lying beyond his control.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, TORONTO,
12*th March* 1862.

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