

A SHORT HISTORY
of
CIVILIZATION

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*No single age can show the true
end of man and meaning of
civilization. History must reap
the harvest of all the ages.*



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PREFACE

The first edition of this book was in part a reaction from the First World War, a turning away from the old and oft-repeated tale of destruction to a constructive survey of past culture, rather than political history. When it appeared, there was no similar work and there was some difficulty in finding a publisher for the volume. Since that time courses in the history of civilization have multiplied, and numerous writers of textbooks have availed themselves of that magic word, although their notions of what constitutes civilization and what should be included under that caption have often differed markedly from mine. In any case, let us hope that civilization will not go the way of magic.

Now, after another world conflict, I have decided to revise and enlarge the work. The general plan of the first part on Ancient Civilizations remains essentially unchanged, although numerous minor alterations and additions have been made to take note of recent archaeological discovery and historical scholarship. But the chapters of the second part on Modern Civilization have been increased in number from eighteen to twenty-four, and their order and the arrangement of the matter in them have been somewhat altered. Especially have the last eighteen chapters, dealing with the period from the sixteenth to the present century, been enlarged, not merely bringing the narrative on from 1925 to 1948, but treating the civilization of the entire period with greater fullness and detail, particularly the intellectual development and the advance of modern science. The number of illustrations and maps has been correspondingly augmented, as has the chronological table. The bibliographies, now brought up to date, adhere to the previous principles of adding specialized treatments to the general survey in the text, of inclusion of some titles in other languages than English in order to give the reader a taste, or glimpse at least, of world-wide scholarship, and of alphabetical arrangement by authors for ready reference. To avoid repeated citation of the same work at the close of different chapters, books which cover long periods or deal with the entire history of some one topic or department of civilization are grouped in a separate general bibliography. Maps 4, 5, 6, and 7, of Asia and Eastern Europe, Central Europe and Italy, Western Europe, and Africa, America and Oceania, are not limited to particular periods but intended for general reference.

Teachers who wish to divide the text between two semesters may cover

twenty-four chapters each half-year, devoting the first semester to Ancient Civilizations and the second semester to Modern Civilization. Or, since the last eighteen chapters cover about as many pages as the first thirty, the dividing line may be drawn there, giving the first semester to what are commonly called the ancient and medieval periods, and the second semester to the modern period in the conventional sense. The exhaustive Index obviates any cross references in the text and may be used in reviewing a particular topic through successive periods of history and stages of civilization.

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INTRODUCTION

*Many civilizations other than ours have achieved things of genuine
and unique worth.*

GOLDENWEISER.

Recent Revelation of the Past: Until the nineteenth century modern man knew little of the varied background and long development of the human race and civilization. Though well versed in classical Greek and Latin and fond of reading what he called history, his backward view was limited by the Old Testament and the Homeric poems. Even this restricted vista was further narrowed by a tendency to slight many of the intervening centuries (from 400 to 1400 A. D., for instance) as "Dark Ages." Geology had not yet interpreted the long story of rock strata. Anthropology had not yet subjected primitive peoples and survivals from past cultures to scientific scrutiny. The languages of the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, and Assyrians were a sealed book until in 1802 began the first successful efforts to read hieroglyphic and cuneiform. Phoenician was deciphered in 1837. Sumerian began to be distinguished from Semitic around 1880. Scholars started to study the Hittite languages in 1877, but were successful only from 1915 on. Although archaeological excavation had begun earlier in Egypt and Mesopotamia, it was still in its infancy when Schliemann in 1870 tried to unearth Homeric Troy. Similarly scholars have penetrated beneath the crust of printed books to information and rich lore hidden in medieval manuscripts. Thus it is only of recent years that the story of civilization has really unveiled itself. Man's previous historical knowledge resembled the condition of natural science when it had to depend upon observation with the naked eye and lacked telescope and microscope and the infinitesimal calculus. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the discovery of America and of sea routes to the Far East broadened man's view by its disclosure of new lands and peoples with different social and cultural standards from those of Europe. But this revelation hardly compares with the opening up of the records of human civilization which our own generation has witnessed. Even during the years since the first edition of this book appeared our knowledge of early man and civilizations has been greatly extended. Early pleistocene and late neolithic China, the earliest known settled agricultural village life at Badari in Egypt, the hitherto unsuspected Indus civilization of 3000 B. C., the treasures of Ur in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, the deciphering since 1930 of Phoenician tablets at Ras Shamra of the fourteenth century B. C., and new information on the Christian Middle Ages have added much to our knowledge.

Importance of Studying Civilization Historically: Civilization may be defined as the product of our higher faculties, as exercised first by original

and superior individuals and then accepted by a sufficient number of human beings to make it a social fact. Most civilizations, however widely separated in space or time, have had a number of features in common. Remarkable parallels may be noted between the early histories or legends of different peoples. Take, for example, the tradition of a series of early kings or rulers who lived or reigned for enormous lapses of time and made successive contributions to civilization. It is told of the first Chinese emperors, of the antediluvian kings of Sumer, of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, and of the seven kings of early Rome. On the other hand, civilization has been a gradual, complicated and often irregular growth. That is to say, a given people or a given period may be highly developed in one respect and very backward in another. The Eskimo, for example, has marked mechanical ingenuity but a crude political and social life. The ancient Mayas of Central America constructed most impressive works of architecture, but in metallurgy were inferior to the present negroes of Africa. They did not employ domestic animals; yet they had developed the art of writing and had an elaborate calendar. Even our present civilization may have, intermingled with it, survivals of animalism, savagery, and barbarism, or, while advancing far beyond past cultures in many respects, it may have lost some of their good features. It is therefore highly desirable to study the history of civilization, not only in order to understand how the present state of civilization came about, but also in order to rectify it intelligently. In a national or international crisis, or in an epoch-making hour for future civilization, the average mind is apt to explode aimlessly under the stress of excitement, emotion, altruism, prejudice, self-interest, or, most likely, misapprehension. The result is a big flash, a breaking of all the intellectual windows in the vicinity, and maybe even more serious damage where it was least intended. But the historically trained mind, using the long gun barrel of past experience and the sights of dispassionate, critical, historical method, is far more likely to hit the desired distant mark.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ¹

- Four noted books that in their respective times made perhaps the closest approach to being histories of civilization are:
- Pliny the Elder (died 79 A. D.). *Natural History*, translated by Bostock and Riley, London, 1855, 6 vols. See especially its first and seventh books.
- Giovanni Villani (died 1348 A. D.). *Selections from the First Nine Books of the Chroniche Fiorentine of*, ed. by P. H. Wicksteed and translated by Rose E. Selfe, 1906.
- Voltaire (1694–1778). *Le siècle de Louis XIV* (The Age of Louis XIV).
- Buckle, H. T. *History of Civilization in England*, 1857–1861, 2 vols.

¹ A bibliography of general histories of civilization, works covering long periods, and histories of special types and departments of civilization will be found at the end of the book.

ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

CHAPTER I

THE PREHUMAN BACKGROUND

Men climbed many a mountain peak. After the men had passed away, the mountains were still there. FAHR AD-DIN AR-RAZI

Relation of Civilization to Natural Change: Before beginning to trace the story of human civilization, it may be well to call to mind briefly the scene upon which it has been enacted and the almost interminable drama of natural change in which it comes as a late and brief episode or climax. Who can tell which it is? In those vast vistas of other worlds which the telescope has revealed to our gaze and which light alone traverses, our earth, the scene of human civilization, is but a tiny speck which would be quite invisible to an astronomer on one of the more distant stars, and the drama of human civilization in which we are engaged shrinks to the insignificance of a child's toy theater or a puppet show in a bandbox. Only after long eons required for the formation of solar systems from nebulae, and long ages of rock formation and development of organic life on our planet, does the hour of human life strike, and, as against the slow evolution of early man, the period of the development of civilization is but a moment. Nevertheless, it is the progress of civilization that has invented the telescope and other scientific instruments, has revealed to us those other worlds, those long periods of natural change, and that slow evolution of early man. It may yet reveal to us signs of organic life, or even other dramas of civilization, on other planets or sidereal systems, or otherwise enlarge and improve our knowledge of space and time, of life and change.

Geological Strata and Periods: In studying the crust of our earth, the geologist discerns the world over successive layers of rocks and soils laid down in the different periods of rock formation. The lowest, and therefore earliest formed, strata contain no relics or evidence of the existence of organic life, but include rocks which were apparently formed before there was any sea, when the earth was still so hot that its surface was covered with steam and vapors, and other rocks that were formed later from the sediment which washed down into the first seas. Finally the strata begin to contain fossilized forms of organic life. These again occur in successive layers, and in different parts of the world the same types of fossils are found in the corresponding geological strata. This indicates a regular evolution of organic life conforming to surrounding conditions and guided by natural selection.

Appearance of Life and Origin of Species: The first forms of life of which we have any knowledge existed in the water and somewhat resembled those forms which can be seen through a microscope today, although they were then sometimes of great size. There were as yet no vertebrates. At a later stage in the long process of rock formation, we find evidences of the spread of plant life from sea to land and of the existence of amphibious animals. Then, leaving primary or palaeozoic for secondary or mesozoic times, we enter the age of reptiles. It is from this distant period that are preserved the remains of huge monsters now extinct, like the dinosaur and ichthyosaur. In 1946, Russian palaeontologists found near the Gobi Desert remains of a dozen different kinds of dinosaurs, of a tyrannosaurus thirty-five feet high that hopped about on its hind legs, and of another monster with some two thousand teeth—quite a mouthful! Remains of creatures somewhat approaching the form of birds begin to appear in this mesozoic period but are relatively rare, and if mammals existed at all, they were very small. But in the tertiary or cainozoic period we reach the age of mammals, or vertebrates which suckle their young. At the beginning of that period the ancestor of our horse was about the size of a fox terrier. In place of a hoof he had toes and something like a thumb, and he still bore a close family resemblance to animals from which our tapirs and rhinoceroses are descended. The tertiary period is commonly subdivided into four ages: eocene, oligocene, miocene, and pliocene. The tremendous duration of even these subdivisions may be deduced from the fact that while in the early eocene age the ancestor of the horse was the type of animal described above, by the middle of that age he had already advanced to the stature of a whippet, had lost his thumb splint, and centered his weight on his middle toe. To suppress the lateral toes completely, however, “required two or three million years more.” Thus the available evidence indicates a very slow gradual progression or evolution of organic forms. Some species become extinct, new species gradually emerge from their predecessors, though at first the changes are minute and inconspicuous. This transformation of species has been actually traced in the case of ammonites in the successive strata of Jurassic rocks. Why there is such variation is a problem not yet solved, but the fact must be accepted.

Human Evolution: This fact must be taken into account in studying the history of civilization, since the human species has evolved like other mammals and vertebrates. “Not only in the structure of all his physical parts, bone for bone, muscle for muscle, and nerve for nerve, is man fundamentally like the other mammals, but his specific organic functions are identical. We have the same diseases; we are similarly affected by the same drugs.” Some of the organs of the human body can be traced far back into the past, “others are but of yesterday.” Man, indeed, “is one of the few surviving animals that have not ceased to progress.” This may be partly be-