



Mankind

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中央编译出版社 Central Compilation & Translation Press Copyright, 1921,

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#### 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

人类的故事:英文/(美)房龙著.—北京:中央编译出版社,2008.12 ISBN 978-7-80211-779-2

I. 人…

Ⅱ.房…

Ⅲ.①英语-语言读物②人类学-通俗读物③世界史-通俗读物

IV. H319.4; Q H319.4; K

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2008) 第 167361 号

### 人类的故事(英文版)

出版人和龑

责任编辑 韩慧强

责任印制 尹 珺

出版发行 中央编译出版社

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(010)66509364(发行部) (010)66509618(读者服务部)

**网** 址 www.cctpbook.com

经 销 全国新华书店

印 刷 北京新丰印刷厂

开 本 787 × 1092 毫米 1/16

字 数 440 千字

印 张 30 彩插8

版 次 2009年1月第1版第1次印刷

定 价 45.00元

本社常年法律顾问:北京建元律师事务所首席顾问律师 鲁哈达 凡有印装质量问题,本社负责调换。电话 010-66509618



#### For Hansje and Willem:

WHEN I was twelve or thirteen years old, an uncle of mine who gave me my love for books and pictures promised to take me upon a memorable expedition. I was to go with him to the top of the tower of Old Saint Lawrence in Rotterdam.

And so, one fine day, a sexton with a key as large as that of Saint Peter opened a mysterious door. "Ring the bell,"he said, "when you come back and want to get out, "and with a great grinding of rusty old hinges he separated us from the noise of the busy street and locked us into a world of new and strange experiences.

For the first time in my life I was confronted by the phenomenon of audible silence. When we had climbed the first flight of stairs, I added another discovery to my limited knowledge of natural phenomena—that of tangible darkness. A match showed us where the upward road continued. We went to the next floor and then to the next and the next until I had lost count and then there came still another floor, and suddenly we had plenty of light. This floor was on an even height with the roof of the church, and it was used as a storeroom. Covered with many inches of dust, there lay the abandoned symbols of a venerable faith which had been discarded by the good people of the city many years ago. That which had meant life and death to our ancestors was here reduced to junk and rubbish. The industrious rat had built his nest among the carved images and the ever watchful spider had opened up shop between the outspread arms of a kindly saint.

The next floor showed us from where we had derived our light. Enormous open windows with heavy iron bars made the high and barren room the roosting place of hundreds of pigeons. The



wind blew through the iron bars and the air was filled with a weird and pleasing music. It was the noise of the town below us, but a noise which had been purified and cleansed by the distance. The rumbling of heavy carts and the clinking of horses' hoofs, the winding of cranes and pulleys, the hissing sound of the patient steam which had been set to do the work of man in a thousand different ways—they had all been blended into a softly rustling whisper which provided a beautiful background for the trembling cooing of the pigeons.

Here the stairs came to an end and the ladders began. And after the first ladder (a slippery old thing which made one feel his way with a cautious foot) there was a new and even greater wonder, the town—clock. I saw the heart of time. I could hear the heavy pulse beats of the rapid seconds—one—two—three—up to sixty. Then a sudden quivering noise when all the wheels seemed to stop and another minute had been chopped off eternity. Without pause it began again—one—two—three—until at last after a warning rumble and the scraping of many wheels a thunderous voice, high above us, told the world that it was the hour of noon.

On the next floor were the bells. The nice little bells and their terrible sisters. In the centre, the big bell which made me turn stiff with fright when I heard it in the middle of the night telling a story of fire or flood. In solitary grandeur, it seemed to reflect upon those six hundred years during which it had shared the joys and the sorrows of the good people of Rotterdam. Around it, neatly arranged like the blue jars in an old-fashioned apothecary shop, hung the little fellows, who twice each week played a merry tune for the benefit of the country-folk who had come to market to buy and sell and hear what the big world had been doing. But in a corner—all alone and shunned by the others—a big black



bell, silent and stern, the bell of death. Then darkness once more and other ladders, steeper and even more dangerous than those we had climbed before, and suddenly the fresh air of the wide heavens. We had reached the highest gallery. Above us the sky. Below us the city—a little toy-town, where busy ants were hastily crawling hither and thither, each one intent upon his or her particular business, and beyond the jumble of stones, the wide greenness of the open country.

It was my first glimpse of the big world.

Since then, whenever I have had the opportunity, I have gone to the top of the tower and enjoyed myself. It was hard work, but it repaid in full the mere physical exertion of climbing a few stairs.

Besides, I knew what my reward would be. I would see the land and the sky, and I would listen to the stories of my kind friend the watchman, who lived in a small shack, built in a sheltered corner of the gallery. He looked after the clock and was a father to the bells, and he warned of fires, but he enjoyed many free hours and then he smoked a pipe and thought his own peaceful thoughts. He had gone to school almost fifty years before and he had rarely read a book, but he had lived on the top of his tower for so many years that he had absorbed the wisdom of that wide world which surrounded him on all sides.

History he knew well, for it was a living thing with him. "There," he would say, pointing to a bend of the river, "there, my boy, do you see those trees? That is where the Prince of Orange cut the dikes to drown the land and save Leyden." Or he would tell me the tale of the old Meuse, until the broad river ceased to be a convenient harbour and became a wonderful highroad, carrying the ships of De Ruyter and Tromp upon that famous last voyage, when they gave their lives that the sea might be free to all.



Then there were the little villages, clustering around the protecting church which once, many years ago, had been the home of their Patron Saints. In the distance we could see the leaning tower of Delft. Within sight of its high arches, William the Silent had been murdered and there Grotius had learned to construe his first Latin sentences. And still further away, the long low body of the church of Gouda, the early home of the man whose wit had proved mightier than the armies of many an emperor, the charity-boy whom the world came to know as Erasmus.

Finally the silver line of the endless sea and as a contrast, immediately below us, the patchwork of roofs and chimneys and houses and gardens and hospitals and schools and railways, which we called our home. But the tower showed us the old home in a new light. The confused commotion of the streets and the market-place, of the factories and the workshop, became the well-ordered expression of human energy and purpose. Best of all, the wide view of the glorious past, which surrounded us on all sides, gave us new courage to face the problems of the future when we had gone back to our daily tasks.

History is the mighty Tower of Experience, which Time has built amidst the endless fields of bygone ages. It is no easy task to reach the top of this ancient structure and get the benefit of the full view. There is no elevator, but young feet are strong and it can be done.

Here I give you the key that will open the door.

When you return, you too will understand the reason for my enthusiasm.





g.6 Cupid, the Roman god of love, is a popular symbol of Valentineis Day. Roman mythology ates that he shoots people with arrows to make them fall in love.



Fig.7 La Primavera (iAllegory of Springî, 1477-1478) by Sandro Botticelli, Italy.



1 ìFlight of Aeneas from Troyî, fresco painting by Girolamo Genga, 1507-1510, Pinacoteca Nazionale, <sub>1</sub>a.



2.2 Theodora (here with her retinue, mosaic from Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna), Justinianís influential e, was a former mime actress, whose earlier life is vividly described by Procopius in Secret History.

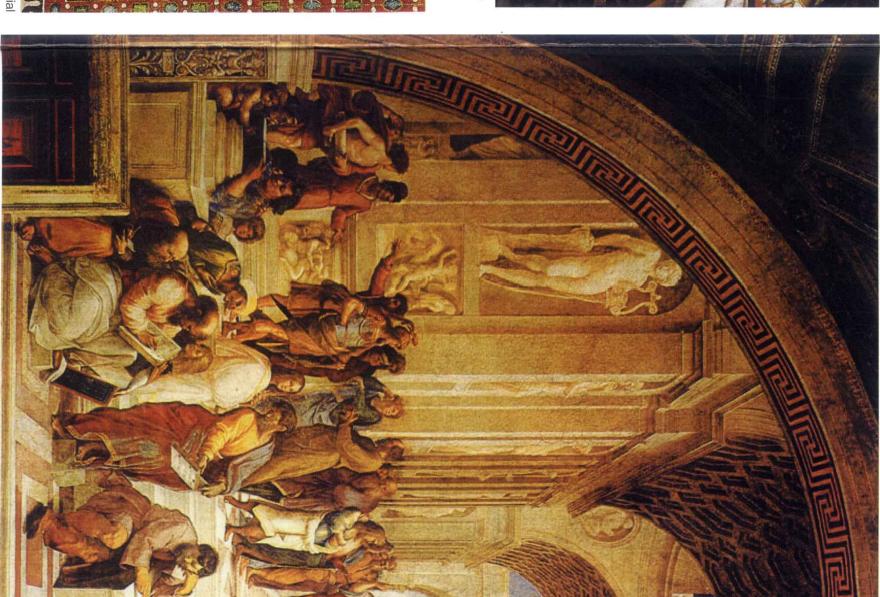


Fig.3 The School of Athens fresco by Raffaello Sanzio.





Fig.8 Europa and the Bull, Roman Wall Painting, House of Fatal Love, Pompeii, 1st c.

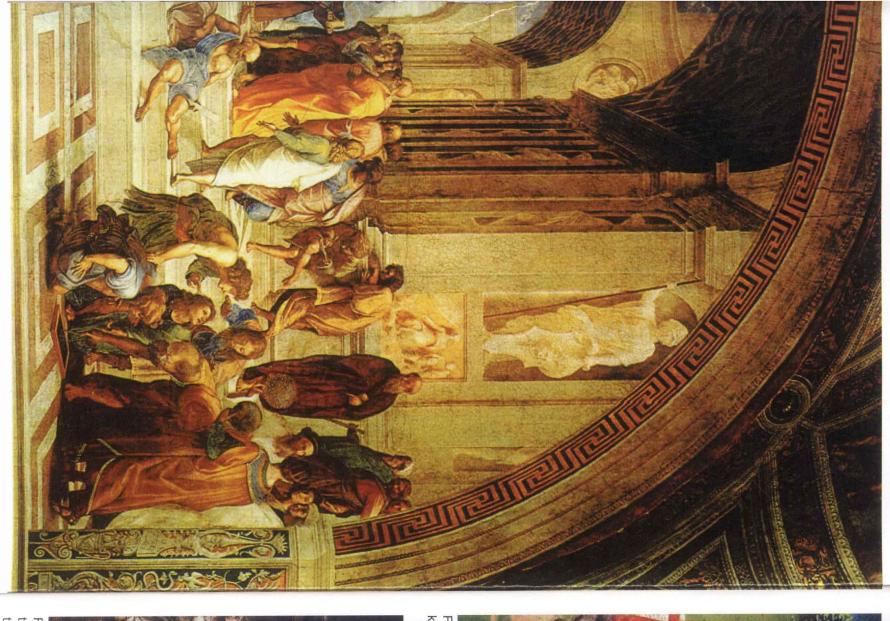




Fig.4 Charlemagne (747–814) was King of the Franks from 768 to his death. He expanded the Frankingdoms into a Frankish Empire that incorporated much of Western and Central Europe.



Fig.5 The Baptism of Constantine painted by Raphaelís pupils (1520ñ1524, fresco, Vatican City tolic Palace). Eusebius of Caesaria records that, as was customary among Christian converts time, Constantine delayed receiving baptism until shortly before his death.



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	fresco painting by Girolamo Genga,	
	1507-1510, Pinacoteca Nazionale,	
	Siena.	
	Fig.2 Theodora (here with her	
	retinue, mosaic from Basilica of San	



# 



IGH up in the North in the land called Svithjod, there stands a rock. It is one hundred miles high and one hundred miles wide. Once every thousand years a little bird comes to this rock to sharpen its beak.

When the rock has thus been worn away, then a single day of eternity will have gone by.



Detail of the monster Skylla, from a scene depicting Zeus.



## ∽ Chapter 2 ~

### THE SETTING OF THE STAGE

E live under the shadow of a gigantic question mark.

Who are we?

Where do we come from?

Whither are we bound?

Slowly, but with persistent courage, we have been pushing this question mark further and further towards that distant line, beyond the horizon, where we hope to find our answer.

We have not gone very far.

We still know very little but we have reached the point where (with a fair degree of accuracy) we can guess at many things.

In this chapter I shall tell you how (according to our best belief) the stage was set for the first appearance of man.

If we represent the time during which it has been possible for animal life to exist upon our planet by a line of this length, then the tiny line just below indicates the age during which man (or a creature more or less resembling man) has lived upon this earth.

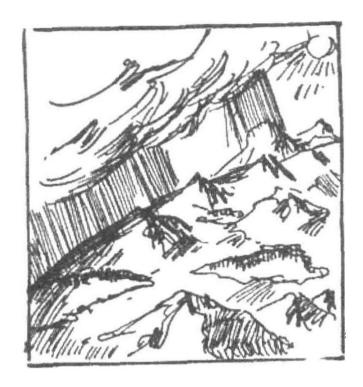


Man was the last to come but the first to use his brain for the purpose of conquering the forces of nature. That is the



Dike & Adicia, Athenian amphora,6th BC.





IT RAINED INCESSANTLY

reason why we are going to study him, rather than cats or dogs or horses or any of the other animals, who, all in their own way, have a very interesting historical development behind them.

In the beginning, the planet upon which we live was (as far as we now know) a large ball of flaming matter, a tiny cloud of smoke in the endless ocean of space. Gradually, in the course of millions of years, the surface burned itself out, and was

covered with a thin layer of rocks. Upon these lifeless rocks the rain descended in endless torrents, wearing out the hard granite and carrying the dust to the valleys that lay hidden between the high cliffs of the steaming earth.

Finally the hour came when the sun broke through the clouds and saw how this little planet was covered with a few small puddles which were to develop into the mighty oceans of the eastern and western hemispheres.

Then one day the great wonder happened. What had been dead, gave birth to life.

The first living cell floated upon the waters of the sea.

For millions of years it drifted aimlessly with the currents. But during all that time it was developing certain habits that it might survive more easily upon the inhospitable earth. Some of these cells were happiest in the dark depths of the lakes and the pools. They took root in the slimy sediments which had been carried down from the tops of the hills and they became plants. Others preferred to move about and they grew strange jointed legs, like scorpions and began to crawl along the bottom of the sea amidst the plants and the pale green things that looked like jelly-fishes. Still others