

题 首

致罕斯机与威廉，

我的最亲爱的小儿们：

你们一个是十二岁，一个是八岁。不久你们便会长大成人。你们要离别家庭，去开创你们自己的生活。我已经想到那一日，踌躇着我能帮助你们些什么。终究我已得了一个观念。最好的指南针是彻底地了解人类的生长和经验。所以我要专替你们写一部特种的历史。

现在我拿了我的忠诚的科洛那（Corona，是笔的牌号）五瓶墨水一盒火柴和一束纸，而开始工作着第一集。如其一切顺利，接着还有八集，它们会给你们详述关于最近的六千年来你们所应当知道的事。

在你们开始读着以前，让我来释明我所想做的。

我不是在赠给你们一册课本。它也不是一卷

画集。它甚至于不是一本历史，如同这两个字通常所含的意义一样。

我只是要手携着你们俩，我们要一起向前漂泊着，到这古代的，奥妙的旷野去探险。

我要指给你们，看神秘的江河，这似乎是没有起源的地方，而且被命定着达不到它终极的目的地。

我要带你们切近着危险的深渊，谨慎地隐藏在层出不穷的快乐的而又迷惑的，痴情之境的下面。

往往我们要离开踏平了的道路，爬上一个孤独而寂寞的山峰，这山峰是高耸于周围的村庄的上面的。

除非我们非常地侥幸，我们有时要困迷于突然而起的稠密的无知之雾中。

我们无论到何处去，应披着人类的同情与了解的热诚的大褂，因为广漠的平原会变成不毛的沙漠——被卷于民众的损害和个人的贪欲的冷酷的狂潮；如非我们善备了来，我们要舍弃了我们的人类的信仰，那是，亲爱的小儿们能对我们的任何人所发生的最坏的事情。

我不愿自命为一个万事精通的向导。无论何时你们一有机会便可以跟别的那先前已经过了这同一路由的旅客们斟酌去。你可以把我的话同他们的观察比较一下，如果这引导你们到一不同的结论时，我决不会恼怒你们的。

以前我从没有训诲过你们。

如今我也不是在训诲你们。

你们知道这世界所盼望于你们的是什么——就是你们要做这共同事业的你们的一份，而且要勇敢、愉快地做它。

如其这些书能帮助你们，那是更好。

以我的全爱，我奉献这些历史于你们，并奉献给那些在生命之途上与你们为伴的男孩们和女孩们。

亨德里克·威廉·房龙

*DEDICATION TO
HANSJE AND WILLEM*

MY DARLING BOYS,

You are twelve and eight years old. Soon you will be grown up. You will leave home and begin your own lives. I have been thinking about that day, wondering what I could do to help you. At last, I have had an idea. The best compass is a thorough understanding of the growth and the experience of the human race. Why should I not write a special history for you?

So I took my faithful Corona and five bottles of ink and a box of matches and a bale of paper and began to work upon the first volume. If all goes well there will be eight more and they will tell you what you ought to know of the last six thousand years.

But before you start to read let me explain what I

intend to do.

I am not going to present you with a textbook. Neither will it be a volume of pictures. It will not even be a regular history in the accepted sense of the word.

I shall just take both of you by the hand and together we shall wander forth to explore the intricate wilderness of the bygone ages.

I shall show you mysterious rivers which seem to come from nowhere and which are doomed to reach no ultimate destination.

I shall bring you close to dangerous abysses, hidden carefully beneath a thick overgrowth of pleasant but deceiving romance.

Here and there we shall leave the beaten track to scale a solitary and lonely peak, towering high above the surrounding country.

Unless we are very lucky we shall sometimes lose ourselves in a sudden and dense fog of ignorance.

Wherever we go we must carry our warm cloak of human sympathy and understanding for vast tracts of

land will prove to be a sterile desert—swept by icy storms of popular prejudice and personal greed and unless we come well prepared we shall forsake our faith in humanity and that, dear boys, would be the worst thing that could happen to any of us.

I shall not pretend to be an infallible guide. Whenever you have a chance, take counsel with other travelers who have passed along the same route before. Compare their observations with mine and if this leads you to different conclusions, I shall certainly not be angry with you.

I have never preached to you in times gone by.

I am not going to preach to you today.

You know what the world expects of you—that you shall do your share of the common task and shall do it bravely and cheerfully.

If these books can help you, so much the better.

And with all my love I dedicate these histories to you and to the boys and girls who shall keep you company on the voyage through life.

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON

一 历史以前的人

哥伦布要四星期多才能从西班牙航行到西印度群岛；反之，我们在如飞的汽船中只要十六小时便能驶过洋面了。

五百年前要三四年才能抄成一本书籍；我们有了活排铅字机和旋转印刷机，只要两天便能印成一本新书了。

我们很知道了些解剖学、化学、矿物学并熟悉了论千种的不同的科学，这些从前的人是连名字都不知道的。

然而在一方面，我们是跟原人一般地蒙然——我们不明白我们从何处来。我们不明白人类如何，为何或何时才进行到这“宇宙”中。我们虽恣意地想遍了千方万法，却依旧只能照着童话的老方法，这样起头：

“从前有一个人。”

这人生在几千百年以前。

他是怎样的相貌呢？

我们不知道。我们从没见过他的图像。有时候我们从深的古代的泥土中寻见他的几块骨骼来。它们搀和在早已绝迹于这地球的动物的骨骼中。我们用这些骨骼来重构成这曾做过我们祖先的奇异的形象。

人类的始祖是一种很丑陋而不动人的哺乳动物。他是十分地小。太阳的热光和冬日的烈风使他的皮肤转为深褐色。他的头和肢体的大部分都被长的毛发覆盖着。他的手好像猴子的手指很细，但很有力。他的前额是低的。他的牙床是像野兽的牙床一般，用牙齿如用刀叉。

他不穿衣服。除了以它们的烟和容石充满了这地球的隆隆的火山之焰外，他看不见火。

他住在潮湿而黑暗的深林中。

当饥饿的痛苦袭来时，他便吃植物的生叶和生根，或者从凶狠的鸟的窠内偷蛋。

有时，经过了长时间的耐心的追逐后，才好不容易得到了一只麻雀或一只小野狗或一只兔子。这些他都是生吃的，因历史以前的人，还不知道食物可以煮来吃呢。

他的牙齿是大的，正像现在有几种动物的牙齿一般。

当白天时，这原人出去为他自己，为他的妻子并为他的子女找寻食物。

晚上呢，他听见了出来寻食的野兽可怕声音，便爬进一株空树中，或者藏在青苔和大蜘蛛的几块大石后面。

夏日他赤裸着受太阳光的焦灼。冬日他受严寒。

他受了伤时，并没有人来看护他，而且打猎是始终会折伤了他们的骨头，或扭转了他们的踝节的。

遇危险时，他会喊出一种警告他同族人的声音，这正像狗见了陌生人会叫一样。在好几方面，他还远不如一只养家的小狗或小猫动人。

总之，古人是很可怜的，他住在惊恐和饥饿的时代，他周围是论千的仇敌，他是永远被



有史以前的人

亲朋的幽灵作祟着，那些亲朋是已被狼熊或齿利如刀的虎所吞食了的。

关于这人的最初的历史，我们一些都不知道。他没有器具，也不盖屋。他生了死了，并不留一点他曾经存在的痕迹。从他的骨殖，我们才追知他是生在二千世纪以前。其余的是蒙昧不明。

直到了有名的“石器时代”，人才学得了我们所谓文化的初步原理。

关于这石器时代，我得详细地告诉你们。

I. PREHISTORIC MAN

IT took Columbus more than four weeks to sail from Spain to the West Indian Islands. We on the other hand cross the ocean in sixteen hours in a flying machine.

Five hundred years ago, three or four years were necessary to copy a book by hand. We possess linotype machines and rotary presses and we can print a new book in a couple of days.

We understand a great deal about anatomy and chemistry and mineralogy and we are familiar with a thousand different branches of science of which the very name was unknown to the people of the past.

In one respect, however, we are quite as ignorant as the most primitive of men—we do not know where we came from. We do not know how or why or when the human race began its career upon this

Earth. With a million facts at our disposal we are still obliged to follow the example of the fairy-stories and begin in the old way:

“Once upon a time there was a man.”

This man lived hundreds of thousands of years ago.

What did he look like?

We do not know. We never saw his picture. Deep in the clay of an ancient soil we have sometimes found a few pieces of his skeleton. They were hidden amidst masses of bones of animals that have long since disappeared from the face of the earth. We have taken these bones and they allow us to reconstruct the strange creature who happens to be our ancestor.

The great-great-grandfather of the human race was a very ugly and unattractive mammal. He was quite small. The heat of the sun and the biting wind of the cold winter had colored his skin a dark brown. His head and most of his body were covered with long hair. He had very thin but strong fingers which made his hands look like those of a monkey. His

forehead was low and his jaw was like the jaw of a wild animal which uses its teeth both as fork and knife.

He wore no clothes. He had seen no fire except the flames of the rumbling volcanoes which filled the earth with their smoke and their lava.

He lived in the damp blackness of vast forests.

When he felt the pangs of hunger he ate raw leaves and the roots of plants or he stole the eggs from the nest of an angry bird.

Once in a while, after a long and patient chase, he managed to catch a sparrow or a small wild dog or perhaps a rabbit. These he would eat raw, for prehistoric man did not know that food could be cooked.

His teeth were large and looked like the teeth of many of our own animals.

During the hours of day this primitive human being went about in search of food for himself and his wife and his young.

At night, frightened by the noise of the beasts,

who were in search of prey, he would creep into a hollow tree or he would hide himself behind a few big boulders, covered with moss and great, big spiders.

In summer he was exposed to the scorching rays of the sun.

During the winter he froze with cold.

When he hurt himself (and hunting animals are for ever breaking their bones or spraining their ankles) he had no one to take care of him.

He had learned how to make certain sounds to warn his fellow-beings whenever danger threatened. In this he resembled a dog who barks when a stranger approaches. In many other respects he was far less attractive than a well-bred house pet.

Altogether, early man was a miserable creature who lived in a world of fright and hunger, who was surrounded by a thousand enemies and who was for ever haunted by the vision of friends and relatives who had been eaten up by wolves and bears and the terrible sabre-toothed tiger.

Of the earliest history of this man we know nothing. He had no tools and he built no homes. He lived and died and left no traces of his existence. We keep track of him through his bones and they tell us that he lived more than two thousand centuries ago.

The rest is darkness.

Until we reach the time of the famous Stone Age, when man learned the first rudimentary principles of what we call civilization.

Of this Stone Age I must tell you in some detail.

二 宇宙渐渐地冷了

气候有所变化。

古人并不知“时间”是什么。

生日，结婚纪念或死期于他全无记录。

日子，星期或年岁于他毫无概念。

当早上太阳升起时，他并不说“又是一天”。他说“这是‘光’”。他便利用了这朝日的光线去为他的一家采集食物。

天在渐渐地暗的时候，他回去，把他白天所得到的一部分（大概是些浆果和几只鸟雀）给他的妻子和小孩。他自己呢，吃饱了生肉便去睡觉。

他从长期的经验而知道了季候的变迁，寒冷的冬天过了，便照例地来了温和的春天，春天老去，便是炎热的夏天，那时果子也成熟了，稻麦等的穗也可采食了。夏天一过，暴风便来吹落树上的叶子，并且有些动物便爬进洞去过那长期的

蛰伏。

季候老是这样变迁着。古人领悟了这些有用的寒来暑往的变迁，可是并不发生疑问他活着，那便很够使他满足了。



然而，骤然有很使他烦扰的事情发生了。

冰结的时代

炎热的夏天来得很迟。果子一些也不成熟。本来常被青草覆盖着的山顶，现在却深藏在一层厚厚的雪的底下了。

一日早晨，有一大群跟他山谷中的居民不同的野人，从高山上来了。

他们所说的话，没有一个人能够懂得。他们貌似瘦瘠而面现饥容。他们似乎被饥寒所迫，而离了他们的老家。

这谷中的食物，不足供给新来旧在的两民族。他们想久居时，便发生了一场惊人的争斗，而全民族都被杀死了。其余的人便逃入了森林，以后也没有再见过。