



HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON

【美】 房龙 著

THE STORY OF MANKIND

人 类 的 故 事

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING RESEARCH PRESS

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出版说明

著名荷兰裔美国作家房龙对于我国广大读者来说,已不能算是一个十分陌生的名字。自本世纪 20 年代以来,房龙发表了一系列用轻巧俏皮的文字撰写的通俗历史著作,大多成为美国的畅销书,并被译成多种文字,尤为青年读者们所钟爱。房龙于 1882 年生于荷兰的鹿特丹,父母的分居导致他从小“逃避在过去之中”,从 10 岁起就沉溺于史学。房龙后来曾在德国和美国求学,获得了博士学位,但他并没有成为一个书斋里的学究。他当过教师、编辑、记者,屡经漂泊,同时苦练写作,1921 年写出的《人类的故事》使他一举成名,饮誉世界。对待学问和文字,房龙在坚持人文主义立场的同时,逐渐形成了一套自己的理解和表达方式,他认为:“凡学问一到穿上专家的拖鞋,躲进了它的‘精舍’,而把它的鞋子上的泥土作肥料去的时候,它就宣布自己预备死了。与人隔绝的知识生活是引到毁灭去的。”于是,深入浅出地将艰深枯燥的学问化作轻松风趣的精神食粮呈现给读者,成了房龙作品的显著特征。房龙多才多艺,精通十种文字,拉得一手优美的小提琴,还亲自将自己的大部分作品配了稚拙可爱的插图。这一切都注定房龙会是一个“人民”的作家,将对广大读者产生深刻的启迪和影响。

房龙的通俗历史著作曾打动过老一辈的中国读者,郁达夫在评价他的写作艺术时说:“房龙的笔,有一种魔力……是将文学家的手法,拿来用以讲述科学……无论大人小孩,读他书的人,都觉得娓娓忘倦了。”80 年代以来,房龙作品的中译本在我国再度走红,而且十几年来畅销不衰,这是我国文化市场繁荣、国际交流正常化的结果,也证明房龙作品的不朽魅力。

不言而喻,对于我国学习英语的广大读者来说,幽默、亲切、通俗的房龙作品原著更是绝佳的阅读文本。读他的书,既可提高英语阅读水平,又能丰富历史、科学、文化知识。为了借鉴和继承世

界精神文化遗产,填补我国出版界外语类通俗社会科学读物的空白,外语教学与研究出版社将陆续推出几种房龙作品的原版书,欢迎读者提出改进意见,帮助我们做得更好。

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1998 年 1 月

To JIMMIE

"What is the use of a book without pictures?" said Alice.

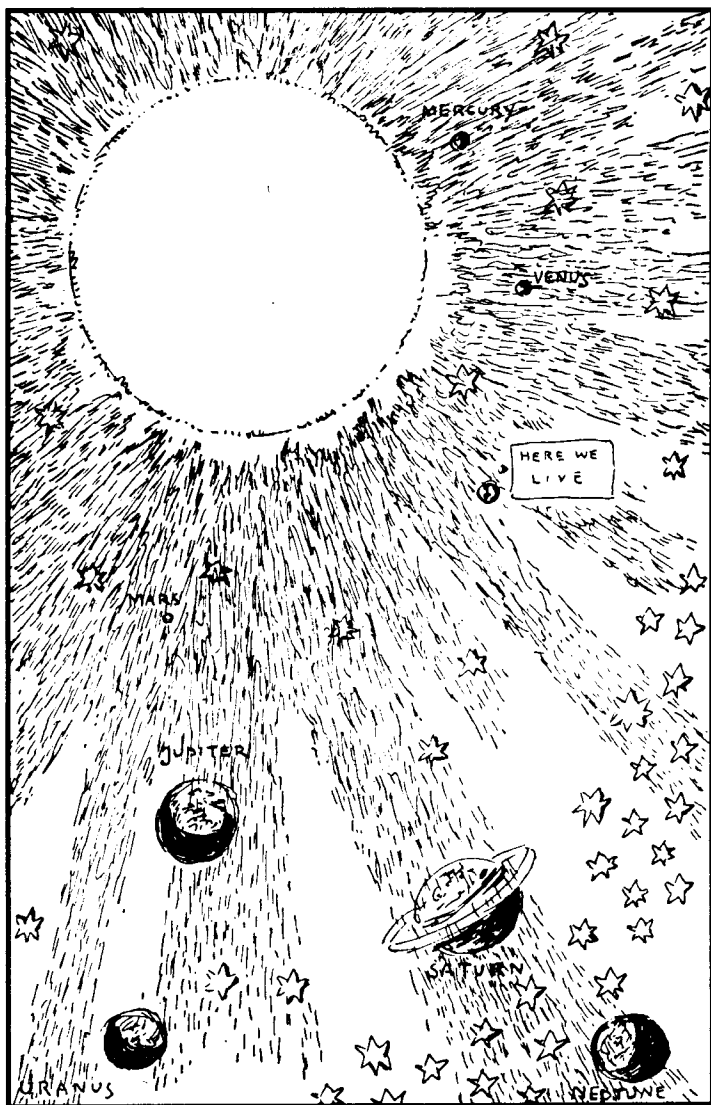


THE STORY OF MANKIND

BY HENDRIK VAN LOON, AB. PH. D.

Author of The Fall of the Dutch Republic, The Rise of the Dutch
Kingdom, The Golden Book of the Dutch Navigators,
A Short Story of Discovery, Ancient Man.

This book is fully illustrated with eighty-three color pages, over one hundred black and white pictures and numerous animated maps and half-tones drawn by the author.



THE SCENE OF OUR HISTORY IS LAID UPON A LITTLE PLANET, LOST IN THE VASTNESS OF THE UNIVERSE.

FOREWORD

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 store-room. 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 pulsebeats 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, imme-

diately 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.

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON.

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