

房龙地理

[美] 房龙 著



by *Hendrik Willem van Loon*

Van Loon's Geography

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Foreword

Literature masterpieces usually mirror the culture of a country or area in a specific period of time. By reading these masterpieces, we can enjoy the authors' fluent writing styles, vivid and detailed description, which will place us in that specific period's history and culture. For this purpose we present the series of world literature classics to the readers.

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前 言

世界文学名著表现了作者描述的特定时代的文化。阅读这些名著可以领略著者流畅的文笔、逼真的描述、详细的刻画，让读者如同置身当时的历史文化之中。为此，我们将这套精心编辑的“名著典藏”奉献给广大读者。

我们找来了专门研究西方历史、西方文化的专家学者，请教了专业的翻译人员，精心挑选了这些可以代表西方文学的著作，并听取了一些国外专门研究文学的朋友的建议，不删节、不做任何人为改动，严格按照原著的风格，提供原汁原味的西方名著，让读者能享受纯正的英文名著。

随着阅读的展开，你会发现自己的英语水平无形中有了大幅提高，并且对西方历史文化的了解也日益深入广阔。

送您一套经典，让您受益永远！

VAN LOON'S GEOGRAPHY

**“History is the Fourth Dimension of Geography.
It gives it both time and meaning.”**



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1. And These Are the People Who Live in the World We Live in

IT sounds incredible, but nevertheless it is true. If everybody in this world of ours were six feet tall and a foot and a half wide and a foot thick (and that is making people a little bigger than they usually are), then the whole of the human race (and according to the latest available statistics, there are now nearly 2,000,000,000 descendants of the original Homo sapiens and his wife) could be packed into a box measuring half a mile in each direction. That, as I just said, sounds incredible, but if you don't believe me figure it out for yourself and you will find it to be correct.

If we transported that box to the Grand Canyon of Arizona and balanced it neatly on the low stone wall that keeps people from breaking their necks when stunned by the incredible beauty of that silent witness of the forces of Eternity and then called little Noodle, the dachshund and told him (the tiny beast is very intelligent and loves to oblige) to give the unwieldy contraption a slight push with his soft brown nose, there would be a moment of crunching and ripping as the wooden planks loosened stones and shrubs and trees on their downward path and then a low and even softer bumpity-bumpity-bump and a sudden splash when the outer edges struck the banks of the Colorado River.

Then silence and oblivion.

The human sardines in their mortuary chest would soon be forgotten.

The Canyon would go on battling wind and air and sun and rain as it has done since it was created.

The world would continue to run its even course through the uncharted heavens.

The astronomers on distant and nearby planets would have noticed nothing out of the ordinary.

A century from now, a little mound, densely covered with vegetable matter, would perhaps indicate where humanity lay buried.

And that would be all.

I can well imagine that some of my readers will not quite like this story and will feel rather uncomfortable when they see their own proud race reduced to such proportions of sublime insignificance.

There is however a different angle to the problem – an angle which makes the very smallness of our numbers and the helplessness of our puny little bodies a matter of profound and sincere pride.

Here we are, a mere handful of weak and defenceless mammals. Ever since the dawn of the first day we have been surrounded on all sides by hordes and swarms of creatures infinitely better prepared for the struggle for existence. Some of them were a hundred feet long and weighed as much as a small locomotive, while others had teeth as sharp as the blade of a circular saw. Many varieties went about their daily affairs clad in the armor of a medieval knight. Others were invisible to the human eye but they multiplied at such a terrific rate that they would have owned the entire earth in less than a year's time if it had not been for certain enemies who were able to destroy them almost as fast as they were born. Whereas man could only exist under the most favorable circumstances and was forced to look for a habitat among the few small pieces of dry land located between the high mountains and the deep sea, these fellow-passengers of ours considered no summit too high and found no sea too deep for their ambitions. They were apparently made of the stuff that could survive regardless of its natural surroundings.

When we learn on eminent authority that certain varieties of insects

are able to disport themselves merrily in petroleum (a substance we would hardly fancy as the main part of our daily diet) and that others manage to live through such changes in temperature as would kill all of us within a very few minutes, when we discover to our gruesome dismay that those little brown beetles, who seem so fond of literature that they are forever racing around in our bookcases, continue the even tenor of their restless days minus two or three or four legs, while we ourselves are disabled by a mere pin-prick on one of our toes, then we sometimes begin to realize against what sort of competitors we have been forced to hold our own, ever since we made our first appearance upon this whirling bit of rock, lost somewhere in the darkest outskirts of an indifferent universe.

What a side-splitting joke man we must have been to his pachydermatous contemporaries, who stood by and watched this pinkish sport of nature indulge in its first clumsy efforts to walk on its hind legs without the help of a convenient tree-trunk or branch!

But what has become of those proud owners of almost 200,000,000 square miles of land and water (not to mention the unfathomable oceans of air) who ruled so sublime by that right of eminent domain which was based upon brute force and sly cunning?

The greater part has disappeared from view except where as "Exhibits A" or "B" we have kindly given them a little parking space in one of our museums devoted to natural history. Others, in order to remain among those present, were forced to go into domestic service and today in exchange for a mere livelihood they favor us with their hides and their eggs and their milk and the beef that grows upon their flanks, or drag such loads as we consider a little too heavy for our own lazy efforts. Many more have betaken themselves to out-of-the-way places where we permit them to browse and graze and perpetuate their species, because, thus far, we have not thought it worth while to remove them from the scene and claim their territory

for ourselves.

In short, during only a couple of thousand centuries (a mere second from the point of view of Eternity) the human race has made itself the undisputed ruler of every bit of land and at this present day it bids fair to add both air and sea to its domains. And all that, if you please, has been accomplished by a few hundred million creatures who enjoyed not one single advantage over their enemies except the divine gift of Reason.

Even there I am exaggerating. The gift of Reason in its more sublime form and the ability to think for oneself are restricted to a mere handful of men and women. They therefore become the masters who lead. The others, no matter how much they may resent the fact, can only follow. The result is a strange and halting procession, for, no matter how hard people may try, there are ten thousand stragglers for every true pioneer.

Whither the route of march will eventually lead us we do not know. But in the light of what has been achieved during the last four thousand years there is no limit to the sum total of our potential achievements – unless we are tempted away from the path of normal development by our strange inherent cruelty, which makes us treat other members of our own species as we would never have treated a cow or a dog or even a tree.

The earth and the fullness thereof have been placed at the disposal of Man. Where they have not been placed at his disposal, he has taken possession by right of his superior brain and by the strength of his foresight and his shot-guns.

This home of ours is a good home. It grows food enough for all of us. It has abundant quarries and clay beds and forests from which all of us can be provided with more than ample shelter. The patient sheep of our pastures and the waving flax fields with their myriad of blue flowers, not to forget the industrious silk-worm of China's mulberry

trees – they all contribute to shelter our bodies against the cold of winter and protect them against the scorching heat of summer. This home of ours is a good home. It produces all these benefits in so abundant measure that every man, woman and child could have his or her share with a little extra supply thrown in for the inevitable days of rest.

But Nature has her own code of laws. They are just, these laws, but they are inexorable and there is no court of appeal.

Nature will give unto us and she will give without stint, but in return she demands that we study her precepts and abide by her dictates.

A hundred cows in a meadow meant for only fifty spell disaster – a bit of wisdom with which every farmer is thoroughly familiar. A million people gathered in one spot where there should be only a hundred thousand cause congestion, poverty and unnecessary suffering, a fact which apparently has been overlooked by those who are supposed to guide our destinies.

That, however, is not the most serious of our manifold errors. There is another way in which we offend our generous foster-mother. Man is the only living organism that is hostile to its own kind. Dog does not eat dog – tiger does not eat tiger – yea, even the loathsome hyena lives at peace with the members of his own species. But Man hates Man, Man kills Man and in the world of today the prime concern of every nation is to prepare itself for the coming slaughter of some more of its neighbors.

This open violation of Article I of the Great Code of Creation, which insists upon peace and goodwill among the members of the same species has carried us to a point where soon the human race may be faced with the possibility of complete annihilation. For our enemies are ever on the alert. If Homo sapiens (the all-too-flattering name given to our race by a cynical scientist to denote our intellectual

superiority over the rest of the animal world) if Homo Sapiens is unable or un-willing to assert himself as the master of all he surveys, there are thousands of other candidates for the job and it oftentimes seems as if a world dominated by cats or dogs or elephants or some of the more highly organized insects (and how they watch their opportunity!) might offer very decided advantages over a planet top-heavy with battleships and siege-guns.

What is the answer and what is the way out of this hideous and shameful state of affairs?

In a humble way this little book hopes to point to the one and only way out of that lugubrious and disastrous blind-alley into which we have strayed through the clumsy ignorance of our ancestors.

It will take time, it will take hundreds of years of slow and painful education to enable us to find the true road of salvation. But that road leads towards the consciousness that we are all of us fellow-passengers on one and the same planet. Once we have got hold of this absolute verity – once we have realized and grasped the fact that for better or for worse this is our common home – that we have never known another place of abode – that we shall never be able to move from the spot in space upon which we happened to be born – that it therefore behooves us to behave as we would if we found ourselves on board a train or a steamer bound for an unknown destination – we shall have taken the first but most important step towards the solution of that terrible problem which is at the root of all our difficulties.

We are all of us fellow-passengers on the same planet and the weal and woe of everybody else means the weal and woe of ourselves!

Call me a dreamer and call me a fool – call me a visionary or call for the police or the ambulance to remove me to a spot where I can no longer proclaim such unwelcome heresies. But mark my words and remember them on that fatal day when the human race shall be

requested to pack up its little toys and surrender the keys of happiness to a more worthy successor.

The only hope for survival lies in that one sentence:

WE ARE ALL OF US FELLOW-PASSENGERS ON THE SAME PLANET AND WE ARE ALL OF US EQUALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING OF THE WORLD IN WHICH WE HAPPEN TO LIVE.

2. A Definition of the Word Geography

And How I Shall Apply It in the Present Volume

BEFORE we start out upon a voyage we usually try to find out more or less definitely whither we are bound and how we are supposed to get there. The reader who opens a book is entitled to a little information of the same sort and a short definition of the word Geography' will therefore not be out of order.

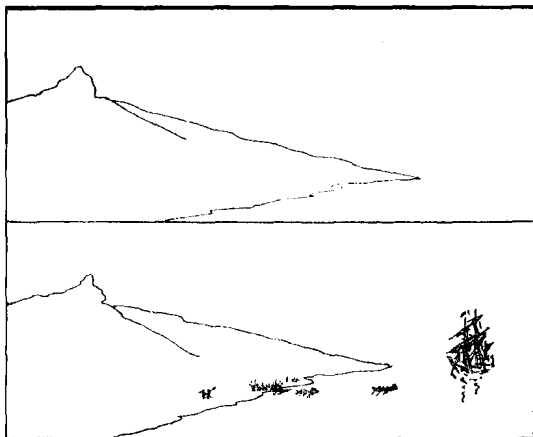
I happen to have the "Concise Oxford Dictionary" on my desk and that will do as well as any other. The word I am looking for appears on page 344, edition of 1912.

"Geography: the Science of the earth's surface, form, physical features, natural and political divisions, climate, productions, populations."

I could not possibly hope to do better, but I shall stress some of the aspects of the case at the expense of others, because I intend to place man in the centre of the stage. This book of mine will not merely discuss the surface of the earth and its physical features, together with

its political and natural boundaries. I would rather call it a study of Man in search of food and shelter and leisure for himself and for his family and an attempt to find out the way in which man has either adapted himself to his background or has reshaped his physical surroundings in order to be as comfortable and well nourished and happy as seemed compatible with his own limited strength.

It has been truly said that the Lord hath some very strange customers among those who love Him and indeed we shall find our planet inhabited by a weird and extraordinary variety of fellow-boarders. Many of them, upon first acquaintance, will appear to be possessed of very objectionable personal habits and of general characteristics which we would rather not encounter in our own children. But two billion human beings, even if they do not cut much of a figure when packed in a wooden box, are still a very respectable number of people and amongst so many there is of course the widest possible scope for all sorts of experiments of an economic and social and cultural nature. It seems to me that those experiments deserve our attention before anything else. For a mountain is after all merely a



The Human Touch.