

CHAPTER VIII

THEN AND NOW

ANTIQUITY OF MAN

It takes about two thousand years for the governments of a culture to reduce man to the lot of the fellaheen. It is not necessary to refer to Spengler's charts for us to assure ourselves that the violation of natural law is the way to dissolution and decay. There never was a better opportunity of contrasting what is *now* with what was *then*. The extraordinary discoveries made in Northern China in recent years, of the remains of our ancestors, enlighten us with a peculiar force as to the antiquity of man. It is now demonstrated that "the real beginning of the history of human culture must, with incontestable certainty, be a good deal older than we thought before." So writes Professor Franz Weidenreich of the Peking Union Medical College. He also tells us, regarding the discoveries at Choukoutien, that the "facts demonstrate clearly that we now have a continuous morphological line of hominids beginning with *Pithecanthropus-Sinanthropus* and proceeding to the Neanderthal man and ending in the man of today. . . . Man must therefore have passed through an anthropoid-like stage of organization. But this anthropoid-like ancestor was neither a chimpanzee nor a gorilla type; it was one which retained some of its special hominid characters with a surprisingly strong persistence." And when it is considered that the dawn of man is by the

recent discoveries pushed back to at least half a million years, and he had then reached the Promethean stage of using fire, it is a little disturbing for the thoughtful, who would compare what is taking place *now* with what took place *then*. Moreover, one cannot help feeling a sense of humbleness invade the mind when it is realized that man then was a discoverer of new things and that discovery of the new ceased years ago.

It is often said that, in principle, the seven great Greeks from Thales to Democritus were the last of the original discoverers, and that was only some two millenniums and a half ago. It is true we have perfected machines, but with all the new machines to aid us, we have discovered no new fundamentals. We move faster, with greater ease; we see farther; we record earthquakes; we discern almost the infinitesimal and, for the production of our food, fuel, clothing and shelter, we have made machines which reduce exertion almost to a minimum and yet, millions go hungry and ill-clad. It is obvious that there is something rotten in the State of Denmark, and the more we pride ourselves on our achievements, the more surely poverty keeps step with progress.

INGENUITY AND EXPERIENCE

Early man was thrown upon his own resources. He had to work everything out for himself. By the time he reached the stage of coping with the vicissitudes of existence, he had the same sources of subsistence placed at his disposal that the animals found. If he wished to satisfy his hunger he had to search for food and take all risks. He had to learn the difference between what was poisonous and what was edible. There was no one to tell him the difference between a mushroom and a toadstool. He had no agricultural college to examine the soil he

was to cultivate and advise him what manures to use. Unaided, he succeeded somehow in surviving, as Professor Weidenreich tells us.

The extraordinary thing about this survival was that he advanced from difficult to easier stages, which indicates that he bowed to the authority of experience. He did not commit the blunders of his father, because to do so would mean paralysis or death. Again, this surely indicates that he must have had a retentive memory, and yet he had no newspaper, no library, no astrologer, and no politician, to advise him. Think of what it meant to him to discover fire, and that he could make it at will! It is almost impossible to realize the thrill of joy that must have warmed his soul when he knew he could gather seeds, prepare the earth, plant, cultivate, and harvest produce! All this he did without an Agricultural Adjustment Administration. If there had been a Mr. Secretary in that day who had told him that prices of crops should be high, and therefore he should curtail production, he would have thought he was listening to a madman. Is not the real fact of this matter one of intention, so far as man's place on the earth is considered? The intention, nay, indeed, it was a law of his being, was that he should be master of his own fate and beholden to no one for his welfare.

Contrasting the *now* with the *then*, it is unthinkable that man should be victimized by bureaucrats. The endowment of man gives the lie to any such notion. Therefore, if we have reached the stage when it is absolutely necessary for a bureaucracy to do the thinking for individual producers and consumers, then man has ceased to be what he was! The State is the enemy of man. The State has undertaken to do practically all the thinking for him, at least so far as all necessities are

concerned, and has consequently reduced him to a mere body afflicted with inanition of thought for himself. As the Preacher says, "He is the victim of the system."

ECONOMIC PRESSURE AND SELF-RELIANCE

There was only one way that man could rise out of the sheer animal stage, and that was by the constant force of economic pressure. And how wonderfully the system was ordered! Everything balanced to a nicety. Through economic pressure he satisfied his hunger and, in the exertion, he learned it was easier to produce from seed than search for edibles. Economic pressure drove him to lighten his exertion, and he fashioned a tool, and so on. The axiom, "Necessity is the mother of invention," might be bettered by striking out the word "necessity" and substituting "economic pressure." We remember the story of Diogenes who, seeing a boy cup his hands to take water, decided he had no use for drinking vessels and threw them away, but that refers to a period of high culture in the history of the State. Imagine the joy of the first man who conceived the idea of molding clay, hardening it in the sun, or baking it in fire, and using the vessel for storing water! It is not easy for us to understand what that meant in the way of lightening his exertions. Dr. Creel in his delightful work, *The Birth of China*, tells us that Neolithic man made a great deal of pottery. At first, they were crude vessels; later, designs were pressed into the wet clay; then followed traces of color; all this, man did without the aid of an art school. Today, when we departmentalize almost everything from mass production to mass bureaucracy, it is significant to realize that early man was completely self-reliant and had to be discoverer, inventor, manufacturer, and artist. This self-reliance

was beneficent selfishness; it was all done for the sake of self-interest. Selfish interest was the motive power of the culture builder. If a politician had appeared in Neolithic times, and had given the men of that day a lecture on selfish interest, it is just possible they might have been so charmed with his voice, that they would have thrown up their hands and reverted to the conditions of their great-great primate forefathers.

UNEARTHING THE PAST

When I was a boy, before the popular science magazines were the vogue, we thought that the history of man went back a long, long way—some five thousand years at most. The Garden of Eden was the ancient habitat of our ancestor. Now we not only find that the earth is considerably older than we imagined it was when I was a boy, but that man, too, is a very much more ancient being than anybody thought he was at that time. That which has caused this revolution in discovery and thought is the work of anthropologists and archaeologists in unearthing the past. These two great branches of science look not to the future; they are concerned only in what was. The matter of importance to them is *then*, not *now*. This, in itself, is a revolution in method and survey. Combine with these two branches of science that of geology, and possibly astronomy, and we have a body of serious thinking men who desire to make the *now* understandable to those of our time and generation, by presenting the facts of existence as they were *then*. But this touches only a very few people.

When I was a boy, minds were so alert that such discoveries as these made in Northern China would have been discussed by all branches of society. Clergymen, lay lecturers, and scientists would have been

going up and down the country interpreting the facts to the people. There would have been Huxleys, Tyn-
dales, Spencers, outvieing one another in their efforts
to reach audiences of working men. There is no stir
today. The politicians have the field, because words and
relief mean more to the people of this generation than
science and history.

But let us see what this going back process, indulged
in by the scientist, means so far as the other sciences are
concerned. It would be stretching a point, I presume, to
say that the biologist, the chemist, and the physicist
are also investigating the past. But is not biology a
science of the past more than it is a science of the future?
And is not chemistry also devoted to the search for what
is here, but hidden from man? As to physics, may it not
be said that Faraday, Clerk-Maxwell, Einstein, and
Rutherford are engaged in the work of interpreting
laws which have always been in existence? This may
seem far-fetched, because the emphasis on their work
has always been put on the material value of their dis-
coveries to the people of our time. The scientist says, of
course, that this is merely a commercial matter which
does not concern him, and that it is the secondary, and
not the primary reason for the quest.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

Now the first science of all, that of economics, is
taking no part in the work referred to above. It is,
however, not difficult to understand why this should be.
One reason for it is that economic law is far too simple
to be understood by complicated minds. Tell a pro-
fessorial economist that the first man was the first
economist, because every day of his life he had a demon-
stration of fundamental economics in process, and he

would not know what on earth you were talking about. Departments of Political Economy in our schools and universities have become nothing more nor less than bureaus for gathering data regarding the production of an article, say the motor car. Their studies and data-collecting excursions begin with the factory and go through all the stages until the car reaches the consumer. Connected with this is the financial system which makes it possible for the manufacturer to buy his raw material and, through a credit system, dispose of it to the consumer. Furthermore, there is the monetary system of the government which, to some extent, regulates the financial system as it hinders or facilitates the manufacturing processes. It is an almost inextricable muddle, piled on a complicated morass of mere financial and commercial thimble-rigging. The manufacturing process itself, although complicated, is comparatively simple and direct compared with the monetary problems of financiers and bureaucrats. In brief, this is about the sum of the work that is done in so-called schools of political economy today. Where all the material that goes into the car comes from does not seem to concern them, and the great lesson that Henry Ford endeavored to teach, during the Century of Progress Fair in Chicago, by setting up in a hall every process from the rawest material to the finished car, went practically unheeded. This was one of the greatest pieces of educational work in economics that was ever put before a people, but I never heard that any school or university thought it was worth the trouble to organize a band of students and take them to the Fair, for the specific purpose of seeing that show and having someone explain it to them. Perhaps no university professor capable of giving an explanation could be found!

MAN AS A LAND ANIMAL

When man or a group of men set out to produce anything, whether it be a vegetable, an aeroplane, a steamship or an article of apparel, there is only one way they can set to work and, although it seems absurd to mention such a fact to the economists, they must begin as the first man began, that is, go to the earth. There is no other way of producing food, fuel, clothing, shelter and the vehicles of transportation. Modern man has undoubtedly done some marvelous things in the way of manufacturing, but he still remains, so far as the first processes of production are concerned, a primitive creature. Mass production, mass finance, mass credit systems, do not alter the initiatory processes one iota. No matter how complicated the commercial and financial systems may be, man remains a land animal, and cannot get his raw-material from any other source than the earth. So, with regard to fundamental economics, man fundamentally remains where he was. But unfortunately, the economists, and the business chart-makers, have failed to understand this, and specialization in industry and business is the cause of compartmentalizing the work of individuals. It is only necessary to look over the agenda of courses, which university departments send out to students, to see that the wretched person who subscribes to such a course will never learn anything about fundamentals. The nearest he will get to the first processes in production will be, perhaps, when the stage dealing with semi-manufactured articles is reached. I say perhaps, because I find in most schools which pretend to deal with economics, that this stage is rather neglected, probably because there is not enough in it to enable a professor to pad a textbook. He

begins his work of instruction at the point where industry and finance become complicated, and the more complicated they are, the longer the work to be written, and the less said of educational worth. Why educational charlatans should begin at the wrong end of the stick, when they start to instruct the neophyte, is not at all difficult to understand by anybody familiar with their works. Still, they must start somewhere and, having no knowledge of the beginning, they select the end and, as it were, putting the horse head first into the shafts of the economic cart, they drill the student in the business of striving to make the horse move in the direction its tail points.

THE LAWS OF PRODUCTION

Our early ancestor always kept the head of the horse in the direction in which he wished it to go, and so he moved forward. If such a creature as a modern economist had turned up just before early man made his first tool, and had told him that it was futile for him to think of producing anything for his desires and needs without the assistance of a company promoter and a financier, early man would have been able to demonstrate in a moment that the economist was quite wrong. Whether the demonstration would have been of any use in the way of convincing the gentleman of the error of his ways or not, is hard to tell, but early man could have made it plain that at that stage there were only two factors in production: the earth and labor. If the economist had remained in the neighborhood until early man had made the first tool, the inventor-cultivator would have been able to reveal certain laws of production that would remain unaltered all through the most

intricate system a complicated civilization could possibly invent.

When the tool was used to aid in production, the third factor appeared upon the scene: capital, which aids in the production of more wealth. Suppose a stranger appeared who said that spring rains had caused a wash-out on his holding, and he needed help in tilling some earth and putting in seed before summer came. When he saw the tool his neighbor used in turning up the earth and digging holes, he would be quick to realize that he could attend to his job and complete it in half the time if he had the use of it. Turning to the capitalist he, no doubt, would have said, "You lend me your tool and I will give you a part of my crop, for wear and tear and the saving of time." No lawyer being upon the scene, they would agree speedily, and when the harvest came, a settlement would be made. The tool, and a part of the crop, would be returned to the owner of it. A part of the crop would be the first payment of interest on the use of capital. But this is all too simple for the professorial economist. It takes place every day of our lives, but the fog of finance, markets, government, is so thick that it is hidden from view. Even under Stalin the same processes take place; even in the Germany and the Italy of today there are three factors in production, and they are just the same factors that were in production when man made the first tool: the earth, labor and capital.

THE BASIS OF A CULTURE

The first man worked for wage. What was his wage? His produce. Produce is wage. But an economist of our time rarely refers to wage in this simple form. Again he must envelope it in a fog of coins, bills, union rates, and

all the other complicated details of the commercial and trade union system. Wage now is so many money bills a week or a month. What these bills represent is nearly forgotten. The tokens of exchange seem to command the mind of man now, and what the man has produced in part, or in whole, is utterly disregarded. The man who pops a wheel onto the hub of a motor car is engaged in the same industrial process as our early ancestor who stuck a spud into the ground. The difference lies in the fact that the latter knew what he was doing and the former does not. Hence the nonsense that is talked about capital employing labor. Here, today, civilization has turned things upside down or, to put it in another way, accepted the superficial for the fundamental process. The order is reversed. As Lincoln says, "Labor is before capital." And even today, strange as it may seem to those who observe the complicated mess in production and finance, labor employs capital. Perhaps it might make it easier for the professorial economist if, in attempting to demonstrate this process, the name labor were changed to consumer, for all are consumers. If we say that consumers employ capital, it might seem a little easier. Still, specialization and compartmentalizing workers make it difficult to see clearly that it is labor, even though we call it by the other name consumers, that employs capital. Perhaps it might aid the understanding to point out that the lessening of consumer demand is the cause of putting capital out of action. Bad trade, a slump, a financial panic—all these are caused more or less by the consumers demanding fewer goods and services. The reason for this is that the value of the land from which all raw material is produced has been bid up so high that the price of commodities has soared to heights beyond the purchasing power of the consumers.

But early man had none of these excrescences of the economic system to worry about, so he made progress and laid the basis of a culture. And now another one of the many cultures he has made is speedily passing away, for one of the surest indications of the twilight of a civilization is a top-heavy bureaucracy.

In this respect it is well worth thinking about the number of times man has started again. Every known section of the earth is now revealing ancient and still more ancient beginnings of cultures, but no one heeds this tremendous portent, no one but archaeologists and anthropologists. The great mass of the people at all times believed prosperity was round the corner. Half a million years of cultural experience goes for naught today, so far as the voting mass is concerned. Only let them have their demagogue and they will live on his words if they are backed up by deeds of relief. Bread and circus!