

Man's Primeval Pacifism

BY H. J. MASSINGHAM

I. FOOD GATHERERS IN THE STONE AGE.

"There was no antithesis between war and peace, because there never had been in the world as yet a real condition of peace in which it had been possible for the creative force at man's command to be exercised for man's benefit. What men really had to calculate in the matter was, not questions of abstract belief, but fundamental human nature."—Dr. Haden Guest, in the House of Commons, March 18.

IN Mr. Cunningham Graham's recently published narrative, *The Conquest of the River Plate*, we read: "He (Gaboto) had now entered the territory of the Guarinis, who were the gentlest and most civilised of all the Indian tribes." They came to him with gifts of silver plate which they had obtained from the Indians of the Peruvian silver mines, but in their own land of Paraguay there were no mines. In these innocent words is centred the whole history of civilisation from the Old Stone Age to the present day. Mr. Graham would have made a better shot at the truth if he had said "gentlest and most uncivilised," and we may add to his record the statement that the far more highly civilised Incas and Aztecs were by no means gentle peoples, that the reason they were not so had nothing to do with fundamental human nature, but was due to the presence of mines in the districts where they lived, and lastly that the Guarinis were what they were because there were no mines in their territories.

This totally novel revolution of accepted values and ideas we owe primarily to the work of one man, Mr. W. J. Perry, the Reader in Cultural Anthropology in London University, who has not only opened up a fresh and clear perspective of how civilisation developed, but in so doing has exposed as a fallacy the doctrine held almost universally and equally by priest and layman, pacifist and militarist, poor man and rich man: the doctrine that warfare and organised violence are a heritage to us from primitive man. It is Mr. Perry's recent book, *The Growth of Civilization*,* that I shall take as the main text of this article.

We apply the term "savage" to backward peoples indiscriminately, whereas there is a very important distinction between primitive peoples who have never been in contact with civilisation and barbarous peoples who have been so influenced at a remote period but have forgotten what they were taught. The former type Perry describes as "food-gatherers," people, that is to say, unacquainted with agriculture and the use of metals, who exist in various parts of the world today, and whose manners and conditions of life correspond with those of the tribes inhabiting Europe and the Near East in the Old Stone stage of human culture.

"It is an error," writes Perry, "to think that men in the food-gathering stage were given to fighting." Explorers have described these modern hunting tribes, to whom war is unknown equally with the dogmas of peace (the Eskimo, for instance, have no word for war in their vocabulary), and who are all essentially alike, however diverse in race or environment. They live at peace not only with neighbouring tribes, but with one another, and Father Huguemin, who spent forty years in an island near Tahiti, testified to the absence not merely of violence, but of rage among the natives. These tribes, whether in Arctic or tropical regions, have no slavery, nor human sacrifice (nor State religion, nor ruling class; fair dealing, equality between the sexes, a free and smiling conduct are so normal that no great bones can be made about them).

And this, so far as excavations have revealed it, was the universal condition of early mankind for tens of thousands of years. All the evidence that has been gathered from so remote a period points to the theory that the people devoted themselves to their food supply and the artistic energies that were prob-

ably associated with it. We cannot call these qualities "virtues" because no such (tiresome) word as virtue could have been invented. As Lao Tze wrote of these men of the "Golden Age": "They loved one another without knowing that to do so was Benevolence; they were honest and leal-hearted without knowing it was Loyalty; they employed the services of one another without thinking they were receiving or conferring any gift. Therefore their actions left no trace and there was no record of their affairs."

Into these people's fretless lives came suddenly the most profound change that man had known since he had branched off from the anthropoids—the arrival of wonderful strangers, bringing with them large ships, copper tools, various arts and crafts utterly unknown to them, an extraordinary and complex system of religious belief worked out by priests to its minutest details, a habit of mummifying their dead and erecting huge stone monuments connected with ceremony, the administration of justice and the deification of ancestors, a passion for acquiring metals and precious stones, especially gold and pearls, and a method of cultivating certain food plants by terraced irrigation. In every case they were led by great lords who called themselves "Children of the Sun," and it was these miner-mariner-migrants who from Ireland to Mexico introduced the first civilisations to a naive world.

For a long time it was not known who they were nor why they went all over the world on these great expeditions, but that they had made them there is no doubt, since the vestiges of the settlements remain in the forms of stone monuments, mine workings, pottery and polished flints, irrigating terraces, religious cults and tenacious traditions. It is not my business here to disentangle the evidence leading to the conclusion that these men were Egyptians of the fifth and subsequent dynasties, or other foreigners of the Near East closely allied to them. Professor Cherry has indeed shown that it was impossible for agriculture to have been invented anywhere else in the world except in Egypt, where Nature, through the agency of the Nile flood, told the people exactly what to do.

Lastly, there is the motive for these world-wide explorations, for we certainly need one to explain how a little Egypt of the Pyramid Age finds itself in place between large stone monuments and mines all over the world has supplied it. What these Orientals were after were certain precious substances to which they attributed a supreme value as "givers of life," as possessing the power to confer immortality in the next world and prosperity in this, and there is little doubt that the immortal beings of the sky and the underworld were originally nothing but the personified forms of these life-secreting substances. I got hold of a picturesque bit of evidence the other day, and that is that the Cornish miners of today suffer from the disease of Egyptian anaemia.

These new discoveries are vitally relevant to the problem of how warfare arose in a human world which knew it not. The important thing about these first civilisations is that the earliest stages of culture were invariably higher than those of a later date in the same country. What we see is a gradual deterioration of culture, building on a smaller scale, inferior pottery and so on, followed by some sudden catastrophe, and in district after district, from Polynesia to Scandinavia, an abrupt disuse of stone-building and a hurried abandonment of the unexhausted mines. And then the "archaic civilisation" vanishes, overwhelmed with warfare.

What happened was that this mining civilisation brought with it the seeds of its own decay. In the first place, you get a highly developed people with a rigid class system imposing themselves upon peoples in the primitive stage of culture, exploiting their labor in constructing huge tombs and temples

and in working the mines, and teaching them an elaborate cult in which they, the Children of the Sun, figured as divine overlords, rewarded with godship and the sky-world after death. The food-gatherers knew nothing of all this: they just accepted it, as credulous mankind does accept things. They could not understand why they should be punished with death for laughing at animals, for instance, but as they were so punished they refrained from the amusement.

And their rulers? There is practically no doubt that all the civilisations of the Mediterranean were peaceful in the beginning, and that their expeditions after mineral wealth were in no sense warlike. They were peaceful because they inherited the peaceable psychology of all mankind. But such power and absolutism as were theirs could not but end in one way, in jealousies and rivalries among one another, in the passing of the pilgrimage for immortality into the scramble for wealth, from the gold of religion into the religion of gold. Quarrels among priests, for instance, brought the first warfare into Eastern Polynesia, and with it a swift decline of culture. Another concrete illustration occurs in the institution of human sacrifice, connected with agricultural rites, and producing petty wars to obtain human victims (the Aztecs desired not to kill the Spaniards but capture them for sacrifice).

So much for internal disintegration. But the chief cause of the destruction of the ancient civilisation was external invasion. It is usually assumed that the warlike communities came down like wolves upon the settled agricultural populations from the wilderness. But they themselves were a decadent product of these settlements and originated from bands of discontented nobles who left their homes with their followers, founded new dynasties, set up nomad military aristocracies with war gods, and attacked the settlements for their mineral wealth. The origin and development of warfare is all one story.

It is not, therefore, to "fundamental human nature," which deep down is kindly like its mother's fruits; but to certain institutions and the class system responsible for them that we owe the curse of war. Would then that man might learn to make them in his image, and like a snake renew his winter weeds outworn.

II. ANCIENT AND MODERN WARFARE.

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TO many fallacies about man's deeply destructive nature, about "the inevitable struggle for existence," so long advanced by the militarist philosopher and pseudo-anthropologist, there has been opposed lately a theory, pointing to the opposite conclusion of man's primeval pacifism.

Mr. Perry, the brilliant exponent of the New Anthropology, believes himself to have discovered that primitive man is essentially peaceful, that war is the invention of one specially gifted or specially wicked nation, the ancient inhabitants of Egypt, and that it thence was spread and imposed upon the rest of the world. Man thus would seem to be, in spite of all appearances, a lamb in a wolf's skin, an essentially good-natured and amiable citizen, disguised under the bristling exterior of a head-hunter, cannibal, buccaneer or, worst of all, modern militarist. If he only chose to shake off the offensive garment, he could live on peaceful terms with the whole world. This theory is so alluring that it was taken up some time ago by Mr. Lowes Dickinson, and registered as a new and valuable weapon in the intellectual arsenal of peace. Now another ardent combatant of the militarist fallacy, Mr. Massingham, seems to hail this spurious hypothesis of man's original meekness as an important discovery.

* *The Growth of Civilization*, By W. J. Perry. (Methuen, 6s).