

Antiquity

VOL. XX No. 77

MARCH 1946

Editorial Notes

THESE Notes faded out of existence early in the War, because under the shadow of that great storm it seemed frivolous to continue the discussion of abstract ideas. In England archaeological work did not come to a standstill; indeed, thanks to the initiative of a government department and the dauntless energy of some of its servants, the excavation of 'military' sites was continued, winter and summer, for six years without remission, with a rich harvest of new knowledge. But what one might call the social side of archaeology, with its meetings and opportunities for discussions and the exchange of ideas, was necessarily in abeyance. These Notes aimed at reflecting the ideas and problems of the archaeological world and they would have been empty of content during those terrible years. We were all preoccupied by other things. The Editors considered that the prime task of ANTIQUITY was to keep going till better times should come. This we have been able to do, thanks to the unswerving support of our readers, which alone made this possible. More than once we have been told that it was our duty to keep ANTIQUITY going whether we liked it or not! We were assured that it had achieved a unique position in the world, and that its discontinuance would be universally regretted. These assurances were so strongly expressed that, quite apart from any opinion of our own, we knew they must be true. The fact is that ANTIQUITY has become an institution, representative of the best and liveliest elements in the world of Archaeology; and it has a momentum of its own. The Editors are the servants of this institution, just as in a democratic state the ministers are the servants of the public that elects them. That is the natural and proper result of following a correct policy right from the start. The Editors may justly take credit for formulating the policy, but they willingly share the credit of its success with all those who, by their unwavering support, have ensured its success. Without that support the policy could not have succeeded. In short, ANTIQUITY survives because it was founded upon correct principles.



We shall try and return gradually to our original format, but paper restrictions still make this difficult. There are other difficulties—increased cost of materials, lack of draughtsmen (especially for maps), difficulties of communication. Moreover, many of our contributors are still occupied with the aftermath of war, and some of them, alas! have died. Owing to the state of Europe we are thrown more on our own resources. It is not easy to discover what is going on in the world outside, and one fears that for a long

ANTIQUITY

time to come the primary tasks of reconstruction will necessarily absorb the whole energies of peoples. But when once the fundamental requisites of food, clothing and shelter have been secured, there is much reconstruction of cultural life to be undertaken. Much has been destroyed, but not quite all; and even if every relic of the past had vanished and we had to begin again, we should do so, because our task of reconstructing human history remains. Nothing can destroy that so long as the technique of archaeology is practicable. It is difficult to imagine any convulsion so great and overwhelming as to obliterate every field everywhere in which sites like Woodbury may exist, together with the skill to exploit them; and modern warfare at any rate has not shown any signs of eliminating air-photography.



Not long ago we published an article (ANTIQUITY XVIII, 147-50) advocating an institution of higher education in West Africa. Such an institution already exists at Khartoum. If it is true, as so often stated, that we Europeans are installed in African countries for the benefit of the inhabitants rather than to exploit them, then it is by just such institutions of higher education that we can best fulfil our purpose—and not only in the sphere of the past. The policy of the U.S.S.R. in the Asiatic republics is an example of what can be achieved, when the predatory methods of big business have been eliminated. The British have been governing India for a long time, but so far there has been no serious or organized attempt to instruct Indians in modern archaeological technique. Not only is this true, but even the British do not appear to have applied such methods as air-photography and post-hole technique to the few sites explored or the many that might have been discovered by one or other of these devices. We are therefore, perhaps, on rather delicate ground when we criticize Indian archaeology, as it is criticized in a review published in this number. Nevertheless we have decided to publish it in exactly the form in which we received it because we feel that, whoever may be responsible for the present state of Indian archaeology, the facts as stated by our reviewer are correct. We receive for review quite a number of publications written by Indian archaeologists; the majority of them consist, almost entirely, of worthless speculation or unintelligible discussions of literary texts. Such are not, properly speaking, archaeology at all. Archaeology is concerned with the soil, in which Indian history is buried. It will remain buried there until it is unearthed by modern methods. It is the task of Indians to extract it, and it should be ours to give them the tools and teach them how to use them. If they have much to learn, we have neglected opportunities to atone for. Let us each admit our shortcomings and start afresh on new lines. There is a wealth of opportunity.



The recent appointment of Dr Wheeler to the post of Director-General of Archaeology in India inaugurates a new era. Dr Wheeler symbolizes the British School of Archaeology in Britain, which is the best in the world. His superb leadership, enthusiasm and mastery of technique have already begun to revolutionize a department which, long dead, was rapidly decomposing. His finely unconventional official Memoranda are clarion-calls that should rally to his side everyone, in Whitehall as well as in India, who is genuinely interested in Indian history and culture. They are inspired by that practical horse-sense which characterized the British before they were strangled by their own Treasury. One can imagine the feelings of horror and amazement with which his

EDITORIAL NOTES

Memoranda will be read by pen-pushing civil servants everywhere. 'Learn by watching coolies at work . . . Learn by trial and error how to mix your mortar . . . You are no longer a schoolboy waiting to be taught'. 'Science is a *whole-time* pre-occupation. It has nothing to do with office hours. There is no such thing as "science from 10.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m." Those are the hours between which the administering scientist has *least* time for his science. His real work begins when his routine work ceases. And archaeology is a branch of science'. The example of Soviet Russia is held up for imitation; just as that country imported capitalist technicians to build up a socialist industry, so should India import archaeological technicians for a limited period to train Indian workers in their methods. The gist of it all is 'Deeds not words. Away with all this spate of verbiage and literary drivel; let us get down to the job of unearthing the history of India and conserving its national monuments properly; and in particular let us begin by filling up the gap of 2000 years between the end of the Indus culture and the coming of Alexander'.



We wish Dr Wheeler the best of luck in his attempt to hustle the East (which includes of course Anglo-Indians). If, as we expect, his influence on Indian archaeology proves ultimately to be as deep and as permanent as it will be on British archaeology, then he will have gone far to atone for the neglect of decades; and he will also show that, if the British are the most uncultured people of the world, they do also occasionally produce the antidote.



As we go to press we have received the first number of a splendid new publication—*Ancient India*: Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India. A full notice of this will be published in the June number; meanwhile we heartily congratulate the Survey and wish *Ancient India* a long and prosperous career. It is priced two rupees, or three shillings and is to be obtained from the Manager of Publications, Delhi, India. The contents are not too technical to appeal to any reader of ANTIQUITY.