

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

A FREE-LANCE journal has many advantages over those which are the organs of learned bodies. One is that, in order to keep going at all, it must be read. The moment it becomes dull it is doomed. That does not mean, fortunately, that we cannot publish occasional articles intended mainly for specialists; they all read ANTIQUITY, and have claims to consideration on that ground at least. It means, however, that the Editor must keep his hand on his readers' pulse; and the moment he observes any weakening of interest must find out the cause and eradicate it. This need does not operate upon subsidized publications. (Need we add that there is ample room for both?).



But how to discover where that interest lies? Readers seem, from their letters, to fall into two groups, westerners and easterners (just as in the war). The westerners call for more articles about British archaeology; the easterners retort that for several millennia western Europe was a mere barbaric fringe on the outskirts of a civilization created by the peoples of the east and of the Mediterranean. Our policy is to try and hold the balance between these two groups, giving to each something of what it wants. It is not a case where rigid or final judgments should be made. The interest of the historical

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evolution of one's own homeland has obvious claims (as it has also obvious risks, if over-indulged). When that country has also played an important part upon the stage of general history, that interest may well be allowed fairly full play. But for the same reason the ' heirs of all the ages ' should know something about those ages ; agriculture and urban civilization were created not in western Europe but in the fertile valleys of the east.



But it is by no means easy, having discovered what one wants, to find the man to write the article. For example, we wanted, and still want, an article summarizing what is known of the economy of the Sumerian city-temple. This was a vital organ in the life of the city-state, the earliest urban community in the world's history. Since the majority of clay tablets are business letters and contracts, there should by now have accumulated a fair amount of information on this fundamental matter. Indeed, according to Dr Woolley,* writing itself arose from business needs. So far, however, we have failed to obtain that article. One of the probable reasons is that there are few posts available for the study of cuneiform, and those who hold them are either overworked by routine or mentally incapable of a generalized treatment of their subject ; for we really cannot accept the excuse made by one non-starter that the economics of early Sumeria are still a closed book.



Articles which give one a bird's-eye view of some department of highly specialized knowledge are at once the most difficult to write and to obtain for publication ; for they demand considerable literary powers, a wide range of knowledge, and a breadth of outlook—faculties not often combined in one brain. It is usual to label such articles ' popular ', and that they certainly are ; but the epithet is also used in a disparaging sense—' merely popular '. How often have we heard an admirable book thus condemned ! No one would think of finding fault with a small scale map because it did not provide him with a plan of his estate or home-town ; it is not intended to do so. To get this he must buy another sort of map altogether (a cadastral map like the

* Address to the English Association, reported in *Manchester Guardian* and *Morning Post*, 2 June.

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6-inch or 25-inch Ordnance Map). It is recognized that different scales are required for different purposes ; and that to describe, say, the half-inch-to-the-mile one as *merely* a small scale map would be absurd. But it is just as absurd to decry a small scale verbal description—always providing of course that it is based upon a large scale knowledge of the subject-matter.



Generally speaking however we have been able to obtain the sort of article we want, even though we may have had to wait years for it. But there are some for which we and our readers are still waiting, as we know from their letters. We have not been able to get a summary of the main features of the Indus civilization, for instance ; nor have we been able to find anyone to describe the characteristics of prehistoric British dogs.



There are whole cultures we have never touched upon—such as are represented by the ruins of Angkor in Cambodia, Anaradhapura in Ceylon, Barabudur in Java ; and except in reviews we have published little or nothing about Stein's Central Asia (as it well may be called), Southern Arabia (the Hadramaut and Yemen), Abyssinia and its phallic megaliths discovered by Father Azais. A note in the present number shows that Nigeria has had a history ; we should not be surprised one day to learn that it was a very long one. East Africa contains much that has never been mentioned in print. What we want is not the notes of a tourist illustrated by bad snapshots, but something that will tell us what was the place in history of the remains in question ; and it must be written from first-hand knowledge.



It was once quite usual for archaeologists to abuse the State for its failure to support their own branch of science. The amount spent upon past records of civilization is still negligible compared with what is spent in destroying civilization itself. We think that Authority still does not realize how rapidly public opinion has moved since the War ; and that it would be supported if it spent more upon science and less

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upon literary curios. Meanwhile it is gratifying that a service of antiquities for the island of Cyprus is likely to be established (*The Times*, 19 July, p. 15) and that prehistoric archaeology is officially recognized in the last award of Civil List pensions (*The Times*, 18 July, p. 8). So far, so good.



One often wonders whether Authority realizes what a good return it gets for its modest outlay—how much work it gets for nothing, how much overtime, how much voluntary enthusiasm. Only those ‘in the know’ can appreciate this and it would be improper for the present writer to enlarge upon it. He has daily evidence of it, however, in his official correspondence and his experience is shared by others of his profession. The standard set by the present generation of archaeologists is admittedly high and lapses from it occur but rarely.



We had hoped to include in the present number a review of Monsieur Poidebard’s splendid book describing the really epoch-making discoveries he has made in Syria by means of air-photography and air reconnaissance. The review has been written but the illustrations that were to accompany it are still not forthcoming. For this failure the publisher of the book is alone responsible.



We have lately issued a letter to some former subscribers who for one reason and another—in most cases an economic one—have (since 1927) felt obliged to discontinue ANTIQUITY. In the letter we expressed the hope, that in view of the more favourable outlook in home affairs, they would now renew their support. We are glad (for their sakes and our’s), to say this has resulted in some renewals, though not so many as we could wish. In one case a subscriber who was unable to attend an archaeological meeting thought that a year’s ANTIQUITY might take its place, and this suggests a hint to others who may, for various reasons, be obliged to forgo some pleasure of the same kind that they can secure a whole year’s antiquarian enjoyment at the cost of a pound note.