

# NATURE

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## MAN IN THE MODERN WORLD

MR. MUMFORD'S aim in the series of volumes that opened with "Technics and Civilization" was to give a rounded interpretation of the development of modern man, and to show what changes in his plan of life are necessary in order to enable him to make the most of the vast powers that are now at his command. The third volume, which has now appeared\*, deals with the purposes and ends of human development. Whereas in his former volumes Mr. Mumford was concerned with the effect of technical and social factors on the condition of man, he is here concerned with that of symbols, or what he terms the 'idolum' which complements man's natural environment. By this term he understands a symbolic milieu of images, sounds, words, fabrications, and even natural objects to which man has attached a representative value. The ability to write symbols and respond to symbols, he says, is an essential difference between the world of brutes and the world of men. Communication, communion and co-operation, the three essential attributes of human society, all depend upon the acceptance of common symbols to which the same meanings, functions, and values are attached. They are not substitutes for experience but a means of enhancing it and enlarging its domain; and ritual, art, poetry, drama, music, dance, philosophy, science, myth and religion are all as essential to man as his daily bread. It is through the effort to achieve meaning, form and value that the potentialities of man are realized, and his life raised to a higher potential; and this survey of the condition of man attempts accordingly to emphasize those aspects of man's life that are usually neglected: his dreams, his purposes, his ideals, his utopias.

From this point of view, Mr. Mumford sets out to survey in its social setting the whole history of the mind of man from ancient Greece to Nazi Germany; to describe the conditions of life, material and spiritual, in which thinkers and philosophers arose; to characterize and evaluate their teachings, and, finally, to find a fresh answer to the age-long questions: What is man? What meaning has his life? What is his origin, his condition, his destiny? Mr. Mumford seeks to determine whether any regular trends are to be found in human history and whether these throw any light on future possibilities. But while he attempts no study of ethical ideals, of the purposes which men ought to pursue, he makes many excursions into philosophy, and enters judgments in that field which are at least provocative and may be irritating, though it is argument and not contradiction that in the main he will stimulate.

The task Mr. Mumford has set himself is immense and may seem unmanageable; but a strong sense of historical continuity informs his attempt at synthesis. Sometimes this leads him to oversimplify the issues, to concentrate on the history of ideas and to neglect the task of delineating the conditions in which men actually lived. "The Culture of Cities" may indeed correct the impression of unity and coherence in

\* The Condition of Man. By Lewis Mumford. Pp. x+467+16 plates. (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, Ltd., n.d.) 25s. net

some of his descriptions in the present book, for Mr. Mumford is here apt to concern himself too much with the spiritual side of the history of Western man ; and his dramatic bias, as indicated in his chapter titles, tends to accentuate the weakness. He gives too much of the impression of a closed chapter to each epoch, rather than of continuous development. Nevertheless, the fundamental theme of the book is that man is a continually changing animal ; his growth is not completed by biological fulfilment as mate and parent or by death ; his nature is self-surpassing and self-transcending ; his utmost achievements are always beginnings and his fullest growth leaves him still unsatisfied, while above his instinctive and automatic activities lies a whole stratum of purpose and meaning. Mr. Mumford has attempted, not to trace lines of development, but rather to discover in each period of human history the forces which tend to encourage or thwart the realization of personality. In dealing with each age he weaves into a single pattern all that is known of its religion and art, as well as of its social and political organization. He often challenges accepted beliefs and opinions, but even when he fails to substantiate his own views sufficiently, he demonstrates the resources of the reservoir of human creativeness to be found in history.

So far as scientific workers are concerned, they may feel that the contribution of science is insufficiently stressed by Mr. Mumford, and may be tempted to compare his book to its disadvantage with Whitehead's "Adventures of Ideas". But while Mr. Mumford has been over-careful to avoid repeating the argument of "Technics and Civilization", he does justice to Bacon and Newton ; and one of the most suggestive passages of the book is that in which he discusses the relation between science and the universities at that time, and the way in which science came to acquire a moral authority that had once been pre-empted by the Church.

When dealing with science and its implications, Mr. Mumford is in fact at his best. In the last three chapters of his book, which are much the best written and most lucid, if not indeed also the most stimulating, he passes in review the nineteenth century and seeks to disclose the roots of the dangers threatening Western civilization and to formulate a basis for renewal. Here is indeed a sombre picture of societies dominated by intensified nationalism, of the triumph of the machine over human personality and of moral weakness rationalized with the help of theories in which brute impulse is given priority over reason.

A formidable mass of reading, not all of equal value, is represented by the bibliographies appended to his books ; but it is in the writings of a man of science, Patrick Geddes, that Mr. Mumford finds the clue to the basis of renewal. Geddes' emphasis on the evolution of a more finely attuned and more complexly balanced expression of both personality and community, and his philosophy of life in which mechanism had constant place as the servant of life but never as its master, led him to an expression of citizenship akin to that which Mumford has already indicated in "The Culture of Cities". Geddes accepted social

responsibility in his life and work, and interrelated scientific investigation with social need ; but the basic change he advocated was the unification of all the processes of life, the subjective and the objective, and the equal cultivation of the sciences, the arts, and the humanities.

Mumford's tribute to the work and teaching of Geddes is deserved, but while Geddes expressed Mumford's own view that the sundered fragments of the modern world will be unified, not by returning to their original simplicity but by advancing to a more highly developed synthesis and a more inclusive pattern of action, open always to the test of fresh action, to the challenge of fresh experience, and the incursion of fresh ideas and ideals, Mumford's final chapter has much in common with General Smuts' conception of holism. None the less, this final chapter, if not exhaustive in its analysis and rather deficient in the delineation of the ways in which the needs of personality and those of the community are to be fulfilled in due balance, is perhaps the most stimulating in the whole book. It is full of pertinent comments as we face the tasks of a post-war world, and is less sombre than most of the book, for Mr. Mumford faces the future with hope. We are moving, he thinks, from an age of expansion to an era of stabilization, which will present an opportunity for a proper balancing of functions, and therefore for a richer development of personality. To make greater use of our vitalities and energies we must re-assert the primacy of the person.

Mr. Mumford points out that every gain in power, every mastery of natural forces, every scientific addition to knowledge has proved potentially dangerous because it has not been accompanied by equal gains in self-understanding and self-discipline. Here he seems to be paraphrasing Smuts' own words to the British Association ; but the last ten years abundantly attest the truth of his further observation that science which disclaims all interest in human values, except the satisfaction of curiosity and the increase of manipulative skill, cannot be useful even in its own limited sphere when the general dissolution of values leads to a contempt for science and a deliberate perversion of its values. The watchwords of the new culture must be cultivation, humanization, co-operation and symbiosis. Many of our present mistakes are due to statesmen, industrial leaders and administrators attempting to apply the ideology of the age of expansion to a social organization with entirely different requirements—an organization in which the careful timing and spacing of activities, the proper diversification of opportunities and the balancing and interlocking of functions must take the place of spectacular one-sided advances.

While the conditions for stabilization have appeared, the institutions that will turn this process to the advancement of society have not yet been developed. For working out the new social order an active knowledge of the social environment, and of the behaviour of men in social partnerships, their needs, their drives, their impulses, their dreams is just as indispensable as reading, writing and arithmetic for those trained to capitalize. The art of politics and the arts of enlightened behaviour and orderly communica-

tions must become the main field of new inventions, and here Mr. Mumford enters a plea for a world language.

The great gains made in technics during the last few centuries have been largely offset by a philosophy that either denied the validity of man's higher needs, or sought to foster only that limited set of interests which enlarged the power of science and gave scope to a power personality. Hence Mr. Mumford puts first among our tasks of post-war reconstruction, not the physical re-building, but the laying in every department of our culture of the foundations for a new set of purposes, a radically different mode of life. "Civilizations," he observes, "do not die of old age: they die of the complications of old age," and the task for our age is to decentralize power in all its manifestations. Our first need is not for organization—nor for the mobilization of organization that has become inflexible—but for re-orientation, a change in direction and attitude. There are new organizations, large and small, set up under stress of war, on which we can draw, but we must bring to each activity and every plan a new criterion of judgment: how far it seeks to further the process of life-fulfilment, and how much respect it pays to the needs of the whole personality.

There is no easy formula for this renewal, and the ideal needs further analysis. The question whether the age of expansion is ended should be explored more deeply if by expansion we mean increasing control over the forces of Nature, including human nature. But if Mr. Mumford is sometimes incomplete he is always suggestive, and his book is one to be pondered by all concerned with the trend of civilization. As already indicated, it is not free from faults: historically, Mr. Mumford tends to defeat his own object by dramatizing episodes in a way that masks the continuous development of human culture, and his strong Socinian bias mars his presentation of Christianity. But as a social philosopher he has the confidence and forward-looking mentality of the Mannheim school, and the whole weight of the book is thrown in support of an adequate programme of social research in the true sense of the word. He comes out also in support of the planning school; but he is too balanced to be led into excess, and his emphasis is on freedom to be achieved only when the new ordering of our environment has permitted the development of personalities capable of drawing upon our immense stores of energy, knowledge and wealth without being demoralized by them. Above all at the present moment it is for its note of hope, the confidence with which, surveying the disintegration of civilization, he summons us to the task of re-integration, that Mr. Mumford's work is most welcome and should be studied, particularly by scientific workers, whose contribution to the task he recognizes as freely as he stresses its limitations. This is the voice of a prophet and interpreter, calling us to seek the way rather than declaring it plainly; and, though the message is not new, the world picture is clearer, more coherent and more relevant to post-war tasks than that General Smuts drew for the centenary meeting of the British Association.

## PRIMITIVE PERSONALITIES

### The People of Alor

*A Social-Psychological Study of an East Indian Island.* By Cora Du Bois; with Analyses by Abram Kardiner and Emil Oberholzer. Pp. xi+654+32 plates. (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1944.) 45s. 6d. net.

DR. DU BOIS received her training in anthropology at the University of California. Her subsequent field-work among American Indians on the west coast of America led her to realize the dangers of supposing that we can deduce what individuals are from the institutions under which they live: "psychological orientations and techniques" need to be employed for this purpose; and analytic psychology appeared to her "to offer the greatest number of concepts with which the anthropologist could operate, although much of its theory, particularly in the field of social phenomena, seemed inept". Thus it came about that in 1935 she spent a year, as a U.S. National Research fellow, in exploring "the bearing of various psychiatric approaches to personality formation within our own society", and that in the spring of 1936 and 1937 she collaborated with Dr. Abram Kardiner in his seminar at the New York Psychoanalytic Society. Together, they reached the conclusion that field-work alone could test the validity of the procedures which these seminar discussions had indicated. Aided by funds contributed by Dr. Kardiner, the Social Science Research Council of Columbia University gave Dr. Du Bois the financial support which enabled her to carry out such field-work.

Dr. Du Bois's choice fell on Alor, a remote island north of Timor, fifty miles long and thirty miles broad, in the (then) Dutch East Indies. There she arrived in 1938 and at once built herself a house, among some six hundred mountain people, in a district called, from the name of its largest village, Atimelang, and comprising four other villages. The Atimelangers, Dr. Du Bois tells us, are predominantly Oceanic Negroids, with Oceanic Mongoloid admixture and with perhaps a strain of pygmy origin. About ten thousand of the coastal people of Alor are Mahomedans; the rest are pagan. In Atimelang she stayed for eighteen months, returning to New York in the winter of 1939-40.

This book, the principal fruit of her expedition, is divided into four parts. The first is introductory. The nine chapters of the second part, styled "psycho-cultural synthesis" (in which thirty-one pages of excellent photographs are inserted), deal with infancy, childhood, adolescence, marriage, sex, adults and institutions, some psychological aspects of religion and some personality determinants in Alorese culture. The third part, by far the longest, comprises more than 360 pages and contains the autobiographies of eight Alorese, four men and four women, who, the author believes, "represent, on the whole, average Atimelang adults". These autobiographies were recorded with the help of a native interpreter; about fifteen interviews, of an hour each, were accorded to each of these eight informants. The fourth part of the book describes the results of the four psychological tests she applied—the Porteus Maze tests (scored and briefly commented on by Dr. Porteus himself), word associations, children's drawings and the Rorschach test (evaluated by Dr. Emil