

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

A FEW years ago a certain bishop suggested half seriously that Science might well call a halt for ten years to put its house in order. His advice was probably not intended to be taken literally, for it was obviously impracticable; but the idea at the back of it was sound. It was, surely, that the time was ripe for synthesis, for the examination and use of the raw material collected and lying about in disorder. Creative scientific work always proceeds thus. When we have collected our notes and observations we cast them together into literary form and make a book, or plot them and make a map. Henceforth we use the book (or map) and put the notes aside, to be used if required for verification; but for all practical purposes the book (or map) supersedes the notes. It is one and they are many; it gives in a handy form all that is then known of a certain sphere of knowledge. The final result is more than the sum of its parts; it is a new document. To produce it the author or authors have carried out once and for all as a single task what would otherwise have had to be done over and over again by every individual who concerned himself with the subject. It may need expansion when new facts come to light, but it will always have value as a concise and synthetic record. In archaeology such records are, for example, Sir John Evans's books on Ancient Stone and Bronze Implements, Déchelette's Manual, Ebert's Reallexikon, the Reports of the Royal Commissions on Ancient Monuments, and bibliographies. They are not, and are not intended to be, literature; but the publication of each of them represents a stage in the advance of knowledge; they are landmarks or milestones.

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We have a definite object in repeating these platitudes (as they will appear to some) because ANTIQUITY itself aims at achieving a synthesis, and the present number is, we think, a peculiarly synthetic one. The subjects dealt with are looked at as a composite whole—and they are described in language which any educated person can understand. We state this because we have not always been able to achieve the ideal, nor probably shall we ever quite succeed in doing so, however hard we may try. With the beginning of our fourth year of existence we have made several good resolutions, which we shall be able to keep if our contributors play up to them as well as they do in this number. This represents no change of policy, but merely an effort to carry out more thoroughly the one we adopted at the beginning.



These remarks have also a wider bearing. Our policy is not isolated or merely individual; it conforms with the best scientific thought of the times. This may be expressed as follows:—The blind heaping up of raw material has proceeded far enough and it is time to call a halt. Archaeological excavation should not be lightly undertaken; much of it is mere treasure-hunting and adds little or nothing to knowledge (*e.g.*, the ‘opening’ of unmutilated round barrows and some other tombs). Excavation, if undertaken, must be justified. It must have some definite objective—to determine the age and character of a site, to snatch something from one that is doomed, to fill a gap in the chronological scheme. But there is an immense field for research quite apart from excavation, in field-work and air-photography. The imaginative use of large-scale maps, and of air-photographs employed in the field as maps, is as fascinating as excavation; it provides an admirable training in outdoor observation and method; it adds to knowledge, and it can do no possible harm to the ancient monuments themselves. To write a clear and concise description of a site is not at all easy. It is however essential that archaeologists should be able to express their meaning plainly, as we know all too well.



Our readers will remember that not long ago we published some criticisms of an ambitious scheme of excavation undertaken in East Anglia. The writer criticized not the method (which is all that it should be), but the launching of the scheme at all in the first instance. He claimed (and we entirely agree with him) that the new knowledge likely to be gained by the complete excavation of the site would not

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be worth the cost ; and that better results could be obtained from other sites for far less money. To the general public such an attitude was almost incomprehensible. To many the word 'archaeologist' is equivalent to 'excavator', and it seemed quite wrong that an archaeologist should come forward and denounce an admittedly well-conducted excavation as needless. The general underlying principles, however, were strikingly reinforced by an official statement issued by the Society of Antiquaries of London and published in the *Antiquaries Journal* (1929, IX, 349). We welcome most heartily the lead thus given by our leading archaeological society.

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It cannot be too often repeated that the one and only justification for excavation is the desire for knowledge, and of reconstructing the past. The excavator of a tomb and the detective employed in a criminal case are confronted by closely allied problems; they solve them by methods which have much in common. (Perhaps that is why so many archaeologists have a passion for detective stories). We have all been taught the importance of leaving the body untouched until the police come ; we are beginning to realize that ancient remains should be treated with similar respect, and left for an expert to examine. In a recent case of murder or suicide much depended upon a detail which amateur disturbance would certainly have obliterated. Dr Reisner and his fellow-workers at the Pyramids Camp left nothing to chance in their clearance of the tomb of Queen Hetep-heres: 'We had an intact tomb of the time of Cheops—the only intact royal tomb of the Pyramid Age. It was manifestly a reburial, but it contained the first royal furniture of this period ever found. Our duty was clear. No matter what the cost in time and labour, the evidence contained in that tangled mass of furniture, implements and vessels must be recovered to the last possible scrap. With the experience of many years of archaeological research we devised a special method of examining the mass of objects and recording every fact, aiming at a record which would enable us to replace every object in the tomb as it was, if so ridiculous a demand should be made on us'. (Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, December 1929, xxvii, 83). They were thus enabled successfully to reconstruct the gold-cased furniture, as the illustrations show. But even this technical skill, valuable though it be, does not represent the highest achievement of the archaeological detective. Just as in police work it is the reconstitution of the *crime* that is aimed at, so in archaeology it is the reconstitution of *events*,

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that is, of history. Bit by bit a purely abstract structure is created in the mind of the architect, so to speak, which in the fullness of time he sets down in writing, and the world is richer than before. Dr Reisner has shown (what some of us knew before) that he is a master of both arts.



Every true archaeologist knows this, of course, however much he may be compelled to perjure himself in the interests of expediency. How different is this pure spirit of enquiry from the motives often imputed or alleged! How difficult it is to bring home its driving-force, its reality as a compelling motive, to those who have not caught the spirit! How mean appear the appeals to cupidity, to local patriotism, to tourist interests or to those of commercialized art! What we really want is a clear complete view of the past, whether it be of the course of evolution—of man himself and of the civilizations he has created—or of the space-grouping of cultures of peoples, represented on a map. The former gives us the curves of progress, the cycles of history, or whatever we may choose to call them; the latter provides the spatial framework. Both are great generalizations facilitating and enriching thought and suggesting causes. Thus we come back to the point at which we started at the beginning of these notes—to the present need of co-ordinating our facts.

The SUBSCRIPTION to ANTIQUITY for 1930 is now DUE. We would remind our Subscribers of the form and envelope inserted in the December number and that we shall be glad to have an early response. This does not, of course, apply to those who have already been kind enough to send us their cheques or to those who pay by orders on their banks.

Payment should be made to

The Assistant Editor, 24 Parkend Road, Gloucester.