

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

Somerset Archaeology—a Suggestion.

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*being his Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting, Crewkerne,
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A COUPLE of months ago, the *Manchester Guardian*, in a leading article, attributed to me the phrase "imaginative archæology," and thereupon proceeded to enlarge upon the advantage of using the imagination in the antiquarian field. Although I do not remember using these precise words, yet I have at various times emphasized the importance of applying the imaginative side of the mind when dealing with the problems that come before societies such as this. It is so much the fashion to deal only with the bare facts, and having set down measurements and the baldest detail, to claim that the story is finished and the case adequately presented. I have heard one of our leading antiquaries, after having given dimensions of the buildings and of the objects found until the hearer's mind was hopelessly confused and swamped in the maze of figures, turn to his audience with the peroration, "now there is nothing more for any one to say about this site." It is to this type of mind that we owe the too common belief that archæology is a dull business, and the wonder of the normal citizen that so many apparently intelligent persons can devote their time to its study. The readers of papers who describe their explorations too often miss the obvious fact that their statements, in place of being the last word on the subject, are

in general nothing but the mere bricks and mortar which the historian, the geographer or the student of social evolution, will use to build for the world at large a fair structure to charm and widen the mind. The excavator is not its architect, nor is he even the builder; he must be content to take his place as the labourer, preparing the raw material for future use, and without even knowing how or when it may be applied. Hence, the most precise accuracy is an essential, and the first requirement.

But the audience reasonably demands more than this in the presentation of the thesis, and it is in giving it a human interest that imagination and hypothesis may usefully be invoked. But here two things are fundamental. Hypothesis and fact must be kept in absolutely watertight compartments, so that the one can never be mistaken for the other, and secondly the saving virtue of imagination must have some solid foundation—with these premisses at the starting point, kept in mind throughout his discourse, the reader of a paper should be equipped to give his audience something at once scientific and attractive.

These thoughts are not new to me, nor would I claim that they possess novelty in any sense. But they have come newly into my mind in relation to a subject in which I think this County of Somerset might take a special interest.

Of all the periods of human life on this globe, there is none, I think, that is more shrouded in mystery or can claim more from modern man, than that of the very dawn of humanity in the universe, the moment of overlap between geology and archaeology. Remote, misty and uncertain as it is, a subject of such primary importance surely merits diligent study, and indeed the energies of some of the best intellects in this country during the past sixty or seventy years have been devoted to it. The results have been anything but futile, but much still remains to learn. Moreover, in this particular branch of archaeology, the imagination of the half-instructed and the incompetent has been let loose to a degree that can only be compared to a South Sea bubble, and has resulted in a mass of misleading literature that posterity would thank us to burn.

And yet the study of early man is hardly older than the

normal span of human life. Exploration in the French caves, infinitely richer in useful record than the terrace gravels, only took formal shape in the sixties of the last century, led by an Englishman, Mr. Henry Christy. He joined with a French geologist, M. Edouard Lartet, and spent considerable time and money in systematic exploration of the limestone caverns and rock-shelters of the South of France, where he made discoveries of unprecedented importance, and laid bare the life story of late palæolithic man with a completeness almost incredible when one thinks of the remoteness of the time from our own and the novelty of the subject. He found that cave man was primarily a hunter, an accomplished craftsman in the production of the tools and implements he needed, but apparently no agriculturist; that he was a person of the keenest observation, and with a power of graphic representation so phenomenal that it is not too much to say that, given the same materials, no artist of to-day could surpass him in producing the outline drawings of the animals by which he was surrounded. These are facts, and not imagination, and they are set out in detail in the book, "*Reliquiæ Aquitanicæ*," that Mr. Christy projected, though it appeared only after his death. But the facts were, and still are, so surprising that one would have thought an army of explorers would have equipped themselves with knowledge and continued the quest. But the search has only been prosecuted languidly and without system, and the results at any rate in England to-day, sixty years later, are by no means so rich as they should be. The reasons for such apathy are many-sided. To a majority of men, albeit interested in the past, a flint is nothing but a flint, and it is a singular fact that the normal person can see no more difference between one flint implement and another than the untutored savage sees between pictures in a gallery: the savage merely notes that there are large and small among them, and that some have brighter tints than the rest. But if the ordinary person were assured that from mere observation of the working of a flint, its colour and its form, a reasonably close judgement of its period and of its country of origin could be arrived at, he would probably remain unconvinced. This is not due to want of imagination, but is merely a sign

of one of the commonest defects of the untrained, and that is, the lack of observation and attention for anything outside the range of personal interest. It has often been said of men of great intellect, that no fact is too small to interest them. If this be the case, then I can truly say that my own experience helps to endorse the verdict of history that great intellects are rare.

It was my original purpose in addressing you to-day to suggest to the Somerset Society the propriety of devoting itself with more assiduity to the exploration of the caves in the county. I am, of course, well aware that during the past half century a good deal has been done abroad, and very competently done, and England has not been altogether idle. But the early history of the district demands more systematic treatment, and it would certainly be fitting that this Society should be associated with the undertaking. I have read with great interest the recent "Proceedings of the Speleological Society" of the Bristol University, and I find that it is doing the very work that I had in my mind for the Somerset Society. But even granting them all the credit they deserve, there is still ample room for additional workers. I find, for example, in these same *Proceedings*, the demand for help to determine the succession of culture stages in prehistoric Britain, and the lament that we know little of the ages of the animals found in the Mendip caves. Sir W. Boyd Dawkins, one of our early workers in this field, says "As yet there are no important discoveries in the Somerset caves with regard to the populations of Somersetshire in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages," and "there are many caves in the Mendip Hills which await scientific exploration." Thus geology and archæology are for once agreed, and it is on this line that I ask your leave to say a few words.

It is a commonplace that the determination of palæolithic remains, as against those of later date, is mainly dependent upon the associated mammals. The palæontologist having fixed the horizon of the mammalian remains by his own line of argument, it is accepted that any associated relics of human work are of the same period, and thus we arrive at the fundamental differentiation between man's productions of the

River Drift period and those of the newer Stone Ages. Strictly speaking, it is this kind of evidence alone that is conclusive, though in the last few decades comparison and deduction has helped to widen the field, in the majority of cases, no doubt, quite legitimately. But when, as is often the case, mammalian remains are entirely wanting, or, as with the now famous Piltown skull, the remains found are highly controversial, then the archæologist should be able to look confidently to his geological colleague to determine for him the geological age of the deposit without any appeal to the products of man's hands. It is here more than anywhere else that I complain of my geological friends, and it is due to their professional apathy or indifference, or to their want of precise diagnosis, that our knowledge of the earliest stages is at this time so slight. After sixty to seventy years of archæology joined to geology in this search, the thinking world has a right to demand data at once fuller and more accurate.

The absence of such exactness in the presentation of prehistoric matters has had an evil effect in both positive and negative senses. It has left the door open for every type of uninstructed fanatic to air, and even print, theories of the wildest kind that have no basis in fact. To the normal person such theories, if couched in fair English, are hard to distinguish from others of healthier growth, while their exposure by truly scientific men again proves an obstacle to the diligent enquirer, who is forced to clear the poisonous undergrowth from his mind before he can go forward in the pursuit of knowledge.

The geologist normally decides on the age of a deposit by means of the fossils it contains, perhaps controlling this opinion from other evidence in addition. In such conditions as are found in chalk, this method is no doubt excellent and fairly simple. But obviously it is another affair when the deposit is surface gravel. Here numerous factors exist of which many make for uncertainty. The actual position of the deposit, its relation to other neighbouring areas at different levels, the condition of the constituents of the gravels, all tend to make clear determination doubtful, in the absence of mammalian or other remains of which the period is known. Unfortunately, from the geological standpoint, such determina-

tion is not of great importance and is very difficult. But from the archæological side, it is of the very highest interest, and I, for one, have been trying for years past to invoke the best geological help to work with archæology in solving the problem. For it has always seemed to me, as I said before, that few puzzles of the kind are so attractive, as that which deals with man's first appearance on this earth. The geologist, however, will have none of it, and declares that the results cannot justify the work involved. Thus geology and archæology meet in a cul-de-sac. The actual situation is well seen in the recent discoveries of Mr. Reid Moir in East Anglia. He, an enthusiastic explorer, has brought to light a large number of flints presenting characters which to him, and to others, among whom is Sir Ray Lankester, appear to present clear evidence of human intention and of human work. The deposits in which they are found have hitherto been regarded as of Tertiary formation, and if they are undisturbed, the obvious and inevitable conclusion is that the implements are also Tertiary, and if of human make, then with equal certainty we establish the existence of man in Tertiary times. For some reason the geologists fight against this last with desperation. They demand, first, that archæology shall tell them whether the flints are of a certainty fashioned by man. If archæology answers "Yes," then the reply of geology is that the stratum in which they are lying must have been disturbed, and that in consequence the evidence for Tertiary man disappears. It does not appear to be at all material that, up to the time of the discovery of the flints, no geologist had ever suggested that the beds were not in their original position. To my mind, the geologist puts the cart before the horse. It is for him, and no one else, to say whether the beds are undisturbed or not, without any regard to the presence in them of flints which may or may not be of man's handiwork. He *ought* to be superior to and independent of such trivial aids to accuracy. He takes an entirely different view; he regards the flints, if admittedly of human make, as fossils, and uses them in arriving at a decision. If they are human, then the deposit cannot be Tertiary because he is predetermined against man's existence at that early time. And so the vicious and useless

circle revolves. If one ponders on the thing for a while, one finds that we have here a cogent argument against ever writing a book. The writer on early man must deal with the evidence at hand when he writes. What will be disclosed within the next decade he cannot tell. If he be sufficiently prophetic or unwise as to declare that man's existence is impossible in Tertiary times, it is clear that he will be most unwilling to admit the validity of any such discovery while his book is hot from the press—for it will be a confession that the book is already out of date. I remember such a case in my own person. I wrote a lengthy and considered article for an encyclopædia, and this, through no fault of mine, was not published for five years, with the result that by the time it was in the hands of the public, it was lamentably out of date. Such is the possible fate of everyone who writes, and the only line of safety is to leave a loophole for every possibility, and to be prepared with a receptive mind for any occurrence, no matter how impossible it may seem in prospect. I know not whether the hardness of the earth's crust produces a corresponding induration in the geological mind, but without doubt, in my experience, it is difficult indeed to find a reasonable proportion of sympathetic minds among our leading geologists.

It is a pity that this should be so at the present time, for, as I read the signs, I would venture to say that the discoveries of the last few years have been of a very revolutionary character, and that very shortly it will be necessary for some master-mind to take in hand the modern evidence and to set down in clear terms the true meaning of the facts that the last two decades have placed at the disposal of the scientific world. Take for example the astonishing discoveries of cave painting in the north of Spain and elsewhere. No paintings of such supreme excellence had been known hitherto, and certainly no one had suspected that early man was capable of such advanced productions, evidence beyond dispute of a long previous training in the practice of the craft. Their existence is only one of the difficult problems that the present century has provided for us. Every kind of question arises. Who did these paintings, when were they executed, and in particular why were they placed, as they are, in remote recesses

of almost inaccessible caves where they can only be seen by artificial light? The types of animals represented are alone sufficient evidence that the paintings were executed at a time very distant from the present, but such mammalian evidence can necessarily only be pictorial, and the palæontologist prefers bones to pictures. As to the purpose underlying these elaborate delineations of the fauna of the time, I have stated elsewhere that I strongly suspect a basis of sympathetic magic or of totemism, connected with the chase and with the daily needs of the prehistoric population. I further suspect that we have in many of these cave paintings and drawings a *primâ facie* case for suggesting, contrary to the accepted belief, that cave man had arrived at the point of taming or domesticating animals. One simple argument on this side is found in the frequency with which the animals depicted are at rest, and not in rapid flight, which would be the normal aspect to the hunter of a hunted animal.

From the early years of the study of the Stone Age, it has been a commonplace to enlarge upon the essential similarity of stone arrowheads, knives and the like, whether found in England or America, or Japan. The practical identity of material seemed to exact the production of very similar results. For I imagine that no one is prepared to maintain that a flint arrowhead from Norfolk and one from Patagonia had a common origin, or that the similarity in outline arose from any other cause than the identity of the maker's needs. But as soon as the ingenuity of man devised the bow as a weapon, the arrow and its point are necessary consequences. It is far otherwise with certain types of flint tools, of peculiar form and of even more peculiar methods of manufacture, and yet found, identical in appearance and in make, in widely separated countries. This is the case with a type of flint called the 'tortoise core,' from its plano-convex shape. For us, living in Europe, it is best known from Northfleet in Kent and from Amiens. It is assigned on good evidence to the earlier cave period, and as I said, both its purpose and mode of manufacture are very unusual. Yet the identical type has been found at the Cape, and further research shows that it is found at a number of intervening spots in North, East and

South Africa and there is evidence also from Syria. Further investigation may reveal yet more links in this chain, and show a real connection where at present we can only suggest a possibility.

Another problem awaiting developments, if not a solution, is that of the age and relationships of the flint pits dug by prehistoric man at Grime's Graves in Norfolk and at Cissbury in Sussex. These were originally explored a good many years ago by Canon Greenwell, General Pitt-Rivers and others, and for reasons that at the time were accepted as sufficient, were set down as being of neolithic date.

Explorations during recent years have yielded masses of material, some of it of novel types, but quantities also that no doubt was equally disclosed by the earlier explorers, but dismissed as not sufficiently worked. Much of this material newly found or newly observed, possesses very disturbing characters, some of them never yet found on any distinctly neolithic site, but resembling in almost every way implements from what are admittedly palæolithic horizons. The question is perhaps as yet of too recent origin for anybody to pronounce with certainty for one side or the other. But when I used the word disturbing, I did so advisedly. For men who made up their minds on all questions of the kind thirty or forty years ago; or still worse, have set down their final judgments in print, nothing can be more disturbing than a discovery that destroys a chapter or more and invalidates important conclusions, spoken or printed. It is not, however, to these that I am addressing myself, but rather to the newer generation, to whom novelty is in itself a substantive joy, and to whom it is not at all material how many volumes of classical repute their finds may render obsolete.

In attempting to put before this meeting this statement of what may usefully be done in the field of prehistoric science, I have purposely set the matter down briefly, and have abstained from going into detail. To have done so would have been a long task, too long for verbal exposition. The purpose I had in mind was to show what an immense field, and, as I think, of great human interest, was awaiting treatment from trained hands and minds; and I do this because I think this

Society can, and perhaps should, take a foremost place in this special branch of study.

Somerset, in fact, more than many parts of England, is fortunate in possessing in or upon the ground, interesting remains of all periods of human activity, from the very earliest onwards. There are few periods of history that cannot be illustrated from the county, and some of these have been admirably and usefully explored. Important contributions to our knowledge of ancient British life and culture have been made by the explorations of the lake villages that are among the prominent features of Somerset, and the never ceasing discoveries on the heights of Ham Hill continue to add to our knowledge of the Roman occupation and of the relations of that wonderful people with the indigenous population, and I trust that the relics so recovered will long continue to enrich the already fine collections at Taunton. There is but little likelihood, that in researches such as these, and, with regard to the medieval periods, even less probability, that the interest of the intelligent and reflective will ever cease, whatever form of government it may be our fortune to possess. The history of more recent times, moreover, is not a subject that relies upon archaeological research alone. Written history and literature are its handmaidens, and enable the studious explorer to allocate every find to its proper place and demonstrates its relations to its neighbours.

Prehistory has no such aids to real understanding. It is, in a measure, dumb, its apostles are men not of its own day, or men to whom its original speech was born with them, but is a mere acquisition of the schools, where it may have been learnt well or ill. For these reasons, as well as for its essential and eminently human interest, I feel always that its claims are entitled, in such a gathering as this, to be rather more warmly pressed than those of periods likely to have their own advocates.

I have said in the title of this address that I desire to make a suggestion, and it is this. You have already on your borders, as I have said, a Society for the exploration of caves, the Speleological Society of the University of Bristol. This body would appear to have secured all the apparatus necessary for

its immediate purpose, and, as far as I may judge from its published *Proceedings*, to be possessed of industry and enthusiasm, as well as knowledge and proper guidance. Would it not be well and possible for the Somerset Society, instead of falling upon these piratical invaders and destroying them, to join forces with them, and by means of a Committee properly authorized, to share in their researches and in their glory? It is quite certain that in the ranks of this Society there are many competent for such a task, and it is by no means unlikely that help and advice would be forthcoming from outside also. If such a Committee could be formed, it is quite within the bounds of possibility that great advances would be made in our knowledge of the prehistory of this country, and this Society, in fostering research within its own borders, would add to the prestige of English science and to the glory of Somerset.