

· THE POINT OF VIEW ·

EVERY time Mr. Theodore Davis uncovers one of those old Egyptian tombs in the Valley of the Kings, I drop other matters to read about it and to look at the pictures of the various objects of ornament and service which have been dragged from a cryptic darkness and silence of several thousand years. And presently I find myself vaguely trying to realize two things—the first of these being the fact that the old races who created and filled these forgotten tombs really lived and walked and were busy, and perhaps considered themselves moderns, even as we hurry up and down and fuss over things and plume ourselves to-day.

We, the
Ancients

It is not so difficult to accept this idea. Some of the articles—the furniture and fabrics, especially—are so curiously like those on sale in our present-day department stores that I feel tempted to invite those old first-owners of them to bring their latest patterns of French chairs, their sofa pillows and their embroidery pieces, and sit sociably with us in the circle of modernity, where they belong.

Then, suddenly, there sets in the second and longer drift of thought—the effort to realize that it is not they who are moderns with us, but we who are ancients with them, in the very morning of history. I want to engrave that second fact a little deeper here. For my own closer acceptance of it I want to record here and now that *we are the ancients*—as ancient as ever were those who walked the streets of Thebes or did business in purple Tyre.

The story of mankind is still in its swaddling clothes. A record that is not above six thousand years long is a puny thing—a beginning—the merest preface of a history. It may be that man himself has existed longer than six thousand years. We have evidence—voiceless evidence—that he has existed a good deal longer than that. But we have no history of such existence. Our history begins with Adam and ends with the present moment. It does not cover a long span, compared with other periods—geologic and astronomic periods—or with those interminable vistas that

stretch down the ages which lie ahead. We do not know how long man has really existed, and it is unprofitable to guess how much longer his race will continue, but there is a likelihood that it will last a good deal longer than another six thousand years. It may even last a hundred times that long. But if it last only ten times six thousand, long before the end of that allotment we of the first six thousand will all be ancients together, barely distinguishable in our separations of race and time. The traveller standing at the end of the speeding train and looking down at the track sees only the ties just below him in their proper relation as to distance, while those just behind are closing together like a long bellows until they blend into a gray line that stretches away to the horizon's rim. And so do the days and the seasons and the years go speeding under our feet, linking themselves so closely that even the student of history, with vision trainedly acute, finds it difficult to separate episodes and to distinguish men. When sixty thousand years have drifted by—a brief time, believe me—the earth dweller of that day will need to dig deeply into his reference to learn whether it was Abraham Lincoln or Moses who led the Israelites to freedom; whether it was Ulysses of Ithaca who was conspicuous in the battles around Troy or an American general by the same name.

We shall all be ancients together, then, we old fellows of the first six thousand years. Rameses will march with Cæsar, Cæsar will commune with Napoleon, and in the infinite perspective behind they will march so nearly abreast that only the keenest chronological vision will be able to distinguish the days between.

And the antiquarian of that far future day will ponder and delve in an effort to comprehend our ancient civilization, and will praise or condemn it, according to his lights. In either case he will marvel at it and will sigh that he could not have lived in these old, old musty days. He will be eaten with envy of us who have dwelt so near to creation's dawn, who had to battle with the problems of distance

and gravitation and cold and electricity; who had to get along with imperfect instrument and crude appliance because our world was new. He will know something of the tablets and the papyrus we scattered in Egypt and Syria; something too, perhaps, of the parchments of Greece and Rome; and there may remain a tradition of the perishable printed books which followed these things. Or did the books come first? It will be a question for debate. How he will hunt and excavate for some of the things we are flinging away, and will cherish the tiniest fragment that will bear evidence to our old, old story. How rich I feel when I think of that! How privileged to be counted among the world's pioneers, pitching my tent and building my camp-fire with those other early settlers, the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Mound-builders and all the rest, on the first dry ground after the flood.

And that is not all. We shall be Mythology, by and by. We shall drift back and back until we blend with the Golden Age itself, dwellers in Arcady tripping measures to the pipes of Pan. We shall hearken to the Oracle of Delphi, we shall gather the Apples of the Hesperides and join with Jason in the search for the Golden Fleece. I have always wanted to live in that time. I have never quite realized that I belong in it already, but those far dreamers in the perspective of infinity will realize it and they will link us with the gods. I am going to get ready for that time when I shall be near enough to the Golden Age to listen to the music of Orpheus and perhaps sail with Achilles to Western Isles.

But we shall not remain always with the gods. Back and still back until we shall walk hand in hand with the brontosaur, cousin to the moa, brother to the troglodyte. I suppose we shall become mere geology after that—a fossil layer, a film of oblivion. The moderns of a million years hence will scrape ledges to find us and will put us into glass cases and perhaps classify an ostrich as a man. How old, how incalculably old we shall be then! The wisest, the mightiest, the most moral, the most strenuous among us old fellows of the first six thousand will have become little more than a trace in the Quarternary formation. But what a glory to be even a trace in a geological procession when it means that you are lying down with the trilobite and the troglodyte, and with those old first races of recorded history, in the silence of creation's sunrise. How we ought to hug ourselves, remembering those cheaply

vulgar and perhaps fragile moderns who will greedily delve for us and glorify us a million years hence—we, the discoverers, the pioneers, the conquerors—we, the grand old ancients of the earth!

THE teacher who came to the confessionals in the April number of this magazine made a sad showing for his profession. Surely the average pedagogue must have gone off a good deal since my own school-days; for one quite understands that it is the average and not the excellent teacher who is described—the one who helps to compose the type. But why, with all our boasted advance in education, should there have been any going off? Why is the typical teacher a person of “fictitious bearing,” uneasily reserved, dogmatic, didactic, inordinately devoted to petty details of form, pedantic, opinionated, and at the same time meek and subservient? Why, in short, has he no sense of proportion? Partly, of course, because of his being shunted off from the main track of the active life of society, just as women lose it by Some Reasons
Why living a too exclusively domestic life. Every woman knows how quickly those of her troubles which are really petty are relegated to their proper place by a little diversion—a walk on a bright day, a meeting with friends, anything which, as the phrase is, takes her out of herself. But there is more in the case of the teacher than can be accounted for by monotony, seclusion, “herding with others of their kind.”

It may be instructive to find out what have been the teacher's early surroundings. If he comes of a family which has had any advantage of acquaintance with the world, he may be expected to show some variation from the type presented to us in the “Confessions.” If, on the other hand, he belongs to bookish people who, either from choice or necessity, are aloof from active interests he may set an exaggerated value on formal so-called education and may ignorantly despise everything outside of his books, but one will hardly expect him to be dragged down to an A B C level. He may be narrow, but it will most likely be the narrowness of the student and not the pettiness of the devotee of the “spelling method,” the “sentence method,” or the “paragraph method.” But there is, as we all know, a third class from which the ranks of the teachers are largely recruited, the class which knows absolutely