MAN, THE ENIGMA

A strange animal — man — until we get to know him. Brilliant, in a sense, he has developed systems of production, exchange, communication, and transportation that make the other animals look rather stupid. But, on the opposite side of the scale, he suffers deficiencies that enhance the prestige of every competing organism.

While not the only animal that works, he is the only one that looks for work; the only ones that works for wages, the only one that the boss can afford to leave alone while working. The only one subject to "separation anxiety" in regard to boss and job. He is the only animal capable of discussing his own affairs, and coming to the weird conclusion that he is lucky to have work. Truly, a strange animal.

In recent years a number of individuals, of high standing in professional and scientific circles, have made brave attempts to associate man with some form of divinity. While they concede that his framework may have been derived from lower forms of life, they contend that he is, at the same time, endowed with a soul or spirit that could emanate only from a beneficent creator.

Some time ago an eminent surgeon — Alexis Carrel — wrote a book called "Man the Unknown." With the knowledge we grant he possessed in his own field, he should have been able to present us with a valuable treatise on man the known. His experience in physiology and comparative anatomy was all he required to acquaint us with the fact that man is made of the same material as all other animals. His body is composed of cells that closely resemble the cells to be found in the horse or the jackass. Those cells are constructed of chemical elements that cannot be distinguished from each other. The organs of his body perform a function very much the same as the organs to be found in other forms of animal life.

Had Dr. Carrel seen fit to write us a book on what he had observed in the many years he followed his profession, we could readily excuse him for avoiding other realms of psychology, history, and economics to complete the picture of the man we know.

But the learned doctor was not satisfied to confine himself to an objective appraisal in his chosen field. In quixotic fashion he wasted the substance of the book in the metaphysical arena, trying to explain that there was some sort of a heavenly transmission belt connecting the animal man with a higher intelligence. The nature of this unknown factor was just as obscure at the end of the book as it was at the beginning.

More recently, another writer — — the biologist, Dr. Lecomte du Nouy — has given us a book, that was favorably reviewed in the orthodox journals, entitled "Human Destiny." In this tome he essays to prove, to the satisfaction of every intelligent reader, that the evolution of man could never take place without a generous infusion of divinity.

A knowledge of the forces operative in evolution, the doctor assures us, leads to the conclusion that an all powerful creator has guided man's destiny all the way from the single cell to the complicated assemblage of trillions of cells that denotes the human body today. In every instance that science, through lack of records, is unable to put the finger on the immediate cause of any particular organic change, du Nouy shrewdly inserts the almighty as the major agent.

The author, brave as he tries to appear, seems to sense the weakness of his approach when he concedes that no materialist will be convinced by the kind of proof he adduces. Still, he insists that he must combat the paralyzing skepticism and destructive materialism that is rampant today.

This is it. He realizes that the nonsensical assumptions of the theologians are rapidly losing adherents in a scientific age. But the "opium of the people" must be perpetuated by those whose names are highly regarded because of what they have accomplished in special fields of science. There is no connection between their work on both fronts. The one nullifies the other. But the fiction of the two methods being identical serves a purpose.

The doctor can safely leave the dialectical materialists out of his campaign. They seem to have developed a theory, that holds water, to the effect that man, as well as the world he lives in, can be explained in terms of the interplay of material factors, and the voodoo science of du Nouy could scarcely be accepted as a reasonable substitute thereof.

But the great mass of uneducated people, of which even modern society is composed, make a fertile field for the bogus seed of pseudo science. Get to them, as quickly as possible, with a man plus divinity goulash, else the materialist goblins will get them, and the consequent disillusionment is certain to assist in disturbing the existent equation of rulers and ruled. Man must continue to be an unknown quantity.

From other, and more surprising sources we have confirmation of the enigma theory as applied to man. In an article in the "Truthseeker", and in a socialist pamphlet — "We Who Are About To Live"* — we find two opposing views of man's nature. The former tells us that man is naturally a warlike animal, while the latter explains that he is, by nature, a peaceful animal.

Both are equally erroneous. Both regard man as something static in a world that moves. In pursuit of what he considers to be his material interests, man can be either ferocious or quiescent. When hunger or danger threatens him, aggressive impulses are engendered and promoted. He becomes an ugly and ornery creature bent upon the destruction of his fellow man.

When we watch a herd of hogs, feeding in a trough, we get a fairly accurate and comparable picture of man himself. When the trough is kept well filled with a choice collection of swill ingredients, the hogs are relatively contented and quiet. Their snouts move slowly through the trough in search of appealing tidbits. They leisurely probe the depths, and playfully blow bubbles. But, when a depression hits them, and the contents of the trough fail to conform to the mass appetite, they squirm and squeal, and bite each other's ears in the quest of something to eat.

Even the hardy lion, in the opinions of those who have studied him at close range, has his mellow moods. He is quite affectionate in his home life. When he goes out in search of food he does not tear up saplings, that might be used for Christmas trees, and strew them along his path with impunity. He does not mangle smaller animals, and leave their carcasses untouched just to show who is boss. Only in his search for food for himself and family does he manifest those murderous impulses that conferred upon him the appellation of king of beasts.

So with man. He is not instinctively either a good or a bad character. His actions are not determined by the divine manipulation advanced in the treatises of the worthy doctors — Carrel and du Nouy — but are, on the contrary, the result of his inherited physical characteristics, expressing themselves through his environment in his efforts to survive.

J. A. McDONALD

*The observation that we must not regard man as being something static in a world that moves is quite valid. The pamphlet "If We Are to Survive" (We Who Are About to Live) does not err in that regard. — Edit. Comm.

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