

Xenophon in the fourth century B.C. knew how much a jokesmith could get away with. Some of his funny stories were dragged in by the ear, the way modern comedians use far-fetched build-ups to launch a gag.

According to one Greek professor, the Greeks were "the maddest, jolliest race of men that ever inhabited our planet." At any rate, they were kind enough to write down their little jokes.

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Science News Letter, February 10, 1940

ORNITHOLOGY

Birds Fleeing from War Gather on Swiss Lakes

BIRD refugees from Europe's war zones have gathered in the lake districts of Geneva, Neuchatel and Morat, and in the Neuchatel Jura marshes. Species not ordinarily seen in Switzerland, including heron, snipe and wild duck, are believed to have been driven out of Poland, the Rhineland and Alsace by the hostilities and by the presence of unusual numbers of men. Also in the Swiss lakes are coot, seagulls and other usual winter visitors from the Baltic.

Around the aviation training fields of England, the day-long roar of motors, and skies filled with training planes, do not seem to be disturbing the winter bird population, reports received indicate. The birds simply ignore the bigger and noisier human fliers.

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To encourage an increase in the birth rate, and to aid families, France now gives a birth premium equal to twice the father's monthly wage when the first child is born within two years after marriage, and is of French nationality.

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GENERAL SCIENCE

War Most Effective Means Of Perpetuating Dictatorships

War, Says Anthropologist, Destroys Humanitarianism And Saves the Weak and Easily Intimidated Man

WAR IS the most effective means of perpetuating dictatorships, declares Harvard's epigrammatic and thought-provoking anthropologist, Dr. Earnest A. Hooton.

Taking the gloomy view that our civilization is headed toward suicide and seems determined to go that way, Dr. Hooton's latest book, "Twilight of Man" (Putnam) says:

"Anthropology has some of the right answers for human problems—or, at least, can work them out. But I do not think that most men want to know them."

That the present world may be expected to leave the dictators stronger than before, not overthrown—as wishful thinking would have it—is predicted on these anthropological grounds: War gives free reign to the combative brute, suppressing humanitarianism. War destroys the most vigorous physically, "thus getting rid of the more turbulent elements and leaving as the breeding stocks those which are weaker and more easily intimidated."

Dr. Hooton's dismal conclusion that our all-but-swamped civilization actually does not wish to be rescued from headlong suicide is based on its tolerance of such conditions as crime and war.

Theoretically we hate war, he points out. But a universal and lasting peace would put the personnel of professional armies and navies out of a job, impoverish industries that profit by sale of war materials, not to mention robbing politicians and statesmen of wartime power and authority which they cannot attain in peace.

Crime, another predatory and destroying process, also flourishes because, apparently, mankind wants it that way. There is plenty of information as to the extent of crime and what it costs, says Dr. Hooton. Both are appalling. But those who profit by crime are in favor of crime. Those who are indifferent do nothing to stop it. And "no small fraction of our population makes an honest living out of the criminal activities of others."

Man's own organism, concludes Dr. Hooton sadly, is the only thing in nature that man does not want to improve. If the human race had any serious ambition in that direction, there would be today, somewhere on earth, a scientific institution for the study of human heredity big enough and well enough equipped and staffed to tackle the hard problem.

In the struggle between man's predatory and humanitarian feelings, Dr. Hooton lines up democracy on the humanitarian side, defining it as "the expression of humanitarian ideals in the government of civilized states." However, he sees democracy as a satisfactory system only when the individual citizens are intelligent enough to understand its ideals and principles and to subordinate themselves to the good of society.

"We do not have to look at recent events in Germany, Russia, and Italy to observe that deteriorated popular intelligence in nations attempting to carry on democratic forms of government makes them easy prey of dictators. That lesson has been plainly printed where he who runs may read in the histories of Latin American states for more than a century."

Refusing to regard the situation as hopeless, Dr. Hooton advises that "we go to work and try to develop a stock with a native fund of intelligence upon which we can re-build civilization and the biological future of man."

Science News Letter, February 10, 1940

Paper manufacturers will try using a small quantity of cotton in high-quality paper, thereby providing a new outlet for low-grade cotton.

● RADIO

Lawrence K. Frank, assistant to the president of the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation will tell "What's Wrong With the World" as guest scientist on "Adventures in Science" with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over the coast to coast network of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Thursday, February 15, 4:15 p.m., EST, 3:15 CST, 2:15 MST, 1:15 PST. Listen in on your local station. Listen in each Thursday.