

MARCH 31, 1969RICHARD S. RUST

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1 Civilization, Genius and a River

In ancient times a great civilization flourished in a land that was seven hundred miles long but only seven miles wide. This civilization existed for over three thousand years without interruption and with little basic change. The land was Egypt.

Many a civilization is inspired largely by one great genius who at an early date establishes the design for its development. Greece had its Homer, China its Confucius, and Egypt had its genius, too. His name was Imhotep.

In Egypt the rainfall is sparse, being no more than one inch per year. As a result the country is one huge desert in which nothing will grow. Man could not survive nor could a great civilization develop here except for one geographical phenomenon. This phenomenon was the River Nile.

The River Nile has its source deep in Equatorial Africa where the rainfall and vegetation are lush. The abundance of water that gathers here is trapped and can find its way to the ocean only by working its way north across the Sahara Desert to the Mediterranean Sea. For more than one thousand miles it winds its lonely way through the desert without being joined by any tributaries. During the spring in Equatorial Africa the rains are unusually heavy, so that more water must seek the level of the ocean, and the Nile floods its banks, this high water reaching the desert portion of the river by late summer. Thus for four months out of each year the Nile is in flood, attaining

a width in some places of as much as seven miles and forcing those who live within its valley to retreat into the desert.

It is this temporary inconvenience that makes habitation and civilization possible and desirable in this hot and otherwise desolate area. When the flood waters at length recede, they deposit in their wake a rich loam, and part of the receding waters can be retained in irrigation ditches. All one need then do is to scratch the soil and anything will grow. It is in the years that the Nile does not fully flood that the people suffer and there is famine in the land, as in the time of Joseph of the Old Testament. What we know as the ancient land of Egypt is that area that the River Nile floods and not the surrounding desert.

Because, if properly managed, conditions in the valley of the Nile are so favorable to agriculture, it is not surprising that a great civilization should develop and prosper. This civilization had even greater opportunity to develop because of its isolation. To the east and to the west, once one moved out of the verdure of the high water mark, there was nothing but impenetrable desert, often flanked with mountains, so that the river dwellers had little fear of invasion from this direction. Attack from the jungle to the south or from the sea to the north was possible, but the nature of the land was such that the inhabitants could easily stop any serious threat of invasion from these sources. While this isolation enabled this civilization to grow with a minimum of interruption from outsiders, there were compensating disadvantages: This very isolation deprived the Egyptians of being apprized of many discoveries that had been known in other parts of the world for some time. For example, the charriot appears very late in Egypt, so that during their early history the Egyptians had neither the wheel nor the horse.

The River Nile had a profound effect upon the Egyptian mind. To them its behavior was wholly incomprehensible, since the jungle to the south was impenetrable, and they knew nothing of conditions in Equatorial Africa. It is only in very recent

times that the source of the Nile has been located. The sun always rising on one bank and setting on the other, and the regular seasonal flooding of the Nile made the Egyptians more cognizant than others of the cyclical aspect of nature. If the forces of nature upon which they were so dependent went through such regular cyclical periods, why would not the greatest force of all, life itself, be subject to similar influences? Pursuing this line of reasoning, the Egyptians believed emphatically in the resurrection or the restoration of life after death.

The legend of Osiris and Isis is symbolic of this Egyptian belief. Osiris, an early ruler of Egypt, was treacherously murdered by his brother, Seth. His wife, Isis, laboriously restored his body to life, but he was to rule henceforth, not over Egypt, but over the lower world. Thus, when man dies, he returns not to this world, but to the world below. Nevertheless, his restoration is complete, but, to be achieved, the Egyptians believed that his body and his possessions in this world must be preserved. This belief led the Egyptians to become the greatest embalmers of all times and resulted in the practice of interring their dead in elaborate tombs with fabulous furnishings.

The Pharaoh, or ruler of the Egyptians, being divine, would naturally have the grandest tomb of all. The construction of these elaborate tombs which, during the earlier dynasties were in the form of pyramids, reached its height with the rulers of the fourth dynasty (There were thirty-one dynasties in all) around the year 2600 B.C. The largest pyramid of them all was built to contain the body of the Pharaoh Cheops. This edifice covered thirteen acres of ground, measured 786 feet on each side at its base, and reached a height of 461 feet. It has been estimated that it contains over two million blocks of limestone, some weighing as much as fifteen tons. The assembling of such a structure would be a remarkable architectural achievement today: In a society that knew neither the horse nor the wheel it is unbelievable.

How did they do it? It was the Nile, the

source of all Egyptian life, that made this feat possible. During the flood period, which lasted about four months, there was little to keep the people occupied, everything being under water. Hence, there was available a labor force composed of the entire population of several hundred thousand that had little else with which to occupy itself other than the building of the pyramids. The stone from which they were built was obtained from a quarry situated far up the river near Aswan on the east bank not far from the high water mark. The huge slabs of stone were cut with a copper saw that was designed for that purpose. With a minimum of hauling they were then loaded upon a barge and floated down the river some six hundred miles to a point near Memphis, the ancient capital. Here, at Gizeh, on the west bank they were unloaded and again, with a minimum of hauling, they were taken to the pyramid site not far above the high water mark. The River Nile rendered the building of the pyramids both economically and physically possible; its annual flooding created the needed hands and reduced the distance they had to haul.

Just who the engineer was who planned and integrated the complex operations involved in the building of the largest of the pyramids, those of Cheops, Chephren, and Mycerinus, we do not know. But we do know the architect who designed the very first of the great pyramids, the Step Pyramid of the Pharaoh Zoser, the second pharaoh of the third dynasty. This pyramid was designed in about the year 2680 B.C. by Imhotep, Visier of Egypt, First Lector Priest, Architect, Sage, and Scribe. The Step Pyramid which he designed was the first and oldest great-stone building of the world. The king's tomb lay under what might be considered six giant steps of stone rising like a stairway to a height of 204 feet. At its base it was 396 feet by 352 feet. It was in effect a series of mastabas, tombs with-sloping sides, superimposed upon each other to give the effect of a pyramid.

Imhotep, its creator, might well be considered as one of the greatest intellects of all time. In this respect he might well rank with such giants of versatility as Aristotle, Leonardo da

Vinci, Rene Descartes, John Stuart Mill, and Benjamin Franklin. But, interestingly enough, he has been immortalized, not because of his achievements as an architect or statesman, but because of his reputation as a physician and healer. Gradually, as the centuries passed, his renown as such became greater and greater until late in Egyptian history, under the Ptolemies, he was given the stature of a god. He was referred to as "the good physician of gods and men, a kind and merciful god, assuaging the suffering of those in pain, healing the diseases of men, and giving peaceful sleep to the restless and suffering."*

We have no actual record of Imhotep's achievements as a physician. We do know, however that Egyptian medical knowledge reached a high point at a relatively early date. The Egyptians had quite an accurate knowledge of the human skeleton and could set complicated fractures successfully. They also had a very good knowledge of the various organs of the alimentary tract, and were familiar with the vascular system, though they were not fully cognizant of the nature of the circulation of the blood. By and large the Egyptian knowledge of anatomy and physiology was more advanced than any encountered elsewhere in history prior to recent times.

And yet, what evidence we have of the practice of medicine in Egypt in the ages following the time of Imhotep seems to indicate that Egyptian physicians relied more upon sorcery and ritual than upon skilled diagnosis and treatment. After a splendid beginning there appears to have been no further advance in medical knowledge. If this fact could serve as a criterion for Egyptian civilization in general - and there is considerable evidence that it could - then it would seem that Egyptian civilization made little real advance after the time of Imhotep and his contemporaries. Instead of serving Egypt as Roger Bacon has served our own civilization by inspiring men to ever more and more inquiry and experimentation, Imhotep seems to have done for Egypt what Confucius did for China by setting a pattern to which the civilization was to adhere with little deviation for many years to come.

Due to their splendid isolation, the Egyptians were able to maintain that great civilization of Imhotep for close to three thousand years. But the foreigners could not be kept out forever, and in time Egypt was to be subject to foreign influences - at first the Hyksos, and then the Assyrians, the Persians, the Macedonians, the Romans, and finally the Arabs. Each of these was to add a little of its own and to take away a little of what had been Egypt until in due course of time the great Egyptian civilization was to disappear entirely - a civilization which owed its existence to a river and, in some measure, its greatness to that genius of geniuses, Imhotep.

*Jamieson B. Hurry, M.A., M.D., Imhotep; The Vizier and Physician of King Zoser and Afterwards the Egyptian God of Medicine. Humphrey Milford; Oxford University Press, 1926. Page 54.

Roger W. Clark

2

Goose Pond

A few miles outside of Loveland on the Murdock Pike a big white gate opens on a steep winding gravel road that leads to a red brick house atop a high hill. The road is bordered with yellow lilies in full bloom. The hill is heavily wooded. Blue jays scream from the tree tops.

A boy is closing the gate behind him. He wears an old straw hat, a khaki shirt and short trousers and no shoes or stockings. A light pole with string, hook and cork complete his rustic fishing gear. A yellow mongrel dog trots at his side as he starts down the dusty road that coils like a long white ribbon in the blazing sunlight.

But a single vehicle, a horse and buggy with a lone driver passes him until he reaches the watering trough. This is a long oaken planked moss covered alluring bit of dripping coolness on this scorching day. An iron pipe comes from far in the woods with the water from the hidden spring. The

silvery splash pours in a generous drink into the long overflowing tank with a soft musical ripple. He leans down and takes a long draught from the pipe.

Climbing down the far side of the fence he disappears into the woods beyond. The time is seventy years ago. It is the real country of my boyhood. I see the scene clearly with a soothing gentle memory of the past. This is quiet happiness, an old man's payment for years of struggle. Tranquilizing, gentle, soothing. Who can say there is no heaven with such a memory or no immortality when life that was then is still now.

Come with me through the dark woods. Our spirits will ride on the shoulder of the little boy as he runs gaily along. Squirrels scamper up the far side of the hickory trees and when high out of danger peek around the trunk at the noisy intruder. Little chipmunks scurry through the dry leaves. The heavy silent sweep of a great owl disturbed from his daylight nap brushes low over head.

On the far side of the woods we break out into the sunlight and climb the steep bank, red with wild strawberries to the rail bed, across the ties and down the far side into the tangled copse following the hidden path that only childhood knows.

There is a hum of insects and the distant croak of hundreds of frogs. The willow twigs strike unheeded against the bare tanned scarred legs, hardened and immune to poison ivy and mosquitoes. He comes out of the tangle to a mossy log extending out over the water. Suddenly the voices of the frogs are silenced. It is very quiet. The boy takes a worm from a can in his pocket and threads it on the hook and with a deft swing of his pole casts it into the green water.

It no sooner strikes the surface than the cork races out and plunges deep. Without any preliminary playing of the line he jerks the pole and a quivering silvery blue gill is flopping on the muddy bank. Swiftly he removes it from the hook and

puts it in the moist grass. There is no thought in the boy's mind that the fish might feel pain. It is simply food. He has seen the blue heron scoop the same kind of fish from the waters and hungrily swallow them. It is just all part of the beautiful life and nature that surrounds him. He is gloriously happy without hardly knowing it.

For an hour, a long day, or eternity (who can measure time?) he fishes in the sun. The frogs become accustomed to his presence and resume their croaking. The wind rustles through the willow, a musk rat slithers down to the water's edge and drinks. The boy is silent. He never breaks a twig or fumbles with his line.

He is silent but conscious of the world about him. Dragonflies skim low over the water and occasionally stop to rest on a lily pad. In a little bay of shallow water a black wiggling mass of tadpoles are gathered in the sunlight. Over his head from a limb hangs a wasp's nest with the poisonous insects coming and going. They will not harm him because he will not disturb them. The many mysteries of nature have no fear for him.

The distant tinkle of a cow bell reminds him that his friend Paul Heath will before long come searching for that cow to drive her home to milk her.

There is a certain clear cleanness of the country air that is life giving, soothing, so different from the noisy, hot, sooty, air of the city. This old Goose Pond is dear to his heart. He and the country boys love every inch of it. City girls might be frightened at the possibility of hidden snakes, the uncertain banks where a sudden slip might dump one into green water. But for him it is filled with interest, beauty and hidden surprises. Every stone if turned over will reveal mysteries.

The sun has wheeled high over head and now drops slowly to the west and the slanting rays slip through the leaves and sting his eyes. A vague gnawing pain in the pit of his stomach reminds

him better than any alarm clock that it will soon be supper time. He gathers up his fish and strings them on a long willow shoot. He wraps the string about his pole and sticks the hook into the cork to make everything fast and with pole over his shoulder starts homeward.

He goes home by way of the Heath farm. In the cow yard he sees his friend Paul on his three legged stool with a large tin pail filling rapidly with foaming white milk as the streams musically strike the sides of the pail.

"Hi Dick."

"Hi Paul."

The greeting is simple and brief between friends who know each other so well they hardly need words to communicate.

The cow stands patiently chewing her cud. A little stream splashes over flat stones near by. Swallows dart zigzag through the evening air catching insects. Chickens walk squaking gently around the yard. A black cat arching its back rubs its sides against Dick's legs and purrs. The milking finished Paul picks up the bucket of milk. The two boys walk silently side by side up the driveway to the Heath home. The milk is placed in the spring house and the two boys sit side by side on the back steps.

A cool breeze springs up after the hot day. There is a large bush of pink Sweet Williams by the kitchen door. A belated humming bird makes his last trip for the d^r and sips the nectar from the beautiful flowers.

"Did you go to Goose Pond today?"

The question needs no answer.

The Heath backyard is beautiful this time of the year. It seems correct to use the same tense for seventy years ago and now. It has always been difficult for me to appreciate time. Mother

and Father are as much alive for me now as when I was a boy. And the stories Mother told me of her youth are real and yet I was not even in existence then.

The loss of immortality does not bother me because I do not understand it. Whether I experience the present or remember the past or dream of the future it makes no difference. This existence, this awareness of the beauties and happiness of life is for me as long as I need it. When it is gone I need it no longer.

Richard S. Rust

3

In Paradise Garden

"And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you'. And he said, 'I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked I hid myself.'" Genesis 3: 8-10

Now let me tell you. Our yard is precisely 125 feet wide by 232 feet deep. Our house stands exactly, at one end of the lot and the garage, a two story building stands at the exact opposite end, so they are about 200 feet apart. That garage, in fact, is so big that we long ago gave up the idea of trying to heat it and that decision also meant that there could not be water out there. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

Our yard being flat, is easy to care for. That is, cutting the grass is no great problem, and it's no chore to gather clippings and leaves to dispose of them. However, on that small lot are twenty four very large trees, most of which are elms, oaks, elders, and locusts, which have to be tended to the year round. In the spring blossoms appear and then drop; the leaves actually start to fall about the first of July and the main difference

between summer and fall is in the number that flutter down, plus the fruit, berries, and acorns which drop with the freshening air of the waning year. Those trees suggest a lot of work, and they are.

It was a gorgeous October day, warm sunshine pouring down through the cool, crisp air. I had been cutting the grass, pruning and raking all morning, and I was glad to conclude the job by gathering the leaves on the apron of the driveway in front of the garage. Sweeping the last leaf onto my drop cloth, I was just about to pull in the ends to carry the load to the other side of the lot where we burn things, when laziness prompted me to throw them into a small narrow, depressed area between my driveway and that of our neighbor, whose garage is adjacent to mine and are separated by only about ten feet. I had never done this before, but the neighbor always used the spot, so "Why not?" I thought. Flicking a match at the foot of the pile of dry leaves, I stood by watching the curl of smoke burst into a tiny flame that signalled ignition. I leaned on my rake and watched it with the fascination only a fire can arouse, and then made my way to the house because it was time for lunch.

A corned .beef sandwich washed down with a cold glass of beer was my (pick lunch and a few minutes later I headed for the yard again. However, as I paused by the back door I heard a crackling sound - a crackling fire sound - and as anyone knows, leaves don't crackle when they burn. So I quickly went out and ran down the driveway to behold my neighbor's garage blazing away like a giant hearth. The fire from my pile of leaves had completed its work, and then like water trickling down a course, had wandered along through other leaves on the ground until it found the necessary fuse, a stack of garden lattice leaning against the neighbor's garage. This dry stuff had immediately responded and like good tinder must have almost exploded. By the time I was perceiving the situation, the fire had climbed up the lattice, ignited the window sill, melted the .glass out of the sill, moved up under the wide overhanging eaves in which

it had eaten out a four foot hole, and there it was roaring away inside the garage in the air space over the ceiling and under the gable. It would be a matter of minutes before the entire garage would be on fire, and because its adjacent dwelling and my garage were so close, it would be a race as to which one would be kindled next. I ran back to my house and in excited terms told my wife of the situation. Since the water was turned off in our garage, the only proximate source would be our neighbor's house, so I told her to find the closest water tap while I brought up our garden hose. So both of us sped in opposite directions to perform our suddenly inspired duties - she to the nearest tap and I to the hose coiled on the terrace. By the time I breathlessly appeared by the burning garage, she had found a tap nestled in some vines on the neighboring house, and quickly the water was flowing. My wife then ran into our house to put in a fire alarm. In the meantime I played the stream of water from the base of the fire, up the side of the garage, and then into that gaping inferno beyond the hold in the eaves. Somewhere I had read in a book that you should start at the bottom of a fire, and work up with your extinguisher, and by golly, it works. The main fire quickly died down under the protests of the water.

By that time the alarm had gone into the fire department, and in a matter of minutes I heard the wail of the sirens approaching in the distance. First came the Salvage Corps, then the Chief and some policemen followed by the fire company itself - ladder wagon and all, and in the wake of this leviathan, wave upon wave of children, dogs, cats and neighbors that stood by to witness the spectacle. And spectacle it was. Although I thought my firefighting efforts had been superb, the firemen sprayed immense quantities of water all over the smoking building, chopped holes in the ceiling, ripped out window frames. The whole business took quite a bit of time and one couldn't help but be impressed with the orderly precision of the firemen as they went about their work, each with a preassigned duty which he tackled with rough skill. Soon the fire was out with a minimum of damage and I couldn't help but be proud

of my role in putting out the initial fire, which, if allowed to spread, would have demolished the garage by the time the fire engines arrived. By the same token, I was also aware of the fact that it was me who struck the match.

Soon the hubub subsided and the firemen began to withdraw their equipment. All the while I had been standing on the apron of our driveway watching the affair from a safe vantage point, and now I became aware of a fireman, more important looking than the rest, probably, the captain, trying to size up the situation as he examined the damage, trailed the ashes of the trickle of fire back through the leaves to the remains of my original burning. Finally, he sauntered over to me.

"Is the fire completely extinguished?" I said without giving him a chance to say anything.

"Yes," he said. "No problem." Here was a man of few words. He chewed on a piece of grass and contemplated the destruction.

"How do you suppose it started?" he asked.

"Looks to me as if that lattice burned, set fire to the sill, and then spread up into the eaves," I said.

"Yup. No doubt about it," said the captain. Then there was a long pause.

"See those ashes along there?" he said, pointing to the tell-tale trail along the ground.

"Yup," I said.

Another long pause.

"Well, that trail of ashes goes from the garage over there to this spot, where it looks as if there was a fire - someone burning leaves or trash."

"Yup," I said. "I'm sure you're right."

Long pause.

"Seen anyone around here?" the captain asked casually.

"Not a soul," I said.

"Not even any kids? There must be kids in this neighborhood," he said waving his hand at the now disbursing assemblage of youngsters.

"Well, that's right," I said, "But I haven't seen anyone."

"That fire got started somehow. In this kind of weather you aren't going to have spontaneous combustion. Someone must have touched it off with a match," he speculated.

".... or it might have been a cigarette," I offered.

"No," he said. "It's hard to light leaves with a cigarette. Must have been a match."

"Guess you're right," I said.

"Who lit it then?" he asked.

"Oh, it was me!" I said.

Harrison P. Warrener
