

ANCIENT MAN: THE BEGINNING OF CIVILIZATIONS

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Ancient Man: The Beginning of Civilizations by Hendrik Willem van Loon

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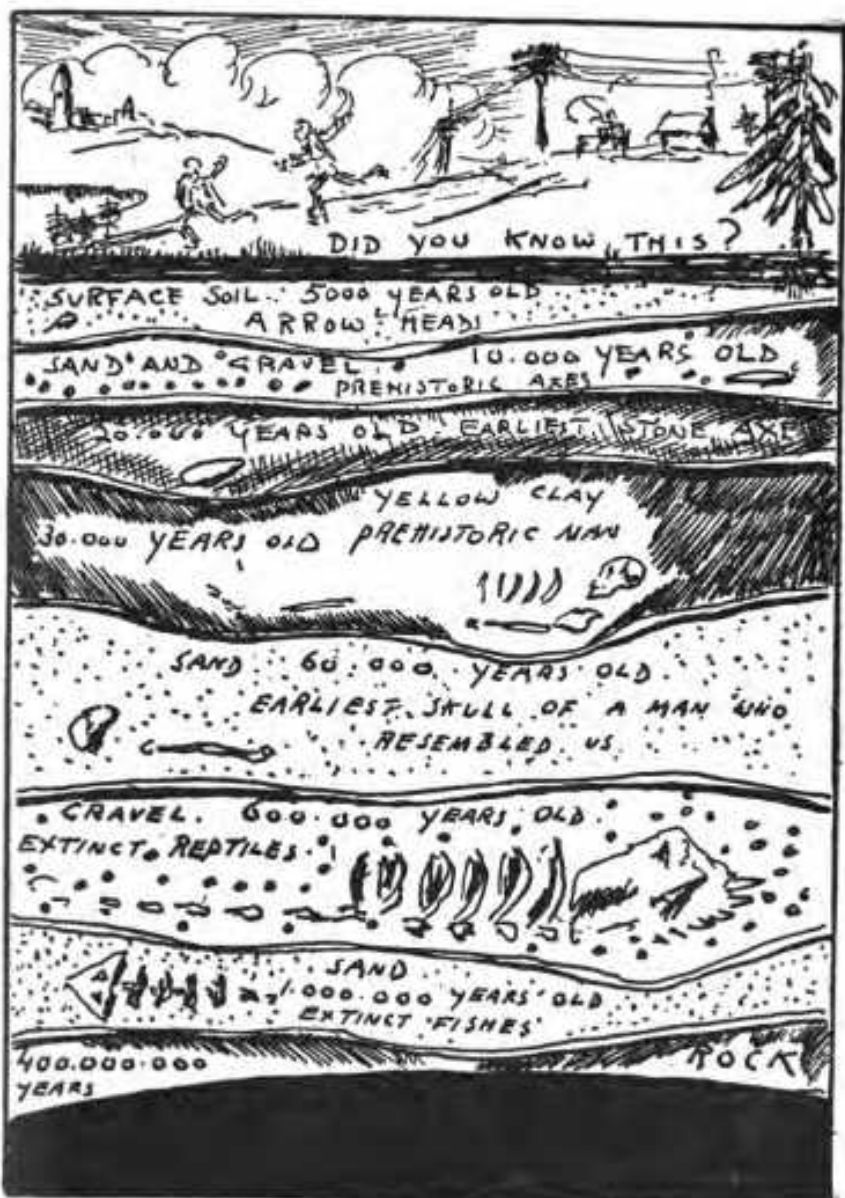
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HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON

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BY
HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON



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DEDICATION

TO HANSJE AND WILLEM.

My darling boys,

You are twelve and eight years old. Soon you will be grown up. You will leave home and begin your own lives. I have been thinking about that day, wondering what I could do to help you. At last, I have had an idea. The best compass is a thorough understanding of the growth and the experience of the human race. Why should I not write a special history for you?

So I took my faithful Corona and five bottles of ink and a box of matches and a bale of paper and began to work upon the first volume. If all goes well there will be eight more and they will tell you what you ought to know of the last six thousand years.

But before you start to read let me explain what I intend to do.

I am not going to present you with a text-

book. Neither will it be a volume of pictures. It will not even be a regular history in the accepted sense of the word.

I shall just take both of you by the hand and together we shall wander forth to explore the intricate wilderness of the bygone ages.

I shall show you mysterious rivers which seem to come from nowhere and which are doomed to reach no ultimate destination.

I shall bring you close to dangerous abysses, hidden carefully beneath a thick overgrowth of pleasant but deceiving romance.

Here and there we shall leave the beaten track to scale a solitary and lonely peak, towering high above the surrounding country.

Unless we are very lucky we shall sometimes lose ourselves in a sudden and dense fog of ignorance.

Wherever we go we must carry our warm cloak of human sympathy and understanding for vast tracts of land will prove to be a sterile desert—swept by icy storms of popular prejudice and personal greed and unless we come well prepared we shall forsake our faith in

humanity and that, dear boys, would be the worst thing that could happen to any of us.

I shall not pretend to be an infallible guide. Whenever you have a chance, take counsel with other travelers who have passed along the same route before. Compare their observations with mine and if this leads you to different conclusions, I shall certainly not be angry with you.

I have never preached to you in times gone by.

I am not going to preach to you today.

You know what the world expects of you—that you shall do your share of the common task and shall do it bravely and cheerfully.

If these books can help you, so much the better.

And with all my love I dedicate these histories to you and to the boys and girls who shall keep you company on the voyage through life.

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON.

*8 Barrow Street,
New York City.
May 8, xx.*

