

Arnoldia Reviews

Man, Nature, and History, by W. M. S. Russell

This volume is the current offering in the Nature and Science Library sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History. The Nature and Science Library is a series of books designed, so the jacket blurb says, for readers of junior high school level. The books are, in fact, eminently readable for adults. The subject matter of the series is natural history in its broadest sense. The individual volumes each treat some particular facet of nature, or man's interaction with nature. Previous volumes have dealt with zoos, archaeology, water, the human body, and pre-mechanical human cultures. Each volume, handsomely designed and copiously illustrated in color, is written by an author with academic or professional competence in the particular field. It is of some interest to note that most of the authors are British.

I originally subscribed to the series thinking that the books might be suitable for my children. I find that, in most cases, I am the one who reads each book as it arrives.

The current volume is essentially a history of European man and the effect that changing agricultural practices have had on him and on his culture. It begins, at the beginning, in the Near East, and there are excursions onto all of the continents. Famines, pestilence, and wars all find their place in the story, and the final chapter ends on the sober problem of current overpopulation.

Why did civilization rise in the dry belt of North Africa, the Near East, and China? Why did it fall? What is the relevance of the legend of Cain and Abel? One explanation is given here — and most persuasively. What effect did the kind of plow have on field size and shape and on village planning in western Europe? And why and how did the forest expand and retreat in response to the activities of man in western Europe? What effect has pestilence had on this, and what other effects does it seem to have on human population and civilization? Who knows the role played by Elisha King Root in the clearing of the American frontier? All these questions and many more are not ignored in this little book.

The subject is timely, and the book is very much to the point. This volume, and indeed the entire series, is highly recommended to the readers of *Arnoldia*.

G. P. DE W.

W. M. S. Russell. *Man, Nature, and History*, Nature and Science Library, Garden City, New York: Natural History Press, 1969.



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