

## Review Articles

### *In Search Of A National Hero*

#### I

Canada has no national hero. There are no Washingtons, Lincolns, John Paul Joneses, or even Davy Crocketts for Canadians to group their national consciousness around. Despite Professor Donald Creighton's efforts, John A. Macdonald still remains a colourful politician rather than a mythic giant embodying all of the supposed Canadian virtues. Although there has been a recent surge of Canadian interest in the period of the birth of their nation, 1864-71, most Canadians continue to show a considerable disdain for history in all of its forms, whether sugar coated by the Book-of-the-Month Club and *American Heritage*, whether condensed into historical markers that infrequently dot the Trans-Canada Highway, or whether presented straight from the shoulder in good, grey books for those who would read and not run. One young Canadian whom I chanced to overhear in St. Paul's Cathedral this last summer asked, when she had been marched by her dutiful parents up to the bust of Sir John A. Macdonald, sitting, significantly enough, almost in an antechamber of the crypt, "But who *is* he?" Her parents clearly were embarrassed, possibly as much for the Canadian nation as for themselves. They undoubtedly took solace in the fact that they could assume no one else within hearing knew either. The child probably took her comfort in the thought that no one cared who John A. was, and she would have been right, at least on that day and in that place. Her next remark showed that she was looking to the future, not to the past: "If he's a Canadian, why doesn't it *say* so?" she asked. Perhaps it was the darkness that kept her from seeing that it did, in fact, say so.

Canadian history has not been without men of heroic stature, of charismatic figures who could evoke a temporary emotional response. But they have lacked staying power in the Canadian mind—assuming that such a collective entity exists. William Lyon Mackenzie King, Canadian Prime Minister when the New Deal moved north and when the Canadian people put forth a war effort between 1939 and 1945 that was proportionately many times that of the effort of the United States, may not have been a Franklin Delano Roosevelt, but his name still can provoke lively argument, and he knew how to

keep the complicated machinery of his burgeoning bureaucracy in working order. But even allowing for Roosevelt's detractors, King is considerably less of a national hero. He is a real one, I would think; but Canadians will have none of either real or ersatz heroes.

It is rather interesting to note that while Americans have busily been creating fake folk heroes like Pecos Bill and Paul Bunyan and whitewashing "victims of society" like Billy the Kid, Canadians have chosen to honour—but not to lionize—the mythical Mountie of the scarlet-tunic, admittedly decked out today for tourists, usually American, and certainly not always getting his man, but somehow getting his job done. The Canadian demi-heroes of the west are figures who represent the side of organized law and order. While we in the United States have emphasized the lone hero in the tradition of individualism, whether a man alone with his conscience, as was Lincoln, or a man alone with his pistol, as are countless television heroes, the Canadian has emphasized an organization man. For the Royal Canadian Mounted Police stood or fell as an organization. Perhaps this is why Canadian television studios have never won success with a series based on the Mountie—an organization man, no matter how heroic, lacks the glamour of the man who defies organization.

In fact, I would submit that one of the two chief reasons why Canada has developed no national heroes is that Canada is a product of a series of organizations, organizations which have colour and excitement only when viewed as a whole. The great fur-trading companies that carved out an empire based on beaver pelts, the vast and powerful Hudson's Bay Company, symbolized by the competent, quiet heroics of dozens of traders, nameless except upon the geography of the land; the peculiar federal nature of the Canadian constitution, the British North America Act; the power of the organized clergy in French Canada; even the organization, loose and inexact as it is, called the Commonwealth of Nations, through which Canada finds a portion of her higher identity—all emphasize the individual less than the structure into which the individual fits.

The second major reason why Canada lacks a national hero may be found in the deep cultural cleavages that have rent Canadian society. One cannot expect a French Canadian to cheer loudly for some Sergeant McDougall of the Royal Mounted, since the good sergeant would represent a nationality and a religion alien to Quebec. The millions of newly arrived immigrants from central Europe can be expected to have little interest in Cartier or Frontenac or Dollard des Ormeaux. Even Champlain, recently nominated by T. G. Mackenzie as "The Father of Canada" in an article in *The Dalhousie Review* (XXXIX [Autumn, 1959], 358-369), spoke a language unknown to the vast majority of Canadians and worshipped a God still stoutly resisted by most. Cultural pluralism has given Canada strength; but it also has deprived her of her own Christ figure, of a figure like Nathan Hale or Lincoln or even the Roger Young of the World War II ballad (far better known in his home town Clyde, Ohio than another Clydian, Sherwood Anderson), a figure large enough in his sacrifice to represent, even if only temporarily, the direction taken by the national consciousness.

Still, Canadian scholars continue to cast about for the heroic, even if much of the Canadian population is not listening. There are, in fact, two ways in which Canadians have sought out their heroic symbols in recent years, and both are underscored by several recent books, two of which are especially pertinent to these remarks.\* One can emphasize the man, quietly heroic in the day-by-day decisions that lead to "the little triumphs and the little deaths that weave the fabric of life," as in J. M. S. Careless's *Brown of the Globe*; or one can emphasize the land itself as the hero, with Canada becoming "she" and "her" rather than "it," an all encompassing mother figure in which environment, or gestation, produces the Canadian who looks with consternation and even with terror—the terror of *frisson*, the pleasurable terror—upon the land, as John Bartlet Brebner has done in *Canada: A Modern History*.

## II

Canada has never been fortunate in her biographies. Most have been pious, cautious, and public; and since man frequently is wicked, rash, and private, there has been a striking gap in Canadian historiography. Despite the obvious professionalization of historical writing in Canada since the founding of the Canadian Historical Association in 1922, this historiographical gap was widened rather than closed in the subsequent years. There have been good Canadian biographies, of course, but it remains true that most are tedious tributes or sentimental appreciations rather than honest attempts to confront their subjects with the warts on.

But in the last decade there has been a small birthing and a few biographies—not yet enough to make valid generalization about the direction of Canadian biographical writing possible—have come to terms with twentieth-century standards of professional scholarship through rounded portraits and analytical probing based upon truly adequate, and sometimes more than adequate, research. Most notable have been Donald Creighton's two volumes on Macdonald (1952-56), R. Macgregor Dawson's first volume on William Lyon Mackenzie King (1958), Kenneth McNaught's treatment of J. S. Woodsworth as a "prophet in politics" (1959), William J. Eccles' series of set pieces in his investigation of Frontenac (1959), and now Professor Careless's study of George Brown. (Since these men are all but one associated with the University of Toronto, one is tempted to think in terms of a Toronto school of biographers, but only place, not attitude, binds them together in this respect.) Creighton (through two Governor-General's Awards) and Eccles (through the award of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical

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\**Brown of the Globe: Volume I, The Voice of Upper Canada, 1818-1859*. By J. M. S. Careless. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1959. Pp. 354. \$6.00.

*Canada: A Modern History*. By J. B. Brebner. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press [Toronto: Ambassador Books], 1960. Pp. xvii, 533, xviii. \$10.00.

Association) have reaped their honours; Careless, with a second volume to come, apparently must wait to receive the honour that he so richly deserves.

For in several ways Professor Careless has written the best biography of the lot. Dealing with a figure far less well-known than Macdonald or King, less immediate than King or Woodsworth, less open to the incisive negativism that Eccles shows in dissecting the Frontenac myth, and less colourful than many, Careless has succeeded in writing a major book about a clearly major figure. That the reader knows both judgments to be justified as he closes this volume is a tribute to author and to subject. In that marvellous object-lesson to all biographers, *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf has written: ". . . while fame impedes and constricts, obscurity wraps about a man like a mist; obscurity is dark, ample and free; obscurity lets the mind take its way unimpeded. Over the obscure man is poured the merciful suffusion of darkness . . . he alone is at peace." No longer will Brown be in obscurity or at peace; as in his own time, he has not remained silent to let John A. Macdonald occupy the entire stage.

Professor Careless also has performed a thorough work of research. His biography of Brown, although only half complete, has already occupied a decade and a half or more of his scholarly life, emerging as it does from his two volume doctoral dissertation—which the reviewer was permitted to read some five years ago—done at Harvard in 1949 on Brown and the *Globe*. Nothing remains of the style and technique of the dissertation, while the whole of the scholarship has been retained. Where Macdonald and King left large and discrete collections of their manuscripts, Brown left no such collection, and Professor Careless has had to ferret out his sources from diverse places, to rely upon peripheral collections and newspapers, and to discover and transport to Canada a large body of Brown material found in Scotland. The result is a full and exciting portrait of a man who was not and is not inherently exciting. This reviewer confesses to a preference for biographies of the sort that Professor Careless has written—biographies that are full-blown, fact-filled, thoroughly researched, tightly constructed, well written, at once analytical and human, critical and compassionate. Whenever a reviewer of an on-going project declares himself to be eagerly awaiting a subsequent volume, I usually count him less than honest. But this time I find that the cliché is true.

Some readers may dislike the format of the volume, which is selfconsciously and archly Victorian. This reviewer was attracted by the compromise with an antique typeface, by the engravings from the *Globe*, the end papers, the illustrations, and the dust jacket. His only complaint, and an old one, is that the notes are squeezed into dual columns at the back of the book and the notes and index run one into the other. But then, footnotes at the bottom of the page would have been highly un-Victorian, and perhaps this concession may be granted to a book that is otherwise so handsomely produced.

George Brown does not emerge as a hero that Thomas Carlyle or William Campbell or even Sidney Hook would recognize. Professor Careless is writing a scholarly biography for an essentially scholarly audience. When one compares this volume with

the most recent addition to J.-C. Ibert's popular *Meneurs d'hommes* series being published in Paris, the contrast between the hero of the grand gesture, so dear to the nineteenth-century reader, and the hero of the commonplace, so close to the heart of the uncommitted twentieth-century reader, is great. In volume VII of the Ibert series Jacques Chabannes begins his brief life of *Jacques Cartier* (Paris, 1960), "*Jacques Cartier n'est pas un héros, ni un surhomme.*" From the heat of this statement one can retreat to the shade of Professor Careless's cool prose.

George Brown exhibited the standard Victorian virtues and he played a standard Victorian rôle. Even his love letters, which the reviewer had the pleasure to read shortly before hearing Professor Careless entertain a meeting of the London and Middlesex Historical Society with excerpts from them, are the epitome of Victorian love. And to us these vain, proud, foolish, arch, idealistic, money-wise, proper Victorians are coming to have a growing fascination, for men like George Brown and William Ewart Gladstone, his English prototype, were truly heroic. Or so Professor Careless, like Gladstone's Morley, makes us feel. This is the success of the book.

Most readers will find faults with most books. This reviewer would have liked to learn a little more about Brown as a journalist and a little less about Brown as a politician or farmer; others might want a more precisely stated judgment concerning Brown's significance, but Professor Careless may justly postpone such a summation until his second volume. And readers will always disagree over the proper meaning of self-revealing statements, about what such statements actually reveal and what their author hoped they would be taken to reveal. Professor Careless clearly felt, for example, as he showed in his talk, that Brown's love letters were to be taken at face value; after reading the same letters I sometimes felt that Brown was merely voicing proper Victorian sentiments, posturing on a stage in a manner decently incumbent upon a new husband and recent father. But this is a disagreement over nuance, and Professor Careless, after all, knows his man so well that in questions of nuance he will unquestionably be nearly always right. It is with this confidence that one truly looks forward to the next volume.

Professor Careless, already the author of an excellent short history of Canada in the British Commonwealth Series (*Canada, A Story of Challenge* [Cambridge, England, 1953]), has recently achieved several distinguished honours, including the Presidency of the Ontario Historical Association and the Chairmanship of his department at the University of Toronto. If an outsider may cast a vote, he should also have received a Governor-General's medal for writing one of the best half-dozen biographies to come out of Canada in the last decade and a half.

One wishes that John Bartlet Brebner's last book could be praised as unstintingly. This reviewer feels a particular debt to the late Professor Brebner—not only the collective debt that we all owe to the Canadian-born scholar who taught generations of students at Columbia University that Canadian history could be an exciting discovery—but an in-

dividual debt for encouragement. But Professor Brebner's standards were of the highest, and he would have been among the first to consider that his own book, *Canada: A Modern History*, is a disappointment.

Brebner was a master of English prose. Taking his own guidance from Parkman—and emulating the great Bostonian in his *Explorers of North America* (London, 1933; reprinted, Anchor Books, 1955), a near-classic of North American history—Brebner moulded each sentence to fit his paragraphs, each paragraph to fit his chapters, so that his books were cohesive, organic wholes.

It is precisely this that his last book is not. Dividing his story into five parts, Brebner has moved from the earliest geological history through historical geography down to 1815. Throughout, the land dominates, and it may be said that Brebner's romance with North American geography binds the book together. But this romance for the land as hero is not enough, and after the excellent opening section, Brebner turns to a less organic, institutionalized organization. Book 2, "The Parts," deals with each province separately, to Confederation. Traditional subjects are treated traditionally, with brief snippets, some only a paragraph or two long, under "Education and Culture," "Religion and Churches," and the like. The result is disturbing, not only because Brebner has been able in the past to rise so far above this textbook organization, but because the underlying assumptions of the first portion of the book, concerning Canadian geography, are at war with an organization which proceeds mechanically from province to province, adhering to artificial boundary lines set by man, not nature.

Nor can one blame the editors or the publishers for the organization. This volume is the ninth to be published of a projected 15 volumes in the University of Michigan History of the Modern World series, under the general editorship of Allan Nevins and Howard M. Ehrmann. The series, according to the publisher's statement, is intended to offer "to the public at large an interconnected view of the histories of the great modern powers, comprehensive and scholarly in content, yet lively in style." This sounds formidable and even constraining, but Brebner was able to write his superb *North Atlantic Triangle* (New Haven, 1945) within the framework of a restrictive and sometimes pedestrian series. And of the other three volumes in the present series that the present reviewer has read, none has the mechanical organization chosen by Brebner. Perhaps the author was limited by his need to be meaningful to an American audience (and to justify to the sceptical that application of "great modern power" to Canada), so that he could not write with the beauty and power of Donald Creighton in *Dominion of the North* (Toronto, 1944)—a book that can hardly be used in an American class-room—or with the heavily factual and self-confessedly textbook orientation of Edgar McInnis in *Canada: A Political and Social History* (New York, 1947), since Brebner had to write for the mercurial "intelligent layman" as well. But A. L. Burt's *A Short History of Canada for Americans* (Minneapolis, 1942) or even D. G. Graham's *Canada: A Short History* (London, 1950),

are more suitable for the lay reader. Few Americans outside the scholarly world will care to read 553 pages of closely-packed material on Canada.

Brebner did not live to see the book through the press. Had he done so, many of the present reviewer's complaints probably would have been eliminated. The Brebner of *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia* (New York, 1937) never would have permitted such a pair of sentences as these (p. 253): "During the celebration of Washington's Birthday two months later, Ned was challenged to a duel by J. W. Bagley, another former San Francisco ruffian, but replied 'that he would not fight in British territory, but was willing to meet him in United States territory.' It is believed that the duel was not fought, but the respectful McGowan left the country shortly afterwards with \$4700 worth of dust in his poke." Brebner was too sensitive a writer to let stand a crude gaucherie like "worth of dust in his poke", or to permit the internal quotation to force "but" twice in two lines. Seldom does the book rise above this level; it leaves the impression of lacking that final polishing that all "finished" manuscripts need.

Nor would Brebner have permitted publication of a book that shows so much evidence of having incorporated almost none of the post-1950 research. The bibliography is reasonably up-to-date, although too highly selective for a book of such size. A population figure ten years out-of-date is permitted to remain; Brebner repeats the (hopefully disproved) statement that "53,532 persons born in the colonies" served in the armies of the North during the American Civil War and omits the words of caution he used when first citing the figure fifteen years earlier in *North Atlantic Triangle*; a page later he implies that the United States did not apply passport regulations against British North America until December of 1865. Again, Brebner would have removed the several errors, of which these are typical, had he lived to do so, for he was the most careful of scholars.

It is difficult to know where to place the blame for this disappointment. Not on Brebner, certainly, for the book clearly seems to this reviewer to be a next-to-last rather than a final draft. Not on the publishers, or the editors, presumably, for they have performed a notable service to include a volume on Canada in their series at all, and a volume most handsomely produced at that. Certainly not on Donald C. Masters, Chairman of his department at Bishop's University, who undertook to write a final chapter on Canada since 1950," which brings the book up to 1959, for Masters' own chapter, while perhaps rather too statistical, is concise, and he was not called upon to revise the portion written by Professor Brebner. Perhaps disappointment, like love, cannot be labelled so clearly.

In any case, Professor Brebner has succeeded with his love story, and if the reader will persist through the statistics, the potted summaries, and the textbook headings and sub-headings, he will come to know that ultimately Canada's greatest historians, men like Brebner and Creighton, A. S. Morton and A. R. M. Lower, are at heart romantics, writing of a land and of a people they admire, if sometimes without quite knowing why.

In a passage that Brebner quotes, unfortunately not at length, the Canadian critic Northrop Frye has declared that "there is a recognizable Canadian accent" in the best (and some of the worst) Canadian poetry, and that this accent is heard "in the evocation of stark terror. Not a coward's terror, of course, but a controlled vision of the causes of cowardice. The immediate source of this is obviously the frightening loneliness of a huge and thinly settled country." Frye was right, and Brebner is right; if only he had lived to say it as he could have done.

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### *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*

An undeciphered script is a challenge to the curious intellect. There are many approaches to its problems, and for persons with the temerity to tackle them it holds diverse and curious fascinations. Some minds find the same delight in a strange script as in a puzzle that can be solved by the application of proper statistical formulae. To others it is a mystery to which a secret key is someday to be found. Persons with a practical turn of mind are apt to see it as a scientific problem that requires a team of experts and a generous grant of funds for research. To a few, the study of an unknown script becomes a lifelong pursuit, yielding occasional exciting triumphs between long periods of painstaking and often discouraging effort.

For nearly a century now, Maya hieroglyphic writing has resisted all attempts to decipher it. Thompson\* tells us that it was first brought to the attention of European and American scholars by Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg, who in 1864 brought out an account of sixteenth-century Yucatan written by Bishop Landa, which contained vital information on the Maya calendar. He attributes the initial elucidation of this calendar largely to the efforts of Ernst Forstemann, working in the 1880's with the Dresden Codex, one of the three surviving Maya hieroglyphic manuscripts. By the turn of the century, it was possible to read Maya dates and to place them accurately in respect to one another, although their position in the Christian calendar was still unknown, and the relation of

\**Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: An Introduction*. By J. Eric S. Thompson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press [Toronto: Burns & MacEachern], 1960. Pp. xxii, 347. \$12.50. 65 plates, 22 tables, 5 appendices, glossary, references and general index.

the characters to the spoken language was far from clear. There were several attempts to assign phonetic values to glyphic elements, but they were all unsuccessful.

Now, sixty years later, the situation remains essentially unchanged. We have expanded vastly our understanding of the Maya numerical system, of the calendar, and of the astronomical data in the texts; we have established the meaning of a number of new hieroglyphs; but there still remains the uncertainty of the true correlation between the Christian and the Maya calendars, and no two scholars can yet agree on the proper reading of a single passage of Maya text that does not deal with calendrical matters.

J. Eric S. Thompson has been the most productive and versatile contributor to our knowledge of Maya writing since 1927, when his proposals for the correlation of the Christian and Maya calendars were given preference over those of Herbert J. Spinden by the majority of active scholars. Although the recently discovered method of dating organic archaeological remains by their content of radioactive carbon has tended to reopen the question of the correlation, many investigators still adhere to Thompson's views. His subsequent publications range over the entire field of Middle American pre-history, but epigraphy has remained his major interest, and his pre-eminence in this field is acknowledged by all his active colleagues.

*Maya Hieroglyphic Writing* was originally conceived as an introductory volume to a dictionary of Maya hieroglyphs, on which Thompson has been working for a number of years, and which has just been completed; but it is actually an independent work in itself. Primarily a summary of all that is known or conjectured concerning the Maya script, it goes far beyond the requirements of its subject and gives a comprehensive view of the intellectual content of Maya civilization—of its cosmogony, its religion, its literature, and its incipient sciences.

The present edition is a second printing of the book originally published by the Carnegie Institution of Washington in 1950, as Publication No. 589. It retains the original format and has gained somewhat in the reprinting, as well as in being brought up to date by a preface which reviews very briefly discoveries made in the decade between 1950 and 1960. In view of the technical character of much of the material contained in the book, its popular success has been phenomenal. Evidently there is a growing interest among serious readers in the history of native civilizations of the New World, stimulated by such general accounts of the Maya as Morley's *The Ancient Maya*, its revision by Brainerd, and Thompson's own *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*.

The heart of the Maya area lies in a sparsely inhabited region of tall sub-tropical rain forest in northern Guatemala, a region that raises formidable obstacles to intensive cultivation and that seems to modern eyes a very unlikely place to nourish a young civilization. None the less, from before the beginning of the Christian era to about A.D. 1000, this region was heavily populated, and huge assemblages of masonry structures now almost obscured by vegetation mark the sites of the civic and religious centres of the ancient Maya. One marvels at the prodigious energy expended in felling the forest and

building these large constructions, when only the most primitive tools were available. There were no draft animals. The wheel was unknown as a mechanical device. The art of metallurgy had not yet reached the area. The great stone monuments carved with figures and hieroglyphs found in almost every large site were worked entirely with stone tools, and set up with the help of only such elementary devices as the roller and the ramp. In artistic style and conception, however, these monuments are comparable to the sculptures of ancient Egypt and Assyria, while the character of the script used in their long and exquisitely carved inscriptions is uniquely complex and without parallel in the Old World.

This script survived in northern Yucatan until the conquest; but in misguided zeal the colonial bishops and friars seized and destroyed all native documents that fell into their hands, with the result that in a generation or two the old writing was forgotten, and there is no reliable account of it today. Fortunately, Landa's imperfect description of the Maya calendar could be amplified and corrected from numerical notations in the hieroglyphic texts once it was realized that the numeration is similar in principle to our own place-value system, in which each digit is multiplied by 10 to the power indicated by its position. The Maya used 20 in a similar way as a base multiplier, but their system of counting time was encumbered by compound forms for digits, and by an odd irregularity making 360 instead of 400 the multiplier for the third position. Although the numeration thereafter follows a regular pattern, the irregular factor is contained in higher numerals, complicating the process of multiplication of high numbers. For astronomical computation, long tables of numbers were constructed, reducing operations to addition and subtraction.

The calendar was based on permutations of time periods of varying lengths. The primary unit was composed of 260 days, itself a permutation of 13 numbers with 20 names. Thompson rejects the term *Tzolkin*, usually applied to this period, and prefers to call it "the sacred almanac". When the position of the days in a formal year of 365 days is given also, the 260-day cycle combines with the year to form a larger cycle of 18,980 days, or 52 years, known as the *Calendar Round*, in which each day has a unique designation. In addition, certain important dates are accompanied by data concerning the moon, and by a designation of one of the nine *Lords of Night* that follow one another in regular succession. A *Calendar Round* date with its *Lord of Night* is thus definitely fixed within a period of 468 years. Distances between dates are expressed in numbers, and long numbers called *Initial Series* link dates with a certain fixed day more than three thousand years in the past that represented the beginning of the current era. There is evidence that sometimes calculations were carried back into earlier epochs, but the system of counting in the higher reaches is still not entirely clear.

Thompson sees in this elaborate system a poetry expressing the vast and intricate rhythm of time, and believes it to be the dominant theme of the ancient Maya religion. In his view, it was an instrument of a sophisticated astrology, linking each day, each

year, each season, and the motions of the sun, moon, and planets with the fortunes of men and with the larger destiny of peoples. His approach to the interpretation of hieroglyphic forms draws heavily on associations of ideas in Maya mythology. Without neglecting the frequent phonetic use of some of the characters, he treats the system as essentially ideographic, and categorically rejects the validity of recent attempts to make phonetics the key to decipherment. All his interpretations are based on the important assumption that Maya texts deal almost exclusively with divination based on the calendar and on astronomical cycles.

In his introduction to the book (Chapter 1), Thompson states this position clearly and with eloquence. He also gives us a rapid survey of what is known of Maya civilization; of its geography, its history, and its philosophy, and discusses such topics as the sources of texts and the studies that had been made of them previously.

Chapter 2 is entitled "Principles of Maya Glyphic Writing" and covers a large range of subjects, including the composition of glyphic forms, the relation of writing to spoken language, the linguistic system of counting, hieroglyphic styles, and the subject matter of inscriptions. Principles, however, are singularly lacking in this discussion. Perhaps it is a virtue of Thompson's approach that it is not hampered by preconceived notions of the structure of the writing, but it is a weakness of his exposition that he prefers to convey a general idea by illustrating it with examples rather than by giving it rigorous form. Thus, he often seems to evade criticism by shifting his ground of argument. Some of his statements barely avoid being contradictory. For instance, in discussing the structure of glyphic sentences, he remarks, "one can perhaps conclude that the order of the glyphs is not supposed to correspond without deviation to the spoken sentence, but that all essential parts are given, so that the reader could arrange them and supplement them with speech particles not represented in the text." This seems to imply a considerable degree of independence of the written from the linguistic form. In a discussion of the transference of affixes, on the other hand, Thompson observes, "This mutation is surely about the same as changing 'he gave him hearty thanks' to 'he heartily thanked him'. I make no doubt that the flexibility of such affixes corresponds to the flexibility of spoken Maya." Thompson makes no attempt to reconcile these two remarks, to derive from them any general observation, or to assess the degree and character of the interdependence between spoken and written forms. I have the impression that his reliance on linguistic evidence and even on phonetics is far stronger than statements in his introduction might lead one to expect, but one can never be quite sure how the considerations that he adduces in evidence have been selected, or what general process or relationship assures their relevance in a particular instance. This, of course, is the approach of a humanist scholar, which relies on personal sensitivity and subliminal judgments, communicating conviction by persuasion rather than in strictly logical form.

Chapters 3 to 11, which deal with the known structure of calendrical notations, are little affected by the ambiguities of Thompson's theoretical stand. In Chapters 3 and

4, he discusses the periods of the sacred and the solar calendars, with particular emphasis on the meanings of the names of the days and months, and on their ritual and divinatory significance. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 deal with the numerical system and its applications, and Chapter 8 takes up the ritual aspects of the 360-day period and its multiples. Ritual and astronomical cycles not directly involved with the calendar are covered in Chapter 9. A separate chapter is devoted to the moon and lunar glyphs, and another entitled "Soulless Mechanisms and Magical Formulae" deals with various tables, computations, and other details of the system.

These chapters, though full of technical complexities, are lightened by constant allusions to mythology and to ideas linking calendrical elements with the daily habits of the people and with their romantic notions about the universe and its controlling powers. They are replete with information on all aspects of Maya life and thought, and must be read again and again before the knowledge and the insight contained in them can be fully absorbed.

In Chapter 12, Thompson finally turns to non-calendrical passages and comes to grips again with the central problems of decipherment. Here again he demonstrates his method and even offers some tentative translations. In keeping with his theory, these are rendered directly from the hieroglyphic script into English, without transliteration into the Maya language. Nevertheless, linguistic evidence is used freely, and the method can be described only as an "attack on all fronts." Many suggestions are new and original, and each is discussed in detail and supported by evidence marshalled from all available sources. It is difficult at present to evaluate the contribution to knowledge contained in this chapter, or to judge the validity of the conclusions. Proof is still elusive, and in Thompson's opinion, there is an element of uncertainty inherent in the structure of the writing, so that different renderings of the same text may be equally correct. He concentrates particularly on the poetic meanings, on the metaphorical implications, and on the mythical themes, rather than on the literal significance of the forms. In his own words, "our ultimate objective is not the literal word-for-word decipherment of the glyphs, but a fuller comprehension of the mentality, the poetic concepts, and the philosophical outlook of the Maya."

The final chapter, in which these words appear, is a brief summary of the conclusions reached in the book, and an appraisal of prospects for future research. For the expert, there are five appendices enlarging discussion of important but controversial topics covered more briefly in previous chapters. A glossary and index of specific hieroglyphs, a general index, and a copious list of references further enhance the value of the book as an aid to technical studies. It is the extraordinary style of the book, however, that succeeds in carrying it beyond the interest of the specialist and bringing to bear a broad outlook on the most minute examination of forms and shades of meaning. In keeping with this style, there are poetic quotations taken from the Bible and from English classics at the head of every chapter. The modern North American reader may find these literary

flourishes somewhat anachronous, but they serve to emphasize the strictly classical, humanistic approach of the author. For those who tire of graphs and statistical formulae, it will be heartening to know that a less formal approach, using subtle and delicate judgments, and weighing simultaneously many considerations, is still able to give vigorous competition to methods that rely on the accretion of isolated and limited propositions. True, it provides us with no ready test of its success. Only time and future discoveries can demonstrate how much of the result is sound. But even if a large proportion of the readings offered were to be ultimately rejected, the book remains not only a valuable reference work, but also a thoroughly absorbing thesis. It is not easy reading, but to the earnest and thoughtful person it gives an exciting glimpse of a conception of the world arrived at by a people who lived long ago and remote from the sources and inspirations of Western thought. Whatever minor distortions in this conception may be due to the author's bias, it is certainly in its general outlines completely authentic, for it rests on thorough familiarity with native colonial literature, early histories, and modern researches in ethnography and archaeology. One can ask for no better foundation for an interpretative work such as *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*.

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