



THE EARTH-DWELLERS*

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PART I, published in the August FORUM, related a series of extraordinary events that took place on the Earth in the spring of 1954. Enormous fissures were made in the Earth's surface; without warning people were snatched up, and within a few seconds, were transported to distant countries; houses were cut in two, as if by a keen-bladed knife, and their occupants were interchanged; a group of eminent scientists were caught in a transparent cage, where they would have starved to death had they not been released as mysteriously as they were trapped. The Earth was thrown in turmoil. Many people, seeing in these events the hand of God, turned to religion and good works. All was inexplicable until it was learned that a distinguished scientist on Uranus had been conducting a series of experiments to learn the social habits of the Earth-Dwellers.

Part II

WE must now give a few fragments (in our opinion the most important) of the book in which the illustrious AE-17 reported the results of his experiments. The reader will understand that for the Uranian words we have been compelled to substitute Terrestrial equivalents which do not translate them with any degree of exactness. As time on the planet Uranus is composed of years much longer than our own, we have, wherever possible, changed to Terrestrial time. Moreover, to designate the human race, the Uranians use a word which may roughly be translated "wingless bipeds"; but since that is unnecessarily complicated, we have substituted the words "men" or "Earth-dwellers." Likewise, the queer word by which they represent our cities we have translated "man-heaps," which roughly suggests

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the same associations. The reader must not forget that the Uranians — although they have, like ourselves, the gift of sight — have no conception of sound. They communicate among themselves by means of a special organ composed of a series of little colored lamps, which flash on and off alternately. Discovering no such organ in mankind and being unable to imagine speech, the Uranians naturally regarded us as incapable of communicating our ideas.

We are able to give here only a few short fragments from the study by AE-17, but we earnestly advise the student to read the whole book. There is an excellent critical edition, published with notes and appendices, by Professor Sing-To, of Peking.

The Life of the Terrestrials by AE-17. When, with the aid of an ordinary telescope, one examines the surface of the small planets, and particularly that of the Earth, one perceives large patches much more motley in color than those formed by lakes or seas. If one observes these patches long enough, one sees that they increase in size during several Terrestrial centuries, pass through a stage of maximum development, and then diminish, sometimes even disappearing altogether. Many observers have held that they were caused by diseases of the Earth itself. Nothing, indeed, presents a closer resemblance to the appearance, development, and reabsorption of a tumor in an organism. But after the invention of the ultramicrotelescope, it was realized that these phenomena were really aggregates of living matter.

The earlier apparatus, being imperfect, enabled us to see nothing but a confused swarm, a kind of vibrating jelly, and very excellent minds — among them a scientist of such standing as A-33 — then held the view that these Terrestrial colonies were composed of animals, attached to one another and living a kind of communal life. With modern apparatus, one can see very clearly that this is not true, for it is now easy to distinguish one individual from another and even to follow their movements.

The living spots in which A-33 believed are in reality immense nests, almost comparable to Uranian villages, for which our scientific name is "man-heaps." The miniature animals which inhabit the man-heaps — the men themselves — are all mammalian and wingless bipeds, imperfectly supplied with hair and covered with an artificial epidermis. It has long been supposed that they themselves secreted this supplementary skin. My

studies prove, however, that this is not so, but that the Earth-dwellers possess an instinct which leads them to collect certain animal and vegetable fibres as a protection against the cold.

I say an "instinct," and I wish at the beginning of this monograph to indicate more definitely my feeling on a question which should never have been raised, yet which has, in the last few years, been treated with incredible frivolity. The strange fashion has of late established itself among our younger naturalists of attributing to these inhabitants of the Earth an intelligence of the same order as that of the Uranians. Let us leave it to others to dwell upon the shocking nature of such a doctrine from a religious point of view. In this book I wish merely to show that it is absurd from the scientific point of view.

No doubt, when one first contemplates these drops of jelly under the ultramicrotelescope and sees unfold a thousand animated and interesting scenes; when one sees long streets where men seem to cross and recross, sometimes stopping and appearing to converse; when one sees armies marching, builders at work, mothers leading their little ones: the beauty of the spectacle is enough to arouse enthusiasm. But to study the psychic powers of these creatures with any profit, it is not enough to take advantage of such circumstances as a happy chance may offer to the observer. It is necessary to create other circumstances and vary them as much as possible. It is necessary, in other words, to experiment and try to construct a science on a solid basis of fact. That is what I have been doing in the course of a long series of experiments.

Before commencing my recital, I must ask the reader to imagine the immense difficulties which such a project must necessarily encounter. No doubt it is true that experimentation at a distance has become relatively easy since we discovered the Alpha-Omega rays, which permit one to pick out an object, bisect it, and carry it over the interstellar spaces. But when such small and fragile creatures as men are involved, the Alpha-Omega rays are rather coarse and crude instruments. In our first attempts, it too often happened that we killed the animals we wanted to observe. An apparatus of extreme delicacy was needed to place the body directly at the desired point and manipulate it with the necessary gentleness.

When we began to transport men on the surface of the Earth, we failed to take into account the difficulties which these creatures

have in breathing. At that time we carried them at too high a speed through the thin layer of gas which envelopes the Earth, and our animals were asphyxiated. The same thing happened when we tried to study their habits by interchanging the members of a pair. We had not taken into consideration the way in which their shelters are constructed, and we destroyed several of these. By experience, however, we have learned to adapt the necessities of experimentation to the life of our subjects.

We had paid special attention to three great man-heaps to which we gave the names, since adopted by most scientists of the Solar System, the Rigid Man-Heap, the Crazy Man-Heap, and the Geometric Man-Heap.* Between the Rigid Man-Heap and the Crazy Man-Heap there lies a gleaming line which certain scientists believe to be a channel of the sea, but which others maintain is formed by low-hanging clouds and fogs.

First Attempts. The secrets of living nature impose difficult conditions on the observer. He is the slave of the season, the day, the hour, the very instant. To what parts of the Earth was it most appropriate to direct our efforts? How could we interfere with the life of these animals so as to obtain from them the most revealing reactions? I admit that my emotion was great on the day when, equipped for the first time with apparatus of adequate power, I prepared to begin operations on the Earth.

I was surrounded by four of my younger students, who were also very much affected when, one after another, we looked through the ultramicrotelescope at those charming and diminutive landscapes. We had trained the apparatus on the Rigid Man-Heap and had sought for a place sufficiently open so that we could follow our experiment more easily. The little trees gleamed in the spring sun and one could see multitudes of motionless insects forming irregular circles, with an isolated insect in the centre of each. For a while we sought to understand what was happening, but meeting with no success, we decided to try an application of the rays. The effect was appalling. A little trench appeared in the Earth and a few insects were buried in the rubble. Immediately an astonishing activity began. One would really have thought that these animals possessed intelligence. Some rushed to save their buried companions, others dashed off for help.

* Even now, although interplanetary communication has made the names of London, Paris, and New York known throughout the universe, the Uranians still prefer their own designations for these cities, and scientists generally agree that the Uranian terms are more descriptive.

We then undertook to train our rays on several other locations, this time taking great care to choose points that were not inhabited, so as not to kill the animals we wished to study. We thus succeeded in reducing the force of our rays so that they would do as little damage as we desired, and we even learned to cut through the nests without injuring them. Certain thereafter of the value of our instruments, we decided to begin a new series of experiments.

Experiment and Observation. My project was to take certain individuals in a man-heap, mark each with a brush, transport them to some other point, and observe whether the transported individual would find his way back to the original man-heap. In the beginning, as I have said, we met a great deal of difficulty, because the animals died in transit and also because we failed to take into account the artificial epidermis with which these creatures endow themselves. As they shed this epidermis very easily — every night in fact — they were lost to view as soon as we had deposited them in the middle of a strange man-heap. During subsequent transportations we tried to mark the subjects directly on the body by tearing off the supplementary epidermis. But then, as soon as the animal arrived at the man-heap, he constructed a new one.

With a little practice, however, my pupils developed the ability to follow any particular individual through the ultramicrotelescope without losing track of it. By this means they established the fact that in ninety cases out of one hundred, the man returned to his point of departure. I tried to transport two specimens from the Rigid Man-Heap to a very distant one, which we call the Geometric Man-Heap. After ten days, Terrestrial time, my dear pupil, EX-33 — who had, with incomparable devotion, kept them under observation night and day — showed me both of them, just as they were reëntering the original man-heap. They had found their way back, in spite of the fact that the places to which I had transported them were totally unknown.

Now, as we had determined by long observation, these were individuals of a stay-at-home disposition, who obviously beheld for the first time the district in which we placed them. How then were they able to find their way back? We had transported them so quickly that there was no opportunity for observation. What was their guide? It was certainly not memory, but probably some special faculty whose amazing accomplishments we may merely

state without attempting to explain — so far does it lie outside our own psychology.

These transportations suggested another problem. Would the returned individual be recognized by his fellows? It seemed that he was. Usually, there was a great stir in the nest at the moment when the absent individual returned. The others clasped him with their appendages and sometimes placed their lips upon his. In other cases, however, the emotion manifested seemed to be anger or discontent. These preliminary experiments proved that an instinct does exist which permits men to recognize their own man-heaps.

The second problem that we set ourselves was to find out whether there existed between these individuals emotions similar to those of the Uranians — that, for example, which we call “paternal love.” Such a supposition — which would attribute to the Earth-dwellers emotions as refined as those which have been evolved in Uranus only after millions of years of civilization — seems absurd to me. But the duty of the scientific experimenter is to approach his subject with an open mind and make all possible experiments without preliminary judgments as to their result.

At night the male Earth-dweller usually reposes in the vicinity of his mate. I asked my pupils to cut the nests in two so as to separate male from female without wounding either; and then, by rejoining one half of pair A to the other half of pair B, to observe whether these little animals seemed aware of the change. In order that the experiment should be carried out under normal conditions, it was indispensable that the nests experimented with should be as much alike as possible. I therefore directed my experimenters to choose two nests containing the same number of offspring, and cells of the same size. EX-33 pointed out in triumph two nests — one in the Crazy Man-Heap and one in the Rigid Man-Heap — which were almost identical, each containing a pair and four offspring. The cutting and transportation of these houses were carried out by EX-33 with admirable skill. The results were conclusive. In both nests the couples thus artificially created displayed a slight surprise on awaking, for which the movement and the shock were adequate explanations. In each instance they remained together, without flight and in attitudes which seemed normal. One extraordinary fact: from the very first moment, the two females exerted themselves to care for the strange shelters and their inhabitants, showing neither horror nor

disgust. They were evidently incapable of discovering that these were not their own offspring.

We repeated the experiment many times. In ninety-nine cases out of one hundred, each of the two pairs displayed instant solicitude for the nest and offspring. The female Earth-dweller retains a tenacious impression of her functions without having any idea of the individuals toward whom she directs her solicitude. Whether the offspring belong to her or not, she works with equal ardor. One might at first think that this confusion arose from the close resemblance between the two nests; but little by little we began to take nests of very different appearance — for example, joining together one half of a miserable little nest with another half of an elaborate nest belonging to another species. The results were almost the same: to an Earth-dweller there is no difference between his own cell and somebody else's.

Having thus discovered that, so far as his emotional life is concerned, the Earth-dweller is an animal occupying a very low place in the evolutionary scale, we attempted another experiment to measure his intellectual capacity. It seemed the simplest plan to isolate several individuals in a cage of radiations and to offer them food which they could reach only by a series of increasingly complex movements.

For these experiments we selected certain individuals who — as one of my colleagues presumed — fulfill functions in Terrestrial society essentially analogous to our own scientific labors. This was to concede the utmost to those who like to consider the Earth-dweller an intelligent animal. The results, in detail, may be found in the Appendix. They demonstrated that the Terrestrial mind operates wholly in a very limited past and future, and that it is quite incapable of discovering the simplest solutions if one places the specimen in conditions such that the routine imposed by instinct is not adequate to maintain life.

Scientific Deductions. After a rather long period of experiment on individual Earth-dwellers, my pupils and I became sufficiently familiar with the movements of these animals to be able to observe them in the course of their ordinary lives, without ourselves intervening.

Nothing is more interesting than to follow the history of a man-heap, as I have done, during several Terrestrial years. The origin of Terrestrial society is wholly unknown. How and why did

these animals abandon their liberty to become slaves in a man-heap? We do not know. It may be that in these groups they have found some aid in their struggle against other animals and the forces of nature; but it is an aid for which they have paid dearly. No other species knows so little of leisure and the joy of living. In the large man-heaps, and in particular in the Geometric Man-Heap, activity begins at dawn and continues through part of the night. Now, if this activity were necessary, one would understand; but man is an animal of such limited capacity, so dominated by his instincts, that he struggles and produces beyond his needs. On ten separate occasions I have seen, in the storehouses of one man-heap, objects accumulated in such numbers that the inhabitants themselves seemed embarrassed by their quantity. Nevertheless, at only a short distance from these another group would continue to make the same objects.

The division of humanity into castes is but slightly understood. It is certain that among these animals some till the soil and produce almost all the nourishment, while others make the supplementary epidermis or construct nests. Still others seem to do nothing but move rapidly over the planet, eating and mating. Why are the first two castes willing to clothe and feed the third? To my mind this remains obscure. ex-33 did a remarkable piece of work in trying to prove that this tolerance is of sexual origin. He has demonstrated that in the evening, when the individuals of the upper caste assemble, the workers also gather at the entrance to the festivals to see the females — largely without the supplementary epidermis. In his view, it is the æsthetic pleasure provided by the spectacle of these easy lives which is the recompense of the sacrificed caste. The theory seems ingenious, but is not sufficiently demonstrated for me to accept it as the truth.

For my part, I should prefer to seek the explanation in the amazing stupidity of man. It is always a great error to attempt to explain man's actions on a basis of Uranian rationality. Our logic is illogic to the animal. Man obeys an inevitable, unconscious impulse. He has no choice in what he does. It is as if he were gliding down a slope, his goal irresistibly determined in advance. Upon occasion I have diverted myself by following the individual existence of certain Earth-dwellers to whom the functions of love seemed the one essential of life. I have seen them, by the conquest of a first female, bring down upon their heads all the responsibilities of nest and offspring. Not content with this first burden, the

male would then go out to seek a second companion and install her in a second nest. These simultaneous matings involved the unfortunate animal in a thousand combats of which I was a spectator. No matter. Recurrent disasters taught him nothing.

One of the strongest proofs of this incapacity to remember past experience, or to imagine what is in the future, is furnished by the terrific battles I have witnessed between members of the same species. With us, the idea that a group of Uranians should attack another group, strike them with objects intended to wound them, try to asphyxiate them with poisonous gasses, would seem absurd. That, nevertheless, is what happens upon the Earth. In several years of observation I have seen — now in one corner of the planet, now in another — compact groups of men arrayed against one another. Sometimes they fought beneath an open sky, sometimes in sunken holes in the ground. Each group tried to demolish the adjoining holes by sprinkling them with heavy masses of metal. Observe that at the same time they were themselves being sprinkled in the same way — an appalling and ridiculous spectacle. The scenes of horror which I then beheld were such that, if these animals had the least capacity to remember, they would avoid the return of such events for several generations at least. Yet in the course of the life of the same individual men, one could see them, two or three times in succession, launching forth madly on the same murderous adventures.

Another striking example of man's blind obedience to his instinct is the way in which certain man-heaps are tirelessly rebuilt in certain parts of the planet where they are inevitably destined to be destroyed. Thus, I carefully observed a thickly populated island where within eight years all the nests were demolished three times by earthquakes. To any intelligent observer, it is evident that animals living in such an environment ought to emigrate. But they do not do so. With ritual gestures, they pick up the same bits of wood and iron and zealously rebuild a man-heap that will be destroyed again the following year.

"But," say my scientific adversaries, "however absurd this activity may be, it is nevertheless orderly, which proves the existence of a powerful, directing force — in other words, a mind." Wrong again! The swarming of a group of men disturbed by an earthquake is, as I have already shown, like the movement of gaseous molecules. If one observes them individually, their lives are seen to follow broken and complicated patterns; but

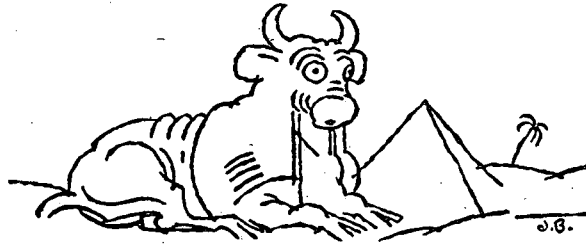
collectively, by the very force of numbers, they produce concrete effects. Likewise, if we destroy a man-heap, the thousands of insects bump together, hampering one another in their movements, rush about side by side without any definite object. Nevertheless, at the end of a certain time the man-heap is found to have been reconstructed. This result is readily explainable by the laws of chance. There is no need whatever for admitting the hypothesis that intelligence is at work here.

Such is the singular mentality in which it is now fashionable to see a counterpart of Uranian reason! But fashion changes and the facts remain — which will bring us back to those good old truths concerning the Uranian soul and its privileged destiny. For my own part, I regard myself as fortunate in having been able, by a few experiments conducted with prudence and modesty, to contribute toward the elimination of these pernicious new-fangled doctrines and to restore to their proper place in the animal kingdom these creatures, which are indeed worthy of study, but which provide a striking example of the follies to which an instinctive activity may lead if not directed by intelligence. . . .

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AE-17 died in time to escape the first Interplanetary War and too early to see the establishment of relations between Uranus and the Earth and the ruin of his theories. To the end of his life he enjoyed his fame, which was very great. He was a simple and good Uranian — who never became irritated unless he was contradicted. It remains to record one fact of interest to us: the monument erected to him on Uranus bears on its base a bas-relief — produced by telephotography — which represents a scrambling crowd of men and women in a setting which strongly suggests Fifth Avenue.





THE COW

BY

E. MERRILL ROOT

THAT four-legged fountain called a cow
Is stranger than the Sphinx:
What Œdipus has told us how
Green grass within a copper cow
Turns the white milk he drinks?

The Roc from the Arabian Tale
Was not so strange as she;
Jonah's apartment in the whale
Beside her alchemy's a pale
And gentle verity.

God's jolly cafeteria
With four legs and a tail,
As mystic as the Cabala,
An elf in rufous taffeta,
She pours us ivory ale.