

HAN ON THE WEB UPDATE: Unfortunately, the website announced in our last number is not yet up and running, and the address given then is no longer current. But work continues, and we hope useful material will soon be accessible at <http://anthro.spc.uchicago.edu/~gwsjr/han/>

CLIO'S FANCY: DOCUMENTS TO PIQUE THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

The Past in the Present: What is Civilization?

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Alexander Henry Rhind, a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, died in 1863, leaving his entire estate, valued at £7,000, to the creation of a lectureship to be administered by the Society. Rhind had been a leading figure in the movement to reform Treasure Trove laws in order to promote government protection of antiquities. Having embraced the "three-age system" advanced by Scandinavian antiquaries and ethnologists, Rhind hoped that legal protection of antiquities would aid in the building of national collections in Edinburgh, Dublin, and London, allowing British and Irish archaeologists to flesh out the three ages of their domestic prehistory. Though he died at the age of 30, Rhind did much to reach these goals in his short life, but more significantly, in the legacy of his bequest. Under the terms of his will, each holder of the lectureship "shall be bound to deliver annually a course of not less than six lectures on some branch of archaeology, ethnology, ethnography, or allied topic" (*Procs. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* 14 Dec. 1874). Among the most notable of the early holders of the lectureship (which continues to this day) were J. Romilly Allen, Robert Munro, John Rhys, John Beddoe, Arthur Evans, and later, V. Gordon Childe.

The very first holder of the lectureship is not, however, so well known. After John Stuart declined the post, the Society offered it to Sir Arthur Mitchell, then Secretary of the Society, as well as Commissioner in Lunacy for Scotland and Professor of Ancient History to the Royal Scottish Academy. Mitchell delivered ten Rhind Lectures in all, six in 1876 under the title of "The Past in the Present," and four in 1878 under the title of "What is Civilization?" While later lectures in the series looked primarily at the objects and monuments of antiquity, Mitchell's approached the topic through an ethnographic narrative.

While travelling through Scotland Mitchell had observed present day uses of objects that could also be found in the archaeological record, and the lectures of the first series were dedicated to particular objects or object categories: the spindle and whorl, food-manufacturing items, houses, farm tools, stone implements, and associated superstitions. In part, Rhind was looking for insight into how these objects and traditions might have been used in antiquity. But he was also interested in how the knowledge behind the objects seemed to go through a process of degeneration, until the objects would take on a totally new meaning. Thus whorls were still in use in yarn manufacture in remote areas, but closer to roads and urban centers were instead venerated as charms.

In contrast to better-remembered figures of his day, Mitchell arrived at conclusions that challenged prevailing notions of progress. He delivered his lectures within two years of Augustus Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers' two seminal papers, "Principles of Classification," and "On the Evolution of Culture," which laid the foundation for Pitt-Rivers' evolutionist approach to material culture (Pitt-Rivers 1875a; 1875b). Mitchell's theory that forms of technology often degrade before they become obsolete not only challenged