

Book Reviews

THE DEEP WELL.

By Carl Nylander.

(Allen and Unwin. £2.25).

Review by J. C. Cooper

Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Winter, 1970) © World Wisdom, Inc.
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As the title suggests, the object of the author, in recounting his archaeological travels, is to enter into "the dimension of depth in an immense horizontal world", and in so doing, to bring to us a sense of meaning of the past and give awareness of man's striving toward fulfillment and a valid communion between the dead and the living, correlating the past and the present. But one must beware of short cuts and "paths of error", such as the theories of the biological and cultural evolutionists who assume "the passage of history towards a greater and greater fulfillment", which presupposes in history, and its development, a set of values which cannot exist. Also, it is meaningless to assert that modern religious forms can be "higher" or "truer" than those of previous ages. Nor are such methods as Marxist Archaeology valid if they seek to prove that "a special kind of conformity of an economic nature should hold good for the development of the human community and for nearly all its manifestations in all ages"; and, in any case, "the philosophical and ethnographical foundations on which Marx and Engels once based their system have now passed".

Paradoxically, it is in the tragedies and disasters of previous ages that archaeology finds its most rewarding results since in sacked, deserted and pillaged towns everyday life is arrested and in the horrors of volcanic eruption every detail is buried intact.

The author does not see a smooth, mechanical evolutionary process at work in human culture, but finds "a series of distinct movements of discovery" and "fateful, eventful moments of creation", the result of dynamic and individual vision and initiative which "gives a more profound view of man, his creative power and his freedom". The book is no jejune account of excavation; through it there runs a vein of philosophy and a deep sympathy and understanding. The illustrations are excellent, but more detailed maps would be an added interest.