Earnest A. Hooton: 1887-1954

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ON May 3, 1954, Earnest A. Hooton, shortly after completing his lectures for the day, died unexpectedly of a heart attack in the 66th year of his life. This was a loss that his colleagues and his many acquaintances will long regret and his more intimate friends will always mourn. He was widely known, both professionally and to the general public; he was the dean of the physical anthropologists of this country, a distinguished professor at Harvard, a brilliant writer who could clothe his scientific ideas with wit and elegance, and above all, he was one of the best loved teachers in his field.

Earnest A. Hooton was born in Clemansville, Wis., on Nov. 20, 1887, the son of William and Margaret Elizabeth (Newton) Hooton. Being the son of a clergyman may or may not be significant, but, in the familiarity with Scripture that Hooton's writing reveals, one is tempted to see the clerical influence of his father. Hooton began his career as an instructor at Harvard in 1913 and remained there for the rest of his life. He became very attached to Harvard and Cambridge, and no offer could ever tempt him to leave the niche that he had made for himself there. On June 3, 1915, he married Mary Beidler Camp and from this marriage issued three children. He and his wife created a hospitable milieu in their home, which became a kind of luminous fixture that drew to them a wide variety of friends.

For many of his former students and colleagues, a visit to Cambridge always meant a visit to Hooton, usually to his house on Buckingham Street where teatime had grown to be an institution for the current crop of students. Tea at the Hootons' was certainly not listed in the University catalog as an educational inducement for prospective scholars, but many of them who, generation after generation, gathered for it must now look back on those afternoon assemblies, not only as one of the pleasantest interludes in their social life at Cambridge, but as an extraordinarily effective means of furthering their education. For at these occasions they met Hooton in a warm and friendly atmosphere, enjoyed his guests, and incidentally and painlessly learned to value his standards of professional integrity and to exchange ideas in a way not possible in the lecture-room. The success of these charming and delightful visits grew out of Hooton's genuine interest in his students. He thoroughly enjoyed their company, and few could fail to respond to and expand under so beneficent a spirit.

Although trained as a classicist at Lawrence College (B.A. 1907) and subsequently at the University of Wisconsin (M.A. 1908, Ph.D. 1911), Hooton shifted his interest to anthropology while he was at Oxford where he held a Rhodes scholarship from 1910 to 1913 and received a diploma in anthropology in 1912 and a B.Litt. in 1913. In his wry way, he used to attribute this abandonment of the classics to his inability to cope with the erudition of the great Gilbert Murray whose seminars he was expected to attend. The fact is, however, that R. R. Marett, to whom he later dedicated one of his books, exercised a strong influence in determining this choice—an influence that Hooton always cherished. To Sir Arthur Keith, Hooton used also to acknowledge a debt that went back to his student days at Oxford and England.

Although Hooton's first anthropological essays were archeological and his first courses at Harvard dealt with the cultural aspect of his subject, he soon became increasingly interested in the biological phases of anthropology. In the end, physical anthropology came to absorb him almost exclusively, both in research and in teaching. In fact, one can truly say of his career that the history of physical anthropology in this country is Hooton's history as well. When he began teaching the subject, his courses constituted the only and, I think, the first professional curriculum to be offered in the United States. And for a long time, until his students began to populate other seats of learning, he remained the only center for such training. Even up to the end, he was always the principal teacher of physical anthropology in this country and the most prolific one. Most of the physical anthropologists in the United States today are his former students or, at one remove, students of his students.

His influence, however significant in manning physical anthropology, was equally massive through his scientific productions. The first of his major studies grew out of a joint enterprise undertaken with Oric Bates. This was to have been a survey of North Africa, Bates beginning at the eastern end and Hooton working from the western. As his initial venture, Hooton went to the Canary Islands to investigate the Guanche problem and to determine what connection these prehistoric and mysterious people had with the mainland. The results were published in 1925 as *The Ancient Inhabitants of the Canary Islands,* volume 1 of the Harvard African Studies, which as editor Hooton established as a medium for the contemplated studies. His independence of mind and his boldness of concept, characteristics that generally distinguish his work, were already clearly evident in this first large-scale investigation. His use of biometric methods was notable here too, since he was a pioneer in this respect and did much to advance their application in physical anthropology.

Apart from several shorter papers on the subject, the only other large craniological investigation Hooton

carried out was a study of the extensive material excavated by A. V. Kidder at Pecos Pueblo in New Mexico. This appeared as the *Indians of Pecos* in 1930 and gave him an opportunity to address himself to the broad question of American Indian origins and affiliations. Like his other work of this order, it is marked by an unusual combination of meticulous detail and a broad sweeping view.

This predilection for speculation, a trait that enlivened his lectures and breathed life into the solid facts and figures he never failed to set forth for his students, induced him, in a measure, to embark on the writing of perhaps his best known work, *Up from the Ape,* which appeared in 1931, was revised in 1946, and went through a number of printings in both editions. He used to say when he was writing this book that it was a relief to get away from the tables of data that required a restricting and conventionalized type of analysis. Here, at any rate, the Hootonian style opened into full blossom. The writing is witty, gay, sometimes a little irreverent, always respectful of the facts, and teeming with stimulating ideas. It was unprofessorial and shocked the more conventional a little, but it has weathered extraordinarily well and is still read with delight.

There now followed a succession of books written with a minimum of scientific jargon and designed to reach the general intelligent reader and to be of significance to the professional reader as well—surely a difficult task, but one in which Hooton succeeded. These were *Apes, Men and Morons,* 1937; *The Twilight of Man,* 1939; *Why Men Behave Like Apes and Vice Versa,* 1940; *Man's Poor Relations,* 1942; *Young Man, You are Normal,* 1945. In these books, he ranged widely over the field of physical anthropology, bringing its lessons home in pungent language. But through them all ran a deeply serious concern with the welfare of society and human population. He saw various dysgenic trends operating unchecked and threatening the health and future of mankind. And these he signaled out for attack and challenge. Often he took a rather unpopular line, but he had a transcendent moral courage that gave him strong support in the face of criticism.

Perhaps in this brief account, there is space to mention only two other lines of investigation that engaged Hooton deeply. One was his study of the American criminal, on which he published two books: *Crime and the Man* and *The American Criminal,* volume 1. This was intended to be a biological and constitutional study of the criminal population of the United States and was executed with great pains. The premises of the study were severely attacked and, to some extent, its impact has been discounted, but in spite of this there is much of great value in these two volumes, which may someday be more fully recognized.

The last years of Hooton's career of research were devoted to constitutional studies. His work in this area is now mainly hidden in reports to government agencies and is, unfortunately, not generally available. As a corpus it is enormous and represents years of devoted labor.

Professionally Hooton was a leading figure. He was a member of a number of scientific societies; he was honored by election to the National Academy of Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He held only as many offices as he could be induced to accept, for he disliked office-holding. He was a Viking medalist for 1947 and received honorary degrees from Lawrence College and the University of Wisconsin, his alma maters.

Great as he was as a teacher, as a scientist, and as a writer, there was something greater still for those who knew him well. For them the finest thing about Hooton was himself.

News and Notes

Association of Southeastern Biologists

The 15th annual meeting of the Association of Southeastern Biologists was held at Louisiana State University, Apr. 15–17. The Southeastern Section of the Botanical Society of America and the Southern Appalachian Botanical Club met with the Association. There were 234 biologists from 16 states in attendance.

In addition to 60 papers presented by members, there were two symposiums. In the one dealing with marine biology in the Southeast, Harold J. Humm and Charles B. Metz of Florida State University discussed the 23 marine stations along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of the region. They pointed out that excellent facilities and abundant biological materials are available to investigators throughout the year. A symposium on biology teaching focused attention on the present problems in that field. Speakers were J. Harvey Roberts of Louisiana State University, John A. Behnke of the AAAS, and Karl A. Stiles of Michigan State College. The annual address was delivered by Edgar Anderson, Director of the Missouri Botanic Garden. His topic was "*Rosa alba,* the white rose of the Renaissance."

The ASB Research Prize of $100, offered annually by the Carolina Biological Supply Company for the outstanding paper at the meeting, was awarded to William J. Brett of Millsaps College for his paper, "Persistent diurnal rhythmicity in *Drosophila* emergence." Honorable mention went to James H. Gregg, Alice L. Hackney, and Jerome O. Knivanek of the University of Florida for their paper, "Nitrogen metabolism of whole and fragments of the slime mold, *Dictyostelium discoideum,* during growth and morphogenesis."

W. B. Baker of Emory University was presented the $100 merit award, given each year to a member