



THEODORE DONEY McCOWN

June 18, 1908 — August 17, 1969

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This sketch of Ted McCown's life and interests is in three parts. In the first I will describe briefly his fundamental contributions to anthropology, drawing on my own appreciation of his work and even more on the comments of my colleagues whose expertise is greater than my own. In the second I will give verbatim the eulogy delivered at the memorial service to him in Berkeley on August 20 last. Finally, I will attempt to express what seems to me to be the particular emerging sentiment of appreciation for him among all his friends and colleagues.

I.

The most important thing to understand about McCown the anthropologist is that he was not in a hurry. Perhaps because his primary interests lay in bones and artifacts that had lain in the earth for millennia, eons, he saw no reason for unseemingly haste, for casual disregard of stubborn fact, for any of the signs of frantic lack of scholarship that are so common. He enjoyed thoroughness, he was precise in his speech and manner and in his thoughts. In all, he was a moral aristocrat.

In considering his more particular contributions, one must realize that he was not an archaeologist or a physical anthropologist but both. (I can recall that in carrying out some statistical analyses of departmental activities, according to the three major divisions of the discipline, I had to make a fourth category for Ted.) It is instructive to look at his activities in connection with the Mt. Carmel finds. He worked in that excavation as an archaeologist, primarily associated with Dorothy Garrod. His father had opened to him the world of classical and Near Eastern archaeology, with its perspectives and methods so different from those of the New World until a few years ago. Having worked in the

excavations themselves, he occupied himself for several years with the incredibly tedious task of removing the fossils from the breccia in which they were embedded, that breccia itself often having been removed from the deposit with dynamite. Then, with patience and skill, he worked with Arthur Keith in the description and analysis of the human fossils. The resulting book, The Fossil Human Remains from the Levalloiso-Mousterian (Vol. II of The Stone Age of Mt. Carmel, with Sir Arthur Keith, 1939), is a classic. In its archaeological approach to human fossils, its emphasis on association, it put physical anthropology into the twentieth century, after it had languished so long in the bone-collecting phase of earlier years. Similarly, the analysis regarded each fossil as a remnant of a member of a group of people, an attitude not particularly common among those physical anthropologists who had spent their lives looking at plaster casts. Having adopted this approach, the report suggested that all the individuals in a fossil population did not have to be morphologically identical, any more than all the people in a living population did. The range of variation between the es-Skuhl and et-Tabun finds did not have to be interpreted as one of vast temporal difference or of admixture of two distinct populations; it could be interpreted as a normal range of variation in a single, roughly contemporaneous population. It took a while for this lesson to sink in in physical anthropology; twenty years later some people were still lecturing out of the 1946 edition of Hooton's Up from the Ape and insisting with him that "pure races" interbred, when McCown had shown that in fact it is people that breed, populations that show diversity, and that "races" are classificatory abstractions.

McCown's archaeological approach, his emphasis on association and ecology, appeared again in a paper entitled "Animals, Climate, and Paleolithic Man" (Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers, No. 25, 1961). Dorothy Garrod and later Frederick Zeuner had interpreted the varying numbers of fallow deer and gazelle as a straightforward indication of periodic variation in precipitation. McCown gently debunked some of the

basic assumptions, returned to the evidence with painstaking statistical care, and concentrated on what kinds of lives palaeolithic hunters were likely to have led, on the terrain and varied climate of Palestine within a day's walk of the site, on the variety of species that must have existed, and on matters such as hunting skill and dietary preference. Again, for him, people had lived in those caves. I can remember talking to him about that paper as he wrote it; he spoke of the topography of the Mt. Carmel ridge and of the adjoining lowlands as though they were in his own backyard. Indeed they were.

Sherry Washburn has noted, in addition to some of the points above, that Ted McCown was always convinced that the secrets of human evolution in the Pleistocene lay to the east of Palestine. He felt that primate populations were inherently variable, so that Neanderthal man's concentration in Western Europe could just as easily be a function of the collecting habits of anthropologists as one of isolation or odd adaptation to the cold of the fourth glaciation. But this was more than another case of the "ex oriente lux" virus, and Ralph Solecki and others have since proved McCown right with more spadework. McCown was convinced that variability was the answer and that it lay in India; he used to speak with animation of probable Pliocene and Villefranchian populations of Dryopithecinae, stretching from Africa to the Himalayas. It was to the Narmada Valley that he later went and where he had planned to return, to seek other evidence of the antecedents of man. Characteristically, with no haste, he began with the geology.

In all of this work he exhibited the patience and respect for solid fact but flexible interpretation that characterizes the natural science in anthropology. Whether in the chimneys at et-Tabun or sketching the architecture at Huamachuco (Pre-Incaic Huamachuco, UCPAAE Vol. 39, No. 4, 1945) he remained cognizant of the cultural and natural environment in which his particular problem was embedded, and he brought to all his investigations the unhurried, literate, and urbane scholarship that is the mark of the generalist and the whole man.

II.

It was more than twenty years ago, in 1947, that I met Ted McCown, when I came as a freshman to Anthropology. In him I found, although I scarcely knew it at first, an anomaly in the modern world, a paradox, and a guide. He was a modern man: an explorer, a scientist, a statistician, a man probing the future of our knowledge of ourselves. But at the same time he was a man of the past: a student of it, with roots, part of the fabric of his ancestry, of his community, and of his university.

He came to Berkeley from Illinois in 1914 at the age of six, the son of a former missionary to India--a place to which Ted later returned to seek the antecedents of man. His father was a Biblical archaeologist and Director of the Palestine Exploration Fund; the son lived in Palestine in the 1920's and later returned there to advance the cause of science with his discovery and analysis of the Mt. Carmel remains. The elder McCown was Dean of the Pacific School of Religion; his son rose to prominence in an institution only a stone's throw away. But Ted McCown came to more than prominence in the University; he came to be a part of it, of the university community, and of the town. From his entrance in 1925, his Bachelor's in 1929, his doctorate in 1939, he grew with the Department and the Museum, with the campus. Frank Lloyd Wright once said of buildings that they should not be on a hill but of it, and there is so much of the University that is Ted McCown and so much of him that is the University, that no line can be drawn between them. Thus he was a boy in the town, a citizen, a student, a professor, a Chairman, a Dean, a leader and counselor in the Senate. So also one could discuss with him at one moment when the last bear and mountain lion had been seen west of Grizzly Peak and in the next the implications of Federal funding for the future of the University. When he was a student, he held the same factotum job that Henry Nixon has now, that George Shkurkin had, that I had. He grew with the Department in its classic days--of Kroeber and Lowie and Gifford,

when the Museum was at the Affiliated Colleges in San Francisco, and later where Campbell Hall now stands, and when the Department was housed in a tin shack. He was the historian of the Department, and with the passing of its chronicler, a chapter of that history has ended.

Most of all I remember Ted from the days when I was a student, and in a way from the standpoint of all those who ever were, and are, students. It was to him that we always went when we were confused or troubled, and from him that we had that invaluable gift of a listener. His advice, coming by indirection, hint, and allegory was spare, austere, so that in the end we profited but thought the solution of our own invention. This gift as an adviser was the more remarkable for its frequent demonstration; we all came to him, and often, and no one was ever turned away. It was Ted who quietly saw to it that seniors were nominated to Sigma Xi and to Phi Beta Kappa, it was he who concerned himself with the departmental citation for scholarship. His talents were not limited to students in physical anthropology; everybody was Ted's student in the old days, and I learned as much from him about the people and religions and social organization of the Near East as I did about statistics, and osteology, and evolution.

The younger faculty in the Department found in Ted McCown a man who troubled himself to guide them in the ordinary administrative tasks, to tell them how the Senate worked, and to suggest the subtle compromises that permit a department to exist. He was by instinct, by practice, and by accomplishment a statesman. Much has been and will be said, and rightly so, about his expertise in the science of man, but for many of us his major accomplishment was in the art of man, in the expertise in people in the singular rather than in the plural. It is always the small things that create a person. It was when I needed a specimen from the Museum as a prop in a sophomore play that Ted McCown quietly provided it. It was when I attended seminars at his home and one night had a flat, that the professor helped the student change a tire. It was when I joined the

staff and became his neighbor around the corner that he would come on Christmas with a sprig of holly from his tree to wish us well.

All of this would make a nice man, but there was more than this to the paradox of Ted McCown. For all his kindness, his thought for people, he was hardly bland. He was a man of conviction, of strong opinion sometimes vehemently expressed, contemptuous of sham, deeply offended by much of the world around him. The hottest fires are those that are well banked, and many are those who mistook control for disinterest, courtesy for neutrality. There was nothing disinterested or neutral about him.

In a world that disenchant and fills with dropouts, he was committed. In a world that changes with alarming rapidity, he had a sense of history. In a world in which institutions crumble, he was stable. Where the inner self is now so public, he was a private man; his was a world of kin and long-time friends. His life was shaped by a stock that is altogether rare now, that stubbornly creates its own place and its own time. We can all take our mark from him.

III.

In the days that have passed since Ted's death, many have spoken of him, reminisced, talked of his contributions to knowledge and to the lives of those who knew him, and particularly of his devotion to the University. In the week that followed August 17, some of us who had felt him a permanent part of our existence could not shake the feeling that he was still here. In the memorial meeting at the Faculty Club on October 27, one could sense his presence in the rooms he had walked so often, where his quiet voice had counselled. It seemed he had not gone, and indeed he has not. He would smile his wry smile to know that he is in Durkheim's words, a social fact--a man whose permanence in the world of our minds cannot be affected in the slightest by his physical absence. It is strange to reflect that in the discussions about him, all who speak seem to feel that they knew Ted better than others did, all seem to feel

that they knew him longer. All are convinced that he was very much a part of their own lives in a special way. There are not many men who have ever lived who can have given that feeling to so many.

As Sherry Washburn said, "'There is a time and a place for everything. A time to be born and a time to die.' This is a time to honor." It was no shame for men to weep when Ted left, and we did. I am saddened that he is gone, but I am glad he was here, and privileged that I knew him.

E. A. Hammel