

# Bill's Book Club

July 2019

## Built to Last

“When you stop building, you die,” is said to be a Chinese proverb.

Whether it is cause and effect... or effect and cause... we don't know. But we don't want to put it to the test. So we've renovated, or built from scratch, 10 houses so far. We're working on another one now.

Of course, we didn't do all the work ourselves. Some of them were more-or-less professional jobs, with architects and builders on the case. Others were totally handmade, in which we did all the work on weekends, usually with the help of our adolescent children.

Some guys play golf. Some watch TV. We lay stones... or hammer two-by-fours. It is a kind of pastime that engages both mind and body. Once at it, we are fully distracted... with no time to worry about trade deficits or P/E ratios.

And when all is said and done – that is, when life adjourns – what will be the verdict? All our writing, thinking, publishing, and speaking... what was it worth?

Didn't we get it right about Fed policy post-1999? Were we right all along about the feds' fake money and its effect on the economy? Shouldn't our new book – *A Modest Theory of Civilization: Win-Win or Lose* – become a real, modern classic?

We don't know. They might all disappear into the internet-o-sphere where they were lodged.

### Our New Home

But our building projects? They will remain... physical, tangible... attached to the Earth itself... monuments to an enthusiastic amateur, who was not afraid to make a fool of himself.

Cottages are easiest and most fun. They are small and usually simple. The one we are working on now, for example, is a piece of cake. It is a traditional Irish cottage, 36 feet long and 18 feet wide.

It was in a deplorable condition when we found it. Covered with vines and tree limbs, we didn't even notice it when we bought our property in Ireland.

Our attention was focused on the main house, also in dilapidated condition. It was an old rectory that had been abandoned for many years. But the slate roof had shed most of the rain, so the inside was intact.



*Bill's new home in Ireland – before renovations began...*



*...a work in (slow) progress...*



*...almost complete*



*Things were not any better on the inside...*

## Dilapidated Cottage

We turned that over to the professionals and focused our attention on the newly discovered cottage. The roof had caved in. All the woodwork was rotten. It had never had water or electricity. And there was so much dirt and debris inside, it was impossible to tell what was on the floor.

The most disagreeable part of the project was just cleaning it out. What was left of the roof had to be dismantled. Roots had to be pulled out of the walls... crumbling windows discarded... and about a foot of dirt shoveled out.

Then, we could see what we had – a wreck!

But then, we could get to work – fixing the stone walls, framing up the roof, putting on tin, and insulating. Now, we are putting up a tongue-in-groove wood ceiling. When that is finished, we will dig out the floor, insulate against the cold and damp, and lay down tile and stone, which we recuperated from the main house. After that is done, we can put in electricity... and a tiny, motorhome-style bathroom and kitchen. Water will be drawn, by gravity, from a nearby cattle trough.

From start to finish, the whole project will take about nine months – with us working weekends only – at a cost of about \$25,000. The biggest cost is the septic tank system, a job we gave to professionals.



*Bill's dilapidated cottage*



*Bill working on the cottage*



*Bill's son Will and grandkids helping out*

The result will not be fancy. Nor will it be luxurious in any way. But it will be charming, comfortable, and authentic... perfectly suitable for the family when they come to visit.

## Experimental Architecture

Our most challenging building project was undertaken early in our career, when we were too naïve to know what we were getting into. The idea was to experiment with ferro-cement (heavy on the steel, light on the concrete) to build a solar house with a fluid design, rather than the conventional rectilinear shape.

We dug out a hillside. There, we poured a round foundation, with rebar sticking up every 6 feet or so. Then, the rebar was woven together... and sturdied up with wire mesh of various thicknesses... to form a remarkable structure – a house in the shape of a football helmet, half buried in the ground, with a slanted glass wall covering the front.



*Bill's experimental house*

Outside, we planted wisteria to shade the house in the summertime. Over the last 25 years, the wisteria has gone wild, now covering the whole place. The effect is dazzling in the spring, with purple blossoms and bees galore, leaving barely enough room to get to the front door.

On the inside, the helmet shape required multiple floor levels – five in all – which makes the house a great place for children who like running up and down the steps. And the round walls required some innovative built-ins, such as children's beds that are built of lighter, freeform plaster, meant to look like little sleeping caves.

No one ever built a house like this before. No one has since.

The project was supposed to take a year. Instead, it took three – about as long as it took us to write our *Modest Theory of Civilization*...

And while the house was a delight for most of the year, it proved disappointing in the summer. Then, the warm, moist air of July and August came into the cool interior. The earth-chilled walls were supposed to keep it from getting too hot inside. But the humid air left the walls covered with mildew and mold.

We tried to correct this with “cool tubes.” These were supposed to take the moisture out of the air before it got inside the house – a moderate success. But we still need to run a dehumidifier, which reduces the quiet charm of the place.

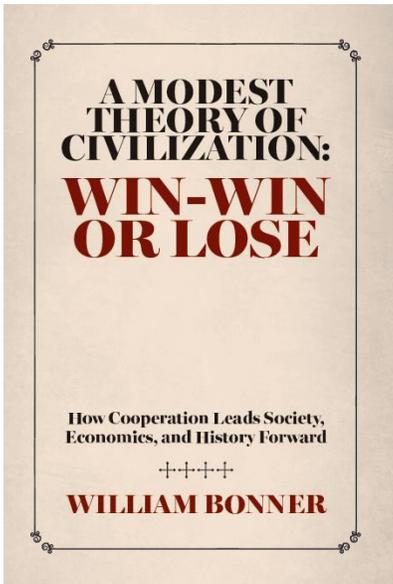
The living have mixed feelings about the place – some love it, some hate it.

As for what the unborn will make of it, we don't know. But we suspect it will last longer than our new book does.

Regards,

*Bill Bonner*

Bill Bonner  
Youghal, Ireland  
July 10, 2019



**Editor's Note:** Great news! Bill's new book – *A Modest Theory of Civilization: Win-Win or Lose* – has gone to print. We're expecting delivery of the hard copies to our warehouse very soon. In the meantime, paid-up *Bonner-Denning Letter* subscribers can download a pdf of the book [here](#) for free. Or the Kindle version is available for purchase on Amazon [here](#).

Be sure to send Bill your feedback if you've already read it. You can email [contactus@legacyresearch.com](mailto:contactus@legacyresearch.com) – just put “Feedback on Bill's Book” in the subject line and we'll pass any feedback we get straight on to Bill.

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