ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMAN SPECIES, AND THE PERFECTIBILITY OF ITS RACES.*

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NATURE is the universe. Hence, there is no subject which does not belong to the investigation of nature. Proud of so many victories by which natural science has overthrown error and prejudice, she strides triumphantly along foreign provinces, and should she be obstructed in her path, she claims her right; for all science of antiquity has proceeded from her. Thus, there exists by the side of history, which relates the course of times, the names of great kings, wars, and battles, or the rise and decline of arts and sciences, a natural history of the human species investigating the struggles and doings of peoples; the various degrees of culture as a natural development, to which the picture of individual human life forms a counterpart. Peoples, also, have their ages. As organic life in general is determined by natural influences, so is the crude man intimately connected with nature; but even the cultured man is not independent of it, he merely learns to apply her laws to his objects. The knowledge of the surface of the globe has thrown light upon the course of universal history; and since a new science, that of statistics, has commenced a strict investigation into the most complex cultural conditions of modern nations, we have learned that human society everywhere is subject to natural laws,—that events, hitherto deemed accidental, such as deaths, births, the number of marriages, crimes, may be calculated beforehand. Here we meet with the unsolved problem, that liberty of human action and natural necessity stand side by side.

The various cultural conditions of the human species, as they followed each other in time, have a special charm for the naturalist, inasmuch as he sees them side by side in the various human races. Many features in the manners of savage peoples are not sufficiently made use of, to afford a living picture of the beginnings of our own civilisation.

Just as the brightness of light is measured by the depth of the shade; so do we estimate the height of our own civilisation by looking into the depths from which savage peoples often vainly try to emerge.

The judgment concerning the condition of savage races varies ac-

* Translated from the official Report of the Thirty-third Assembly of German Naturalists and Physicians, held at Bonn.

cording to the assumption of an original equality of disposition in all, or of an original diversity in the respective races. According to the latter view, there are some races utterly incapable of civilisation, and they will and must disappear, like the bears and wolves of the wilderness. "It is not worth while," says a naturalist of the day,* "to look into the soul of the Negro. It is a judgment of God which is being executed, that, at the approach of civilisation, the savage man must perish." Similar reasons are at present, more than ever, brought forward to palliate slavery. A contrary opinion is derided as philanthropic enthusiasm; and the testimony of numerous travellers and eminent men of science is appealed to, that the Negro never can and never will reach the civilisation of the European; that his destination and his lot is to be dependent on the latter. I must here protest against the justice of such an assertion, and proclaim, in the name of science, equal rights for all human races, in the noblest sense of the word. Although a President of the United States has once said, "The red stripes on our flag are the bloody weals left by the whip upon the backs of our slaves": such an expression is now rarely heard, or when heard, hushed up. Alexander von Humboldt who, in his *Cosmos*, expresses himself decidedly against the assumption of higher and lower races of man, deeming them all destined for liberty, to whom we also owe that the last remnant of the recognition of slavery has disappeared from the Prussian codex; this Humboldt also said, in 1826, that the old Spanish laws on slavery were less cruel than those of the Slave States in North America. He had in July to protest publicly against a translation of his work in New York, in which this passage was omitted. Since then, a great improvement has taken place in the minds of the people. "The immense success," says the *Quarterly Review*, "which Mrs. Beecher-Stowe has achieved by her novel, has given the death-blow to the fugitive slave-law. When, two years ago, a fugitive slave was given up, the tenth part of the whole Union army was required to quell an insurrection. Though it may be admitted that many Negroes are better off in slavery than in their own homes, still, all modern travellers testify that the slave-trade has become for Africa a destructive pestilence; for slave-hunting is almost the sole cause of bloody wars between otherwise pastoral tribes. The dreadful decrease of the population of the South Sea, where the European has imported his vices and his poisons, is quoted as an irrefutable proof that the extinction of savage peoples is inevitable. Certainly, if the Bible is offered to the savage with one hand, and a brandy-bottle with the other, he naturally prefers the latter. And are the North American savages in the wrong in

* H. Burmeister, *Der Schwarze Mensch in. Geolog. Bildgs.*, v. ii, Leipsig, 1853.

believing that the Great Spirit has given them the land which the white man has robbed them of? We admire patriotism in a civilised people, not in a savage people. According to recent investigations, these tribes are far from being yet exterminated; if united, they still would be able to produce 200,000 warriors, which would have the advantage in their forests and mountains. An American, who had become convinced of the uselessness of a fight, proposes, as the surest means of destroying them, brandy and starvation. With the destruction of the woods, the buffaloes, which form their sustenance, also disappear. It is only shamming justice when the North American government has, for some years past, been in the habit of paying to the Indians an insignificant sum for the cession of lands, by the sale of which in Washington an excellent business is carried on.

In this conflict of races, we are inclined to side with the civilised peoples, on the ground that they oppose culture and humanity to barbarism and cruelty. But justice demands the exposure of the disgraceful arts by which the gold-thirsty European has taken possession of such lands, and has become the destroyer or tormentor of his brethren. Bloodhounds have been trained in Cuba to catch runaway Negroes; and the first English settlers in Australia hunted the savages to obtain meat for their hounds. "The Indian," writes a German traveller in California, "is not only here, but in America generally, looked upon, not as a man, but as a wild beast, whose life anyone is not only justified, but bound to take. The scalps of Pawnee and Apaches Indians are paid by the Mexican government fifty dollars each;* hence, hunting the Indians is one of the chief pleasures of the Rancheros." But let not that which the wickedness of man perpetrates be called an inexorable law of nature. "Destruction is easier and more compatible with human indolence and savagery, than the troublesome process of education," are the concluding words of a writer on the fate of the indigenous population of America. Among the most celebrated travellers, naming only Forster and Le Vaillant, Livingstone and Barth, there have never been wanting such who never doubted the good disposition of savages, and expressed their conviction that, in most cases, the cruelty of the savages has been called forth by the disgraceful treatment they experienced from the whites. In most of them, the feeling of revenge, and the fear of treachery, still survive. Just as the question, whether man was originally bad or good, is differently interpreted, so are there some who look upon the savage as a devil, whilst others think to see him in a state of innocence. In point of fact, the savage at one time resembles a child, at another time, a wild beast. On reading the conflicting reports of

* Compare J. Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, vol. i, p. 299, New York, 1844.

travellers, we must take into consideration that much depends on the mental disposition of the observer; that in which man is himself deficient, he is unable to recognise in another. A goodnatured enthusiast sees virtues where none exist, and he becomes the victim of craft and cunning; whilst the merely selfish man pre-supposes the same motives in others. We ought not to feel surprise at finding in the uncultured mind of the savage features of noble sentiments; for the feeling of right and wrong requires no great mental exertion, and is found vivid in the simple-minded man.

As regards the question of the perfectibility of the savage races, it must not be forgotten that nature takes no leaps, neither from savagery to culture. It is for this reason that the self-sacrificing activity of missionaries has not always had the desired success. Christianity, no doubt, spreads the seeds of civilisation; but a full crop cannot be expected, unless it falls upon cultivated soil. The inhabitants of Central America have, for three hundred years, been converted to Christianity: but still, in the villages of the mountains, it occurs that behind the Christian altars they secrete their idols and their heathen priests, who add a heathen name to the Christian name by which the child has been baptised. It is said that on the table-land of Guatemala, a few years since, there were still, according to the old custom, new-born children sacrificed to appease Vulkan Attihang. And yet, even Prichard admits that the successes of the Catholic missionaries in South America, where, of one million Christians, but ninety-four thousand are heathens, are much greater than those of the English in the north, who, with puritanical strictness, wish to introduce among the savages divine service; whilst the former, if need be, lead their followers dancing into the church.

As Christianity teaches the equality of all men; so science must acknowledge that, notwithstanding all the differences in the stages of culture, the same nature and disposition is innate in all races of man, —that each race has a right to live, and possesses the faculty of development. Even the lowest race has not been so much neglected by nature as not, in certain physical capacities, to excel even the European, or unexpectedly to manifest a deep human feeling. The Australian throws his boomerang with a wonderful skill, so that it strikes the bird and returns to him. Without his moving from the spot, this savage avoids, by the mere flexion of his body, six spears thrown at him in rapid succession.* Although his language, as Gerstäcker informs us,† contains no word for *love*, he still mourns for the dead. Children dying, under four years of age, are only buried after the lapse of several months. They are carefully packed, carried during

* Compare *Das Ausland*, 1856, n. 18. † F. Gerstäcker, *Reisen*, 4 Band, 1854.

the day by the mother on her back, and used as pillows at night. When they have become dry and mummified they are buried, or put into a hollow tree. For months after the burial, the women sit near the graves lamenting, and make incisions on their thighs and the chest with flints. Are not these germs of civilisation worthy of careful nurture? They are not developed, because the latter is wanting. Those happy nations which, by the concurrence of the most favourable conditions or life, have for thousands of years become the carriers and promoters of human civilisation, not by their own efforts alone, but by those from generation to generation, from people to people, from the inheritance of mental treasures, are not entitled alone to take possession of the highest goods of humanity, since experience has shown that human civilisation rises higher in proportion as it becomes the common property of all peoples of the earth.

On considering races as essentially different human stocks, their whole history becomes divided into a series of unconnected, successively played dramas. Every race accomplishes what it can, and then leaves the stage. Gobineau* says, that our present civilisation cannot be compared to that of ancient times; according to which the human species is not progressing but retrograding. Thus it is predicted that the German people are now sufficiently ripe to become the booty of the Slavonians. This is a sorry view of the world, in which it is forgotten that the vital capacity rises with vital development; and that no Christian people has perished, or become so decayed as to render a regeneration impossible.

And how about the proof in favour of the immutability of races? It is said, never has a Negro become white. But his black skin does become paler in cold climates, and who can determine the degree of the change which may supervene, when natural influences have acted upon the race for thousands of years? Is it true that the Jews, as is so frequently asserted, have preserved pure their Asiatic type? That it is not true, despite the seclusion of the race favourable to it, is rendered evident by the comparison of the Israelites of the east with those living in the civilised countries of Europe. The head and the physiognomy of the slaves in the West Indies improve even in the first generation; and the Negro born in America fetches a higher price than the African, because, under the influence of civilisation, he has become physically and mentally improved. When Tschudi† says, "The Negroes will, as a people, even with the most careful education, never reach a high degree of civilisation, because the structure of the

* *Essai sur l'inegalité des races humaines.* Paris, 1853.

† J. v. Tschudi, *Peru,* v. i. St. Gallen.

skull, and the development of the brain by it too much approaches the animal form," it must first be proved whether that unfavourable shape of skull and brain is immutable for all ages; whilst, as experience has unquestionably shown, mental culture does influence it. The immutability of race-type is not demonstrated; it can, therefore, not be used as a proof against the unity of the human species, the possibility of which cannot be denied by natural science.

But apart from physical conformation, where is that rigidity of mental disposition which is said to be imprinted as an immutable mark upon every race? Blumenbach already has cited a number of Negroes who have distinguished themselves by their mental endowments. Neither are Negroes deficient in courage and bravery. How heroically have they not shown themselves at the storming of Palmares by the Portuguese, when their leaders preferred death to slavery, and cast themselves over the rocks. During the liberation war of Fernambuco against the Dutch, Henriquez acquired such renown that even now Brazilian regiments bear his name.* The Dutch equally praise the bravery of the Negro regiments in their Indian colonies. During the insurrection of St. Domingo slaves have, with devoted fidelity, saved their masters,—the Spanish families especially were spared, as they treated their slaves with greater lenity. We now know African tales and songs breathing a deep poetical feeling; and of the pastoral peoples south of Benguela it is known that, when they are carried away as slaves, they die of home-sickness. A suicidal mania frequently becomes epidemic amongst Negro slaves, as they believe to return to Africa after death. In order to destroy this belief, the slave-owners cut off the hands of the corpses, and plant them upon the graves.

Carus,† who ascribes an unequal capacity for higher mental development to the various races of mankind, asserts that never has a Negro, confined to his own stock, risen to importance; and as regards the fate of whole peoples, he adopts the motto of the poet, "the history of the world is the judgment of the world." Gobineau also says, "Because the Negroes, during so many centuries, as they are known, have never become anything by themselves, and scarcely by the impulse from without, it is not likely that they can become much in the future."

Pott‡ replies to this, "Where does the man live who can boast, without an intimate knowledge of languages but little or not at all

* Rugendas, *Reise in Brasilien.* Paris, 1835.

† C. G. Carus, *Ueber ungleiche Befähigung der Verschiedenen Menschheits stämme.* Leipzig, 1859.

‡ A. F. Pott, *Die ungleichheit menslichet Rassen, Lemgo und Delmold,* 1856.

known, to descend into the mental depth of peoples, and take its measure?" "It is in language," he adds, "despite its curious variegation and manifoldness, that the one and universal human spirit reigns. Unquestionably, humanity occupies different degrees of culture. But that the peoples of the Caucasian race can show the highest performances in art and science, is not owing to the race; for Peruvians and Mexicans, Chinese and Japanese, had, centuries before many peoples of the Caucasian race, reached a higher degree of civilisation than can, even at the present day, be shown by many peoples of the Caucasian stock, such as Tsherkesses, Croats, Berbers, and others. Moreover, none of the European nations can boast of owing its civilisation to its own tribe. A great portion of our civilisation we have received from the Greeks and Romans; these again received it from Asia and Egypt. We know not to what race the beginning of civilisation is to be ascribed.

It is by civilisation that the peoples of the Indo-Germanic stock have become the noblest and finest branches of the tree of humanity, not because they possessed a higher innate disposition from the beginning. What is called the character of a people, which for centuries preserves its peculiar stamp, is not an innate peculiarity, but an acquired direction of psychical life, derived from early and deeply imbibed influences, which may be preserved, as are physical marks. Thus, dark hair and eyes, in temperate climates, may even, after a thousand years, indicate a southern origin, and, in our Rhenish towns, Roman blood.

Place the peoples into different conditions of life, and they will imperceptibly undergo a change. When the inhabitants of the New World first saw Spanish cavalry, they were surprised; but when the soldiers dismounted, they became terrified; for they took horse and man to be one body, the horse being unknown to them. At present, the Patagonians are mounted nomads, who cross the Pampas as the nomads of High Asia cross their steppes, and as the Indians of the north hunt the bison on horseback up to the rocky mountains. The cannibal Caribees are at present Christian agriculturists; whilst the Hottentots, driven away from their fertile hills by the Cape colonists, have, from peaceable shepherds, become miserable savages. A Botokudo became the apostle of his people, who, by the abolition of the punishment of death, are in this respect in advance of us. A Cherokee has invented an alphabet for his people, who, according to Catlin possess nice farms, written laws, good schools, and charitable institutions.* Who, looking at the Hungarians, would say that they

* J. C. Prichard, *Naturgeschichte des Menschengeschlechts herausgegeben von R. Wagner und F. Will.* 4 Band, Leipzig, 1848.

are Fins, were it not that their language betrays the fact? The poor Irish, one-fourth of whom have, during the last ten years, left their homes, have, in the New World, become an industrious, temperate, and cleanly people, the opposite of what they were at home.

We should never forget that the history of the most civilised people points back to periods of savagery; that the vestiges of human sacrifices are found both in Homer and the Old Testament; and that the primitive inhabitants of Europe were savages. Although the German occupied a higher stage, still the Romans, who sold Celts and Germans in their slave-markets, had a better right than we have to say, "These barbarians are incapable of civilisation." At the time of Julian, German tribes were dressed in skins, or went about naked. The Heruli went, down to the sixth century, naked into battle; and our ancestors immolated their prisoners in the eighth century. Strabo says: "The Belgians have the custom, on returning from their wars, to hang up the heads of the slain around the necks of their horses, and to nail them above their house-doors. Posidonius observes that he has frequently seen this." "The heads of men of rank are anointed with cedar-oil, in order to preserve them better. These and other customs have been abolished by the Romans. The inhabitants of Ireland are cannibals; they consider it praiseworthy to consume their dead parents." Is this not like reading a description of Indians, or of South Sea savages? May we not expect similar results as those obtained by Roman civilisation?

One of the great means which nature employs for the improvement of the species is the intermixture of races. Thus, after the conquest of Roman provinces by the Germans, a rejuvenescence of most European peoples took place. As regards England, Dahlmann observes, "Our belief in the intellectual privilege of a pure, unmixed breed is a worthless superstition; Attica and Rome refute it." And in our own fatherland, do we find that the most mixed tribes of south-western Germany are the worst endowed physically and psychically? That which wars and conquests once effected by imparting to unnerved, sickening nations, the rude force of an uncorrupted primitive people is now being produced by the peaceable intercourse of peoples in all seas, and all parts of the globe.

And what is to be the future of species? If Gobineau be in the right, who sees in the intermixture of peoples the cause of their degeneration, the species must sink deeper and deeper, and finally decay. We, on the other hand, believe that the result will be, that a more homogeneous, a purer, and more perfect species will issue. The human races will not, on that account, entirely disappear; for although culture has the tendency to equalise what nature has separated, and

just as, even now, for example, the cultivated classes in all European capitals more resemble each other physically, than the rural populations of the respective countries, still culture cannot change the cosmic laws, and the climatic vital conditions depending on them will continue to exist, and preserve a variation in the human form.

We look upon culture and civilisation as the natural development of our species; others place civilisation and nature in hostile opposition. Many qualities and capacities are considered as natural to, and innate in man, which have only been acquired by education. There exists no man without any culture, for then he would not be a man. In the lowest state of savageness, man has already implements of stone or bones, skins, and mats. Rousseau, in his zeal against the excrescences of an effeminate culture, when mothers no longer suckled their own children, and confined the new-born infant so as to impede its movement, committed an extravagance by wishing to return to rude nature. He would have changed him into a savage. He went so far as to call it ill-treating nature when the gardener pruned his fruit-trees; he ignored that every noble fruit has only become so by the labour of man. Even the peach, as it grows wild in Persia, is bitter and juiceless, and so are by nature all roots and herbs we use for our daily food. Not nature but man has developed the rose; a Georgina, which now ornaments our gardens, did not exist fifty years ago. The Arab horse, as it now exists, is the work of human care; and, as it appears, it is by human cultivation that the grasses yield grains which again become seeds of culture. There is, no doubt, man has also, according to his humour, deformed nature, but in thousands of cases he has beautified it. Even the physical beauty of man cannot be separated from his culture. The peoples mentally distinguished have, at all times, been the most beautiful. Bodenstedt* has lately, like many before him, rectified the exaggerated description of the beauty of the inhabitants of the Caucasus, giving, especially as regards the female sex, the preference to European beauty, which combines physical charms with those of mental grace, and is alone capable of high psychical expression: the whiteness and delicacy of the skin is owing to the protection afforded by dress, and the small well-formed foot and graceful carriage, to the smooth foot-pavement of their cities. Nor must we omit the influence of cleanliness, which is so great that, according to Liebig, the civilisation of a nation might be determined by the quantity of soap it consumes. Thus, culture shows itself by an improved beauty of man.

But by what is the cultivation of whole peoples, which we call civilisation, most manifested? By the dominion of man over nature,

* Bodenstedt, *Die Völker des Kaukasus.* 1855.

by the general spread of knowledge,—the flourishing condition of industry, art, and science,—the refinement of manners,—the mildness of laws,—personal security and liberty,—the position of woman,—and, finally, by the acknowledgment of human dignity. The higher the civilisation, the more valuable is human life. The great means towards attaining these objects, consist in the acquisition of our mental inheritances, liberty of investigation, the division of labour, the unimpeded development of social conditions, the widest intercourse between men and peoples and their thoughts, called forth by a community of human interests, which will more surely promote the aims of humanity, and secure to civilised countries the peaceful possession and the growth of their prosperity.

And if, despite all this, anyone doubts the progress of the human species, natural sciences alone, which have transformed old myths into truths, will refute him. Is it not natural science that, with her divining-rod, discovers the treasures hid in the crust of the earth? Is it not her that knocks at the rock until the spring gushes forth? Has she not banished pain, and lengthened the life of man? Instead of the mythical numbers of Pythagoras, she has laid bare that mysterious law of numbers which combines the elements of all bodies. And although Socrates called it an idle undertaking to search the heavens, we have succeeded in measuring the distance the light traverses from remote stars; we weigh the sun, and calculate the orbits of comets. On the very spot where calculation indicates the position of a new planet, there is it found by the telescope, which makes us almost better acquainted with the mountains of the moon, than with many mountains of the earth; which resolves the nebulæ into clusters of stars, and indicates the course of the sun and the earth through space.

Those fools only, who would know everything, for whom the mere enlargement of the boundaries of our knowledge possesses no value, they alone remain dissatisfied.

But the best that we can know, is the conviction that there is implanted in human nature the germ of perfectibility, and that we are all called upon to contribute to it. Nature is not rigid, but pliable; it rests not, its essence is motion; but gravity is not alone the ruling law, the noble organised forms seek the light! The human species also seeks it.