

NOTE UPON THE ARTICLE 'PRIMITIVE MAN—TYLOR AND LUBBOCK,' in No. 273.

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We have received the following letter for publication:—

Trinity College, Cambridge,  
SIR, 7th August, 1874.

In the July number of the 'Quarterly Review' of the present year reference is made on p. 70, in the article entitled 'Primitive Man—Tylor and Lubbock,' to an essay by me, published in the 'Contemporary Review' for August 1873, and entitled 'On Beneficial Restrictions to Liberty of Marriage.' The passage is as follows:—

'Elsewhere (pp. 424–5) he (Mr. George Darwin) speaks in an approving strain of the most oppressive laws, and of the encouragement of vice to check population. There is no sexual criminality of Pagan days that might not be defended on the principles advocated by the school to which this writer belongs. This repulsive phenomenon affords a fresh demonstration of what France of the Regency, and Pagan Rome long ago, demonstrated; namely, how easily the most profound moral corruption can co-exist with the most varied appliances of a complex civilisation.'

The Reviewer thus asserts,—

*First*, that I approve of the encouragement of vice to check population, and of the most oppressive laws.

This I absolutely deny.

These pages (424–5) form part of a merely historical sketch of the various marriage customs and laws which have obtained at various times and places. The sketch is prefaced by a distinct statement that the facts are merely given historically. The laws and customs referred to by the Reviewer are those of the early German communistic bodies, and considerable prominence was given to them on account of their extraordinary nature and barbarity.

*Secondly*, he asserts that there is no hideous sexual criminality which might not be defended on the principles advocated by such as myself.

I deny that there is any thought or word in my essay which could in any way lend itself to the support of the nameless crimes here referred to.

The reference to myself is moreover introduced by the statement that,—

'Now, however, marriage is the constant subject of attack, and unrestrained licentiousness *theoretically* justified.'

The whole object of my essay was to advocate the introduction of further regulations in our marriage laws ; and the institution of marriage is attacked only in so far as that I maintained that certain changes therein are required.

Each of these charges is absolutely false and groundless.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

GEORGE DARWIN.

*To the Editor of the Quarterly Review.*

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Nothing could have been further from our intention than to tax Mr. Darwin personally (as he seems to have supposed) with the advocacy of laws or acts which he saw to be oppressive or vicious. We, therefore, most willingly accept his disclaimer, and are glad to find that he does not, in fact, apprehend the full tendency of the doctrines which he has helped to propagate. Nevertheless, we cannot allow that we have enunciated a single proposition which is either ‘false’ or ‘groundless.’ Mr. Darwin’s own words are (p. 412): ‘The object of this article is to point out how modern scientific doctrines may be expected in the future to affect the personal liberty of individuals in the matter of marriage.’ That the mode in which they may be expected to affect ‘liberty’ and ‘marriage’ has his approval is manifest, since he tells us (p. 419): ‘one may hope’ for certain preliminary restrictions, and that (p. 420) ‘we can only make a really successful attack by compelling the production, before marriage, of a clean bill of health in the party, and ultimately in his parents and ancestors.’ He next considers the possibilities of future legislation, and, as a preliminary, enumerates various laws and customs which have already prevailed. But as he does not say a single word to intimate his disapproval or condemnation of them generally, we may be excused if we misapprehended his meaning as to certain of them, more especially as some of the practices (as for instance great facility of divorce) enumerated in the same pages are elsewhere expressly approved by him. Thus he remarks (p. 418): ‘A next step, and one to my mind urgently demanded, is that insanity or idiocy should of itself form a ground of divorce,’ adding that the ‘patient, should he recover, would suffer in no other respect than does everyone who is forced by ill health to retire from any career which has been begun ; although, of course, the necessary isolation of the parent from the children would be a peculiarly bitter blow.’ Certainly it would be difficult to advocate legislation more oppressive and heartless than this. Mr. Darwin will not probably venture

venture to assert that the persons, whom his proposed legislation would debar from marriage, can be expected to lead a life of contingency. We are confident that no unprejudiced person, certainly no Christian, can regard the approval of such laws and practices as anything less than an approval (however little intended) 'of the most oppressive laws, and of the encouragement of vice to check population.'

But the whole tone and tendency of the article is (as Mr. Darwin would probably be the last to deny) in harmony with the teaching of that school which, regarding temporal welfare as the one only end and material prosperity as the one only sanction, logically denies all absolute individual rights, asserting that man is essentially no better than the brutes, and may, like brutes, be treated in any way useful for material ends without regard to any Divine law. Mr. Darwin (p. 413) himself speaks of difficulty in carrying out such restrictions as he advocates, 'so long as *the pernicious idea* generally prevails that man alone of all animals is under personal and direct management of the Deity ; and yet what believer in evolution can doubt that results as surprising might be effected in man, as are now seen in our *horses, dogs, and cabbages?*'

We would further remind Mr. Darwin that the words, 'there is no sexual criminality of Pagan days which might not be defended on the principles advocated by the school to which this writer belongs,' by no means imply that Mr. Darwin himself has in his essay defended such crimes. We expressly disown the interpretation which he puts upon our words. We spoke of the school, and not of an individual. But when a writer, according to his own confession, comes before the public 'to attack the institution of marriage,' even though it be 'only in so far as that certain changes therein are required' (such changes being, in our opinion, fatal in their tendency), he must expect searching criticism ; and, without implying that Mr. Darwin has in 'thought' or 'word' approved of anything which he wishes to disclaim, we must still maintain that the doctrines which he advocates are most dangerous and pernicious.