



166337

ON THE
STUDY OF ETHNOLOGY,

BY

DR. ERNEST DIEFFENBACH.

~~~~~  
READ AT A MEETING

PRELIMINARY TO THE FORMATION OF THE ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY,  
*Held at Dr. Hodgkin's, 9 Lower Brook Street, Grosvenor Square,  
Jan. 31, 1843.*

~~~~~

THE different races of which the Human Family is composed are distinguished from each other by certain anatomical and physiological marks; which, although they do not justify us in dividing mankind into classes, genera, and species, as we do with plants and animals, yet they are to a certain degree very durable and lasting, and, in the opinion of some very distinguished writers, even constant. If we take the civilised nations of Europe, Asia, and America, as an instance, we find everywhere a distinct type of formation and features—of physical, intellectual, and moral character—various religious ideas, and different forms of social life—peculiar sympathies and antipathies, enduring for long ages of national existence—manifold adversities, mixtures, and migrations. And what is the case in Europe, especially where we should imagine civilisation to have thrown down all barriers and extinguished all differences between nations, is still more the case with nations more widely different: and for this reason we are able to divide mankind into large families and subdivisions, and to establish a description of them, in as concise terms as the Botanist, when he examines the plants of a certain region of the globe. The study of this, the Natural History of Man, is what has been termed the Science of Ethnology.

This Country, above all others, seems to be qualified to

open a new era for this important science; and yet, although Societies exist for all possible branches of human knowledge, we have not yet established a Society to investigate the Natural History of Man. The sceptre of England sweeps the easternmost boundaries of Asia, and the westernmost of America. The Anglo-Saxon in the seas of China, approaching from the westward, gives his hand to the fur-merchant at the Western Coast of America, who arrived there from the eastward. England encircles the globe in glorious enterprise: her sons come in contact with the Esquimaux of the Arctic Seas, with the red hunter of Northern America, with the cunning Chinese, with the mild Hindoo, and with the mountaineer of Affghanistan. The same is the case in the Southern Hemisphere. New empires are springing up in New Zealand, New South-Wales, Van Diemen's Land, and at the Cape of Good Hope, where the Englishman has intercourse with man in the most opposite stages of development. No nation, therefore, has such opportunity for investigating the history of races:—for no nation is it so essential to be well acquainted with these races. Much material, it is true, is dispersed in the works of Navigators and Travellers: but a Society is wanting, for collecting, sifting, and extending such information—a focus for Travellers of all nations, where information regarding the human race may be received and given—a Society, which will not reject the minutest detail that may elucidate the history of the human race, and spread an interest in the subject among the different classes of the community.

It must be a main object with the Ethnological Society, to collect facts, from which we may arrive, by philosophical reasoning and induction, at results which ought to excite at least an equal interest with the history of animals and plants, because they bear so intimately upon the highest interests of human nature. We may expect from the Science of Ethnology not only important results as regards the origin and education of man, the causes of the varieties of the physical and mental development of nations, the origin and difference of languages and religious ideas, but we may be able to collect the colours of the prism, each of them rich and beautiful, into the pure ray of light, and confirm

by inductive science the cherished unity of mankind. We do not, however, yet possess sufficient materials to draw such results.

It is necessary first to fix the proper boundaries of Ethnology: which is the more desirable, as it is believed, by some, that the subject rather belongs to the Geographer, the Historian, and the Philologist; the pursuits of all of which are indeed very incomplete without a proper study of the Natural History of Man.

We may examine the races of men under two different points of view. 1st, we may glance at them as they present themselves at the present moment, contemporaneously: and, 2dly, we may not only trace back the nations to their sources, and from actual remains and historical survey give a true picture of the changes which their physical nature has undergone in the vicissitudes of time, but we may bring to light the nations which have disappeared. The latter may be termed the Historical part of Ethnology. The Natural History of Plants and Animals presents the same two points of view. The Naturalist is no longer satisfied with being acquainted with the different plants and animals as they exist at the present moment: many genera and species have existed in times gone by, and have been lost in the succession of ages: from their remains, imbedded in the crust of the globe, he obtains not only an insight into the changes which the latter has undergone, but the structural differences between extinct and existing species enable him to fill up any chasm which may appear in the natural system of the present day. He may restore the chain of that astonishing variety of creatures by means of fossil links, and humbly lift the veil from those great and harmonious laws which we see pervading the universe with every step that we advance in the knowledge of the animal and vegetable world.

It is sufficiently obvious that the inquirer into the physical history of man must combine both methods.

It must be the object of the Ethnological Society, therefore, to obtain an exact knowledge of any nation or tribe, as they exist at the present moment. Ethnology begins with Ethnography—with an authentic description of the physical

condition of each nation: and for this purpose it will be necessary to collect every thing that will throw light on this subject. It is not sufficient that authentic skulls should be collected of all races, or casts of such; but whole skeletons. We have sufficient materials to distinguish races from the form of the skull, as there are large collections in England and on the Continent; but we are almost ignorant of Comparative Human Osteology. We have no accurate data of the relative proportions between the abdomen and the chest, amongst the different races; of the number of vertebræ; of the shape and capacity of the pelvis; of the length and strength of the extremities. The muscles, the internal organs, and the organs of voice, have been still less thoroughly examined. The weight and structure of the brain of the European and Negro, it is true, have been compared by Tiedeman and Soemmering, and have been pronounced to be identical in both; but no notice has been taken of the other races; and the few researches which have been made do not entitle us to form an opinion, either on the identity of the human race, or on the influence of external circumstances on the structure of parts. It cannot be doubted, that marked differences exist in the average weight of the brain, and the development of its different parts; but further investigation is necessary, to shew that they are constant. Still less has been done in regard to numerous interesting points connected with the fecundity of different races; in comparing the muscular strength of races, their durability, longevity, national diseases, and a great many other subjects. —It suffices here merely to indicate the fields of investigation with which the Ethnological Society should be occupied: it will be the especial duty of the Council to promote the publication of interesting matter contained in the books of Travellers of different nations, and the illustration of their publications with accurately-coloured portraits of typical specimens.

It is well known, that many nations are in the habit of marking their faces, and other parts of their bodies, with certain figures or lines. This custom existed amongst the ancient nations of the East, and we find it in all parts of the globe. To trace this singular custom through all its

different degrees will perhaps be the means of identifying nations, though living at great distances from each other. Such an investigation will open an insight into the origin and real meaning of this custom, with which we are now all but unacquainted.

I may mention here a subject on which the labours of modern chemistry have thrown a new and most interesting light; viz. the food of the different races of men, or inhabitants of parts of the globe which are widely different from each other in their geographical and climatological relations. The substances which serve as food, or the quantity which is taken, appear, to the superficial observer, often of a most extraordinary nature, because they are apparently so heterogeneous from what we are accustomed to; so that Travellers relating such facts do not withhold their astonishment or reprobation. But it has been demonstrated, that the general use of certain articles—for instance, tea and coffee, betel, tobacco, and wine—depends upon the presence, in those substances, of elements which are often identical, and which are necessary to the maintenance of the animal economy, more or less, according to the presence or absence of other elements in the food, the different occupation, mode of living, and so on. The fact of the Esquimaux consuming large quantities of train-oil and blubber ceases to be astonishing, when we reflect that these highly-carbonized substances serve to furnish fuel to his increased respiration. In one word, it is necessary, in the present state of chemical and physiological science, to collect an analysis of all the substances which are consumed by a particular race, either as food or drink, or, by an habitual custom, as so called matters of luxury, or as medicines. It is also desirable that the average quantity consumed of all such articles should be ascertained. The Ethnological Society may have the great merit of working here hand in hand with chemists and physiologists, and fill up, in that manner, a most important chapter in the Natural History of Man; as it will be shewn how instinct and necessity have led him to adopt different customs, and to make use of different articles of consumption in different climates.

I need scarcely direct attention to the necessity of

extending the investigation to the domestic animals and cultivated plants of the different races of men—to the materials used for their dresses—to their rude arts—and to all other things which belong to their physical life. The results at which we might arrive, if we were able to compare, in a Museum, models of the houses of all the tribes of the South Seas or of the American Continent, their canoes, their instruments, &c., can scarcely be conceived. There is one more palpable result from such an investigation;—it would increase the stock of materials used by our manufacturers for various purposes; for instance, dyeing and varnishing.

A subject which the inquirer into the history of the human race claims particularly as his own, as the most important and indispensable, is Language. Language distinguishes man from the inferior animals. The communication of his inward feelings, the expression of his thoughts by means of words, is common to man, in all the different stages of physical, mental, and social development. From his language we can perceive the structure and disposition of his mind, his prevailing passions and tendencies: in language, the changes and revolutions which the mind of a nation has undergone have left indelible traces: its structure alone allows us to search into the character of a people, and throw a light into the dark labyrinth of their history, if no written or monumental record, and not even a tradition, has been preserved. Of all differences which distinguish races from one another, language is the most lasting and enduring; and where physical traits and peculiarities have lasted longer, this is only an exception to the rule. To destroy a language of a nation, is to destroy its nationality: it has been the object of all despots and conquerors, but has rarely been attained. By means of language we may trace the relation of one race, one nation, or tribe, to another; by means of language, alone, we can follow their migrations, and retrace them, step by step, to their source: language leads us back to those times when mankind was in its infancy; and we become acquainted with the laws which guided its gradual development, from a more primitive state to its present condition. If any thing can confirm the unity of mankind, and can bring it home to the most sceptic mind, it will be,

when, by a thorough study of all the languages of the globe, we can prove them to be merely dialects, and derivations from one and the same source. But we are now far from such a result; and the Ethnological Society must, therefore, particularly devote its attention to collect materials for the study of Comparative Philology*: it must collect in its Library, Dictionaries and Grammars of all existing languages and dialects, and encourage their publication. There are MSS. existing of various languages; but from a want of patronage, these materials (which have perhaps been collected during a life of trouble and hardship amongst barbarous nations, and which are of the utmost interest to the scientific) are scarcely of any use. In the Library of the Ethnological Society such MSS. would find a most appropriate place.

In speaking of Language, I wish to draw attention to those first beginnings of the art of Writing which has been observed even amongst the rudest nations;—amongst the Indians of the Oronoco and Bolivia, the wandering tribes of North America, the natives of Australia, and in some of the Polynesian Islands. It is a writing in pictures, or rather in drawings, of animate and inanimate objects, which are often found on rocks, on the way-side, or on trees, and represent the occurrence of some event. It is desirable to obtain exact copies of all such drawings, and to collect and compare them.

An inquiry from which we may obtain nearly the same results as from Language, although in a far inferior degree, is Music. It is to be expected that the manner in which sensations or thoughts are expressed, by a modulation of the human voice, or by instruments, will be one of the characteristic differences of races. All nations, however barbarous they may be, have been found to be possessed of some sort of music: it will belong to the Ethnological Society to collect the materials for a Comparative Music of the Races of Man; materials which, of course, must be written in music's own characters—in notes. The want of musical knowledge in Travellers has often prevented acquisitions of this kind; but

* In this it does not clash with the Philological Society; on the contrary, it may render important service, by collecting materials for its use.

in the metropolis of England frequent opportunity offers for musicians to write down musical compositions from the oral recitation of Natives. We may merit in this the thanks of the musician, by furnishing him with materials of a decidedly novel and original character.

The great result of such a contemporaneous study of the races of man will be the construction of an Ethnological Map of the World. An ethnological map must represent the geographical limits of people of the same origin and language: it must also bring before the eye the subdivisions of a principal race, its migrations and intermixtures. Such a map will, no doubt, present to the eye, especially in countries which are continental and contiguous, a law of the migrations of man, as dependent upon the physical geography of the different countries, upon their systems of mountains, great rivers, and valleys; or, in islands, upon the directions of atmospherical and marine currents. In this respect, it will shew how indispensable the study of geography is to the ethnologist, and in what manner the two sciences are connected. I am happy to mention here, that two of my friends, Gustaf Kombokst at Edinburgh and Wilhelm Obermüller at Paris, have lately published such maps of Europe, and part of Africa and Asia, which must be regarded as a great acquisition to the study of ethnology, and will contribute much towards making the science more popular. Both maps are somewhat different in their construction; but both the methods pursued by these gentlemen have their advantages. Gustaf Kombokst's map is more elementary: he has sharply marked where, in his opinion, two races separate; and, from its graphical execution, and the lucid explanation which accompanies it, he gives a very clear view of the principal races of Europe, and their physical and moral character. On the other hand, as nations are nowhere in nature so sharply separated, Wilhelm Obermüller has attempted to express their nearer or more distant relation by more or less vivid colours; and their mixtures and combinations, by mixtures and combinations of colours. An ethnological map of the whole world, constructed like these maps of Europe, does not yet exist; although the labours of the illustrious Klaproth, Ritter, Humboldt, and D'Orbigny have done much towards its completion. It will

be the useful aim of the Ethnological Society to combine the labour of its members to produce such a map, on different modes of construction, that they may serve in Public Schools. Ethnological maps, however, must not only exist of the races of men at the present moment, but of any given time of man's existence; as, like the surface of the globe, and the still less constant political institutions, the dwelling-places of men are ever changing.

Thus far I have pointed out some few of the paths which the Ethnological Society must follow, in pursuing the Natural History of Man, from what I have called a contemporaneous view. But races and nations have lived before us—perhaps many—of which History is silent, and of which no remains are left, or not yet discovered. Of others, we have astonishing pyramids, the ruins of “cloud-capp'd towers, gorgeous palaces, solemn temples,” or monuments upon which records are written in an unknown tongue. Mummies are preserved of others, in crevices of rocks or in artificial tombs, through long ages, as those of the Guanches in the Canary Islands, and of the Aymaras on the Lake of Titicaca and the Coast of Peru. The ethnologist must tell us what was the physical condition of the race which left these remains—what were their manners, customs, habits, and general state of society—what progress they had made in the arts of civilised life, isolated as they often were from the rest of mankind. He must shew us their origin and relations. Ethnology must be the ground-work to their history; as the social development of man, his thinking and doing, the succession of events which led to the rise and fall of nations, must, of necessity, in a great measure depend upon the physical condition of the race itself. And here will be perceived at once the close connection of Ethnological and Historical studies. Herder, one of the principal representatives of a number of illustrious contemporaneous writers in Germany, has forcibly pointed out this connection, in his “Ideas towards the Philosophy of the History of Mankind.” As I have not the book at hand, I can do nothing better than quote here what the writer of an able Article on the “Modern Art and Science of History,” in the “Westminster Review” of October last,

says on this subject:—"History, in Herder's view, is a living organic whole; a growth of Nature, growing, like other natural things, by laws that are simple and changeless, though endlessly varied in their manifestations in place and time; drawing nutriment, like Nature's other products, from all the elements of Nature, and susceptible of light and illustration from all other natural sciences. Thus he examines the influence of climate in determining the physical and moral character of races; in deciding, by its connection with diet and its consequent action on organization—by the different stimuli which different climates administer to the senses and imagination—by the different modes of living (as in doors or out of doors) which different climates necessitate or favour—and by the different ways and directions in which practical intellect and industrial skill are elicited under different circumstances of soil, weather, and production—the particular form which civilisation shall assume in any given time and place; for instance, the rapid and early physical maturity of woman in the East, its determining or modifying cause, whose operation reaches all through the social culture, the domestic habits, and the political institutions of the Oriental World. Even so slight-seeming a circumstance as the characteristic nature and habits of domesticated animals goes some way in determining the social life and manners, the mental development, and consequently the entire public history of a people. The horse, the dog, the camel, the sheep, the Peruvian lama, are influencing agents in the histories of the countries that respectively produce them. In the same spirit of research, at once minute and comprehensive, Herder traces the connection of Physical Geography with the History of Society; shewing how Nature has marked out, in the rough, the ground-plan of civil and political history, the courses of migration and settlement, and the boundaries of nations and empires, in the directions she has given to the great mountain-chains, and to the streams that flow down their sides and communicate with the Ocean. He suggests, too, a philosophical comparison of languages, with reference to their elementary sounds—their etymological inflections, and syntactical constructions—their richness or poverty of metaphor—their relative

fitness for philosophy, eloquence, or song—as one mode of interpreting diversities of popular genius and character. He would read the moral physiognomies of nations in what may be called the physiognomies of their dialects.”

I trust I have said sufficient, in recommendation, and on the general purposes of Ethnological Studies. This Country excels all others in producing great results in Science by a combination of labour: let us hope that the Science of Man equally deserves such a combination;—that it will not only be supported by those who pursue sciences which will be mostly benefitted by a more extensive study of the physical history of man—by the politician, the physician, the historian, and the artist,—but also by those to whom a knowledge of man must be of great interest and vital importance, from their connections with the Colonial possessions of this great Empire. If we have examined, step by step, the physical history of the human race—if we have entered the wigwam of the Red Indian, and followed the hunter in obtaining the scanty means of his precarious existence—if we have endured an Arctic winter in the snow hut of the Esquimaux, and have ceased to sneer at him, when we find that no other life was possible under the circumstances in which he is placed—in one word, if we have traced Humanity through all the forms, simple and complicated, rude and civilised, of social existence, and have found that in each state there is something recommendable, then, and not till then, shall we treat with consideration those who differ from us, instead of warring against individualities and forms which are not the same as our own.

MEMBERS OF THE ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

Aldam, William, Esq., M.P.	King, Richard.
Andrew, —	King, Richard, jun.
Atkinson, Henry G. Esq.	Kestevan, W. B. Esq.
Bannister, Saxe, Esq.	Knox, R. Esq., M.D.
Beale, Thomas, Esq.	Martin, Edward, Esq.
Botfield, Beriah, Esq., M.P. F.R.S. & L.S.	Martin, Thomas, Esq.
Brent, W. B. Esq.	Morison, Sir Alexander, Esq., M.D.
Brodie, Sir B. C. Bart., F.R.S.	Nasmyth, Alexander, Esq.
Bullock, Lloyd, Esq.	Postlethwaite, Joseph Legg, Esq.
Camps, William, M.D.	Ramsay, George, Esq.
Clarke, Professor.	Reeve, Richard, Esq.
Clarke, Braey.	Scouler, John, Esq., M.D.
Clift, William, Esq., F.R.S.	Shillinglaw, John, Esq.
Dieffenbach, Ernest, Esq., M.D.	Slapp, Rev. Thomas Peyton.
Dillon, Chevalier.	Smith, Andrew, Esq., M.D.
Dunn, Robert, Esq.	Smith, Rev. John Pye, D.D. F.R.S.
Eden, Rev. Robert.	St. John, J. A. Esq.
Elphinstone, the Hon. Mount-Stuart.	St. John, Bayle, Esq.
Gardner, John, Esq.	Staneland, Samuel, Esq.
Garnier, J. Esq., M.D.	Stowers, Nowell, Esq.
Gould, John, Esq.	Sturz, John James, Esq.
Granville, A. B. Esq., M.D. F.R.S.	Stevenson, L. M., Esq.
M.R.A.S.	Suttor, George, Esq.
Greenough, G. B. Esq., F.R.S., L.S. &	Taylor, W. J. Esq.
H.S., M.R.A.S.	Wagstaffe, M. F. Esq.
Hartnell, Nathaniel, Esq.	Whiffen, E. H. Esq.
Haworth, Captain.	White, General.
Hindmarsh, Frederic, Esq.	Wyld, J. Esq.
Hodgkin, Thomas, Esq., M.D.	Yates, W. Holt, Esq., M.D.
Holgate, John Wyndham, Esq., M.D.	

LONDON :

PRINTED BY RICHARD WATTS, CROWN COURT, TEMPLE BAR.

