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PRIMITIVE CULTURE*

I.

WHEN the commencement of Mr. Buckle's great "Introduction" appeared, some fourteen years ago, no small controversy arose as to the possibility of constructing a Science of History. On the one hand it was argued that for two or three centuries past every generation had demonstrated certain events to be regular and predictable, which previous generations had considered irregular and unpredictable; had generalised facts which it was supposed were incapable of being generalised; and had indicated the existence of order, method, and law, in events which earlier ages had regarded as regulated only by the fitful vagaries of a blind chance, or the inscrutable decrees of a supernatural interference. On the other hand, it was asserted that, even supposing the universal prevalence of law and order to be proved, our necessary nescience would still remain so totally unenlightened with regard to the operation of the law and the sequence of the order, that no ingenuity could achieve such a classification of human motives and actions as could justly be dignified with the name of a science. Since then we have passed through what amounts to a scientific revolution. Not only has archæology vastly extended the limit of its domain, but the doctrine of evolution—itsself the most striking generalisation deduced from a comparison of the world's present with the world's past—points decisively to archæology as the most fruitful province of inquiry to the student of the science of History. Before Buckle wrote, archæology had indeed already discovered more than one new world for the conquest of modern science. In the last generation, the archæology of organic nature, brought to light by geology, had afforded a sure basis for the science of Comparative Anatomy; and in a precisely analogous manner the archæology of language and religious worship, revealed in the early literary monuments of India, Assyria, and Egypt, had more recently altogether regenerated the science of Comparative Philology, and created that of Comparative Mythology. But the value and importance of archæological research in other directions had not yet been understood and appreciated. It was not until the discoveries of human implements and remains in the drift and cavern deposits had directed attention to the multifarious problems presented by primitive culture, that investigators began to regard the sciences of Language and Religion as merely departments of the more general and comprehensive science of Comparative Civilisation, and to recognise the fact that the science of Comparative Civilisation is the very corner-stone of any real science of History. As indicating the direction of scientific research, it is significant that Mr. Darwin's last work, which surely should have been entitled the "Ascent" rather than the "Descent of Man," should be so closely followed by the volumes of Mr. Tylor on Primitive Culture. The main argument, indeed, of both writers is fundamentally the same. The difference between them is that Mr. Darwin traces it out in connection with what man *is*, Mr. Tylor in connection

with what man *does*. One applies the theory of evolution to man in relation to organic nature, the other to man in relation to human culture. Both, too, have pursued the same method. It was no part of Mr. Darwin's design to write an exhaustive physical history of mankind, or of Mr. Tylor's to detail the history of civilisation. Each has selected the most salient and significant points to illustrate his argument, and has instanced only sufficient facts to supply a reasonable proof of the propositions enunciated.

It is not, however, merely as an exponent of the theory of development that Mr. Tylor has taken his work in hand. Leibnitz long ago pointed out the supreme importance of a study of mankind in connection with that of what he terms the natural history of the world, in order to ascertain what ought to be introduced and what banished from among men. This principle Mr. Tylor has recognised throughout, and the facts he brings forward have quite as often been selected for the light they throw on vexed questions of the day as for the illustration they afford of the theory of evolution.

One great stumbling-block in the way of the student of culture is the extreme imperfection of the only records to which he has access. The comparative anatomist, however, who is perhaps even more closely beset by the same difficulty, has pointed out the means by which it may to a great extent be effectually overcome. If analogy be as trustworthy in the one case as in the other, the historian of culture can study the past in the present with the same confidence as the anatomist, and can as readily reconstruct the shape of human society in primeval ages as his fellow-worker can restore the outward form of an extinct flora and fauna from their fossil remains. But is this analogy to be trusted? Can it be demonstrated that any such vital connection exists between antique and modern barbarism as will enable the inquirer to study prehistoric culture in that of still-existing races, savage, barbaric, or semi-civilised? Can it be proved that savage, barbaric, and civilised life are really correlated as various stages of growth and development? To these questions Mr. Tylor's work supplies a satisfactory answer. Carefully reviewing a number of the most important departments of culture, he proves the existence in all of innumerable relics—the fossils, as it were, of primeval thought and life—traces the modes of connection of one age with another in progress, degradation, survival, revival, and modification, and demonstrates the utter inadequacy of any theory but one of development to explain the complex and varied phenomena of civilisation. Survival in culture, the origin of language, the art of numbers, mythology, religion, rites and ceremonies, are each in turn discussed, and it is not too much to say that the extent of research, the rare felicity of illustration, the breadth of view and signal originality which Mr. Tylor has brought to bear on these subjects really render the appearance of his work an epoch in the annals of the philosophy of history.

To follow Mr. Tylor through his entire argument, and the evidence he produces in support of it, would be to write a somewhat larger work than his own. We can here only indicate the general method he has pursued, and comment briefly on a few facts which he has collected. Commencing with a general survey of the science of culture, he proceeds to give a rough outline of the course of its development. In so doing, he necessarily touches

* "Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom." By Edward B. Tylor, author of "Researches into Early History of Mankind," &c. Two vols. 8vo. (London: Murray, 1871.)

on the controversy between the upholders of the two theories of development and degradation, of whom Sir J. Lubbock and the Duke of Argyll are among the latest representatives. "The master-key," he well observes, "to the investigation of man's primeval condition is held by pre-historic archæology. This key is the evidence of the Stone Age, proving that men of remotely ancient ages were in the savage state." While he shows, however, that the study of archæology has gradually cut away the ground under the feet of those who, like Archbishop Whately and the Duke of Argyll, appear to consider that civilisation was originally created in a state of happy mediocrity, from which it has since more frequently fallen than risen, he is careful at the same time to recognise the agency of degradation as secondary only to that of progress. One circumstance in connection with this argument has perhaps hardly been sufficiently considered by the advocates of either side. The distribution of mankind over the face of the globe is an event for the most part belonging to pre-historic ages, but it is quite clear in some cases, and strongly probable in many others, that the occupation of new territories widely divided by the sea from the earlier inhabited portions of the world, was the result of seafaring disaster; that, in fact, the first denizens of many islands, and perhaps of some continents, were the shipwrecked crews of primeval canoes, cut off from further intercourse with their countrymen, destitute of all the materials and appliances of such rude culture as they may once have possessed, and ignorant of even the primitive industrial arts necessary to utilise them even if they were at hand. Under such circumstances—and a consideration of the actual distribution of mankind in historic times countenances the supposition that the contingency must have occurred over and over again—the march of degradation must have been certain and swift; and even allowing that in the case of mariners belonging to a somewhat advanced tribe, the degradation might be only temporary, the event would account for at least some portion of the diversity which is only less striking than the uniformity perceptible in the various civilisations of the world. Be this, however, as it may, the entire evidence available on the subject fully bears out Mr. Tylor's conclusion, that "throughout the whole vast range of the history of human thought and habit, while civilisation has to contend not only with survivals from lower levels, but also with degeneration within its own borders, it yet proves capable of overcoming both and taking its own course. History within its proper field, and Ethnology over a wide range, combine to show that the institutions which can best hold their own in the world gradually supersede the less fit ones, and that this incessant conflict determines the general resultant course of culture.

The next two chapters are devoted to "Survival in Culture," the strange permanence in the midst of a higher civilisation of certain customs, arts, opinions, &c., long after the real and earnest meaning has died out of them, which in a lower stage commended them to acceptance. Among these metamorphic remains of an earlier world are many, if not most, of the games, rhymes, proverbs, riddles, and minor social customs of civilised peoples. A notable instance is to be found in archery. "Ancient and widespread in savage culture, we trace the bow and arrow through barbaric and classic life and onward to a high

mediæval level. But now, when we look at an archery meeting, or go by country lanes when toy bows and arrows are 'in' among the children, we see, reduced to a mere sportive survival, the ancient weapon which, among a few savage tribes, still keeps its deadly place in the hunt and the battle." In another passage Mr. Tylor remarks: "the practice of poisoning arrows after the manner of stings and serpents' fangs is no civilised device, but a characteristic of lower life, which is generally discarded, even at the barbaric stage." Perhaps one of the most striking instances of linguistic survival is to be found in the word "intoxication," derived from "toxicon," the material employed for poisoning the arrow. Among other instances of survival, Mr. Tylor quotes the custom of casting lots. It is noteworthy that both Wesley and Whitfield in certain cases employed this means of ascertaining what they considered the Divine will, and that even yet many Englishmen are to be found who attach under certain circumstances the old sacred significance to the process. That the theory of survival suggested by Mr. Tylor does really account for nearly all the otherwise utterly unaccountable customs and ways in vogue among civilised nations, will not be doubted by anyone who has taken the trouble to trace their history in any considerable number of cases. It is not, for example, many years since the present Lord Leigh was accused of having built an obnoxious person—one account, if we remember right, said eight obnoxious persons—into the foundation of a bridge at Stoneleigh. Of course so preposterous a charge carried on its face its own sufficient refutation; but the fact that it was brought at all is a singular instance of the almost incredible vitality of old traditions. The real origin of a story such as this dates from a time when the foundations of bridges, palaces, and temples were really laid upon human victims, a practice the tradition of which is handed down to us in the Romance of Merlin, and a thousand other legends old and new, to be finally embalmed for the benefit of posterity in Mr. Tylor's volumes. The most telling, however, of all Mr. Tylor's instances of survival are those which bear upon the history of modern spiritualism.

"Beside the question," he observes, "of the absolute truth or falsity of the alleged possessions, manes-oracles, doubles, brain-waves, furniture movings, and the rest, there remains the history of spiritualistic belief as a matter of opinion. Hereby it appears that the received spiritualistic theory of the alleged phenomena belongs to the philosophy of savages."

This conclusion may possibly astonish and even "exercise" the spirits of some of the faithful; but assuredly it is abundantly borne out by the evidence adduced, which parallels with most afflicting minuteness the various phenomena of spiritualism from mediæval story and tales of witchcraft, from classic fable and ecclesiastic miracle, from Chinese divination and Indian divinity, from the feats of North American mountebanks, the hocus-pocus of the angekokks in Greenland, the juggleries of the Siberian shamans. Even this array of evidence, however, is but a fraction of what might be produced. Mr. Tylor quotes Lucian's Hyperborean, who flew and walked on the water clad in undressed leather breeks, and who by the way is possibly only an allotropic form of our own Regnar Lodbrok; but he spares us that other

Hyperborean, Abaris, "the air-walker," to whom Pythagoras, the Miss Kilmansegg of antiquity, displayed his precious leg. In fact here, as elsewhere, Mr. Tylor has acted on the principle that the half is greater than the whole. He selects enough for his purpose, and resolutely declines to overburden himself with superfluous testimony. Fortunately there are two sides to the theory of survival. If on the one hand we have survivals of the type of modern spiritualism, we have on the other survivals of ideas, which, first broached in a stage of civilisation when they are considered foolish or mischievous, become in a higher stage the dominant influences which direct human opinion. To take a single case:—It is now near upon two centuries since Balthazar Bekker, a D.D. of Amsterdam, corrupted, may be, by certain impious notions propounded by the arch-infidel Descartes, published his "Monde Enchanté," a crime for which he was at once deprived of his benefice; since, as a learned Englishman remarked in reference to the case:—

Dæmonas ex mundo quisquis proscripterit audax,
Esse brevi nullum dicet in orbe Deum.

If the English reader of to-day will take the trouble to read this work—and it is worth the trouble—he can scarcely fail to be struck with the remarkable survival of the ideas contained in it, expanded, corrected, developed as they are in these chapters by Mr. Tylor. Not that Mr. Tylor has borrowed anything from Bekker, but simply that Bekker was the first, as Mr. Tylor is the last, to apply science systematically to the phenomena of sorcery, witchcraft, and spiritualism of his age. Survivals of this kind are indeed proofs as decisive of the vitality of civilisation as survivals of the other kind are of the vitality of barbarism.

In the following chapters on Language, emotional and imitative, Mr. Tylor makes out a strong case in favour of what Prof. Max Müller, with a felicity worthy of a better cause, has nicknamed the "pooh-pooh" and "bow-wow" theories. "It may be shown," he says, "within the limits of the most strict and sober argument, that the theory of the origin of language, in natural and directly expressive sounds, does account for a considerable fraction of the existing *copia verborum*, while it raises a presumption that, could we trace the history of words more fully, it would account for far more." Among other matters touched on in this inquiry, Mr. Tylor refers to the language employed in addressing beasts, particularly dogs and horses. Some curious samples of dog-language are to be found in the Book of St. Alban's, and, indeed, in almost every old treatise on hunting. Sir Tristram, however, the hero of the Arthurian cycle, who is generally considered the *rédacteur en chef* of this particular dialect, appears to have thought plain Norman French best adapted to the intelligence of greyhounds, and is very sparing in his use of mere "brutish interjections." Of horse-language one of the best examples is to be found in "The Enterlude of John Bon and Mast Person," a tract belonging to the middle of the sixteenth century. This is how John Bon addresses his team:—

Ha, browne done! forth that horson crabbe!
Ree, comomyne, garde, with haight blake hab!
Have agayne, bald-before, hayght ree who!
Cherly boy, cum of, that whomwarde we may goo!

One branch of inquiry into which Mr. Tylor partly

enters in these chapters and the following one on the Art of Numbers, appears to deserve closer attention than it has yet received. Considering the important part which gesture plays in all the lower languages, it is a fair hypothetical inference that, as language gradually became more and more developed, a number of words and phrases would creep into it, formed on the principle of translating gesture into phonetics. Thus, for instance, the universal gesture for "likeness" or "sameness" is to hold out both hands together. If, in several different languages, the words meaning "likeness" or "sameness" have an etymological connection with the word meaning "together," a strong presumption would be raised that they were translated from the gesture; and if any large number of correspondences of the same kind were detected, the presumption would be raised into a theoretical certainty. Whether such evidence exists of the translation of action into sound in general language, none could determine better than Mr. Tylor himself, whose essay on the gesture-language in one of his earlier works, forms really almost a complete handbook on the subject. That it does exist in language, as applied to numbers, is clearly shown in his chapter on the art of counting, where he traces the quinary, decimal, and vigesimal systems to their origin in the fact that the average man possesses five fingers on each hand, and as many toes on each foot. He perhaps, however, has not sufficiently noticed the further strong probability that the duodecimal system owes its origin to the circumstance that, in addition to his fingers and toes, a man possesses two hands and two feet—a consideration not without its bearing on the obscurity attending the numerals eleven and twelve in certain languages.

LEA'S UNIONIDÆ

A Synopsis of the Family Unionidæ. By Isaac Lea, LL.D.
4th edition. 4to. (Philadelphia, 1870.)

THIS work, by a veteran American conchologist, contains 184 pages, and is a memorial of his labour and zeal during a period of more than forty years. The *Unionidæ* are generally known as "fresh-water mussels." Their variability is notorious; for almost every river, lake, and pond yields different forms, which some writers call species and others call varieties.

Non nostrum est tantas componere lites.

But while giving Dr. Lea ample discretion to make as many species as he pleases, and full credit for his honest wish to keep down the number, it certainly strikes one as somewhat singular that he admits only "seven or eight species of the family *Unionidæ* living in Europe," when he enumerates 720 species as North American, of which latter number he has himself described no fewer than 582! According to Kreglinger's catalogue, which is the newest on the land and fresh-water shells of Europe, fifteen species of this family inhabit Germany. We have but five, including one debatable species of *Anodonta*. The total number of living species recognised by Dr. Lea is 1,069, besides 224 unknown to him or doubtful. To distinguish varieties from species is one of the great difficulties which perplex the naturalist; but the rule which I have adopted may serve the purpose to a considerable extent, viz., "that all distinct groups of individuals living together and having a common feeding-ground, and which are not connected