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Primitive Races within the British Empire :  
A Problem in Adaptation.

DURING the coming months Wembley will present itself under many aspects to a multitude of visitors drawn from all parts of the world. Whatever may be their final impression, and however their interests may guide them among its varied attractions, it can scarcely escape the least imaginative that the British Empire Exhibition embodies a great ideal. To a multifarious variety of exhibits representative of all sides of a complex and highly organised civilisation is added the colour derived from differences of race and culture, of climate and of soil. Yet beneath the obvious appeal of a bewildering variety is a dominant sentiment—the consciousness of Imperial unity which has grown up largely during the present century, and, quickened by two wars, has now attained its greatest material expression in peace time in the present exhibition.

It would be superfluous to stress this more obvious aspect of Wembley if it were not for the fact that in bringing our Dominions and Dependencies together, each to take its share in a common expression of an Imperial ideal, it has been made clear how very imperfectly in many respects the implications of that ideal have been grasped by the general public. This is perhaps most marked in the way the public regards those sections of the Exhibition in which the more backward races—the native races, as they are loosely called—take part. The attitude of mind, unfortunately too common, which looks upon these peoples and the exemplification of their daily life and activities merely as part of the “show,” indicates only a very partial grasp of the obligations as well as the privileges of Empire. Presumably it was a desire to warn the public against regarding the natives as mere exhibits, irritating to those who know them best, which animated the writer of a recent article in the *Times*. He emphasised the intelligence of the natives of Africa at Wembley, and their skill as craftsmen, and concluded by pointing out that the Fourah Bay College of Sierra Leone had graduated 43 M.A.'s and 138 B.A.'s of the standard of the University of Durham, with which the College is affiliated! If to some his final argument may appear mistaken and inconclusive, it should at least give pause to those who regard all members of native races without discrimination as intellectually inferior.

The case of the native highly educated on European lines is exceptional, although as experience has shown, in India, which stands apart, and elsewhere, it presents a serious problem. It is not so immediately urgent as that of the common run of the population, which is either just coming into contact with a higher civilisation or has retained its own culture to a greater or less

degree while under its influence. If it accomplished nothing more, the British Empire Exhibition would attain a great object did it bring home to the public the urgent call for measures to preserve our backward races, and for the study of their culture and their racial peculiarities and affinities. Anthropologists never cease, both in and out of season, to urge the necessity for scientific study of these peoples. To the trained mind, all research which adds to the sum of human knowledge appears eminently worth while; it is for such minds merely a question of degree. Scientific investigations, however, which involve expenditure upon anything more than a modest scale—as is the case with the study of primitive peoples, which can only be prosecuted in remote parts of the earth—require some measure of public recognition and support. In science, to obtain such recognition, not only is it necessary that the problem which anthropological study would hope to solve should be clearly stated, but it is also essential either that it should strike the imagination of the public or that it should possess a practical appeal. It cannot be said that public interest in the subject-matter of anthropology is lacking, but it has not yet passed the stage which looks for entertainment in a “traveller’s tale.” The examples of native arts and crafts, as well as the people themselves, at the Exhibition should instil a lesson of deeper significance into the mind of the public, and should awaken a consciousness that the interdependence which is recognised to subsist between the civilised communities of the Empire extends also to more backward societies and, equally, involves an obligation to secure, so far as possible, conditions favourable to their survival, as well as the just administration of their affairs by rulers of the more highly civilised race.

It has frequently been pointed out that successful administration of native affairs requires a sympathy and understanding on the part of the administrator which can only be acquired either as the result of a long experience of the people in question or as the outcome of some study of native customs on scientific lines, for which a training in anthropological method is necessary. This, however, in a sense is a static point of view which takes insufficient account of the results which must necessarily follow from an increasing contact with civilisation as a country is opened up to trade and its resources developed. Throughout the world, whenever a primitive race is brought into contact with European civilisation, the result is normally, though not invariably, for the inferior race to lose its vitality and to die out. If this consequence can be averted, it is an obvious obligation of the more highly civilised to take effective measures to protect the more backward. Further, in an Empire like ours, with its

wide range of climatic conditions, in many of which the manual burden of development must depend, not upon the white race, but on a people adapted to the environment, failure to preserve the native population is neglect of an asset of which the full value may not be immediately apparent, but will only be adequately appreciated when necessity, at some day perhaps not far distant, forces upon us the development of the material resources of our Empire to the full.

In a recent lecture at King’s College, which formed part of a course on Problems of Empire, organised in view of the British Empire Exhibition, Prof. C. G. Seligman pointed out that the problem of our native races was one ultimately of adaptation. He showed that these races fall into a classification of hunting, pastoral, and agricultural communities, and that failing adaptation, the hunting communities, which include the most primitive peoples, such as the Veddas of Ceylon and the wild tribes of the Malay Peninsula, must die out as conditions favourable to a hunting community pass away. This opens up a wide field for research which is obviously of more than academic interest, for although we know that adaptation to changed circumstances has taken place, it is by no means certain how and in what conditions. It is common knowledge that the essential characteristic of a primitive community is its conservatism. It has been found that even such limited interference as is customary under our administration, which aims at curtailing only such practices as are utterly at variance with civilised sentiment, such as head hunting, human sacrifice, raiding, and the like, affects the social complex and the mental habit of the people to their detriment. So much so that it has been suggested that the diminution in numbers of our primitive races is to be attributed to the mental inertia following the curtailing of these activities, which were an essential stimulus to their interest in life.

In a community of this type which, presumably, in a long period of time has maintained a form of existence suited at all points to its environment, spontaneous adaptation to changed conditions is scarcely likely. It seems to require the introduction of a new strain from outside—an antecedent which is known to have been present in most cases in which a change to a different and usually a higher type of culture has taken place. Miscegenation in the human races, however, is a subject of which we have little knowledge, and, as Prof. Seligman pointed out in discussing its influence on adaptation, there is an obvious danger that cross breeding may favour undesirable qualities. This is also the popular view of half-breeds, which is not entirely without foundation; but it requires much more detailed and careful investigation than it has yet received.

It is neither necessary nor desirable to pursue further this aspect of the question here. It deals with one factor only in the problem, though that is fundamental. For the solution of problems of administration, as has been said on many occasions, the necessity for study of the people themselves on scientific lines is equally urgent, while on no other conditions will it be possible to attempt a decision of their ultimate place as members of the Empire. An approach to this problem has been made in South Africa, and the conditions in which the agriculture of Kenya province in East Africa is being developed suggests that it is not insoluble. The British Empire Exhibition, in affording an object lesson of what our native races are and of their attainment in culture, serves at once as a warning against their extinction and an exhortation to realise and grapple, on scientific lines, with the problem they present before it is too late.

#### Art-forms in Nature.

*Kunstformen der Natur.* Von Ernst Haeckel. Zweite, verkürzte Auflage. Niedere Tiere. Pp. iii + 12 + 30 Tafeln. (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, n.d.) 16s. 4d.

IT is not a simple matter to form a conjecture as to what has prompted the selection of the thirty plates contained in this "Second, abbreviated edition" out of the hundred contained in the first edition of Haeckel's monumental work "*Kunstformen der Natur.*" By no means all of the most striking and beautiful plates in that edition are here reproduced. The explanation given by the publishers in their foreword introducing this volume, five years after Haeckel's death, and in honour of the ninetieth anniversary of his birth (Feb. 16, 1924), is that "the necessity of the times compels curtailment," but it may well be that in twenty years many of the plates have become damaged or deteriorated. It is explained that this edition is confined to plates bearing upon Haeckel's special study, the lowest forms of life.

The original edition was issued in ten parts, each containing ten plates, commencing in 1899, and in 1904 Haeckel brought his work to a close with a "General Introduction" which he had promised in Part I. The keynote of his intention is struck in his original preface, where he says: "In the rendering of the figures I have always kept before my eyes the combination of exquisite beauty with the closest possible truth to Nature. All the Art-forms here represented are therefore, in truth, real Nature-forms; all idealisation and 'touching-up' (*Stilizierung*) have been sedulously avoided."

It is pointed out that Nature produces in her bosom

an inexhaustible profusion of wonderful forms by the beauty and multiplicity of which all art-forms created by man may be far eclipsed. Familiar as is mankind with the beauties of form among the higher orders of creation, the flowering plants and vertebrates, the immeasurable realm of the lower animals is an unknown country, by reason of the fact that they exist for the most part in the depths of the sea. Moreover, they are invisible to the naked eye, and have only been revealed by the perfection of microscopic aids to vision during the nineteenth century, and by the systematic exploration of the ocean at all depths. This is particularly the case with the Protozoa, and these are principally figured in rare and costly works inaccessible to the layman. Haeckel's object was to familiarise with their beauty an extended circle of students, both of Nature and of art, and industrial workers, who may find in his work a profusion of new designs; but he claimed to have reproduced only actualities, leaving style, modelling, and decorative elaboration to the workers themselves. He, in fact, reiterated the ambition of Paul von Ritter, who, when he founded his school of phylogenetic zoology in the University of Jena, expressed the hope that, apart from academic studies, it might awaken an interest in the wonders and beauties of Nature among the people at large, by making them the common property of widely scattered art-circles.

The "allgemeine Einleitung," published in 1904, is divided into sections dealing (*a*) with the relationships and connexion of art- and Nature-forms, particularly with regard to their gradual development; (*b*) with the geometrical arrangement and æsthetic significance of primitive organisms, and the meanings and motives of their symmetrical laws, a subject which recurs constantly in Haeckel's voluminous works. In section (*c*) he gives us a systematic survey of the art-forms to be found in individual classes of the organic world, the development of primitive types and their æsthetic significance.

Haeckel devoted himself in this work mainly to the lower forms of life, which he studied for half a century, and in illustration of which his works contain more than four hundred plates, especially dealing with Radiolaria, Medusæ, Siphonophoræ, and Corals. To what an extent Haeckel "specialised" in the first of these groups alone may be seen in his *Challenger* monograph, in which he estimated the number of species at 4314, included in 739 genera. It may, however, be said at once that this number has been greatly reduced in recent years by the elimination of a mass of "species" which have been recognised as growth-stages and minor varieties of the same form. In conclusion, Haeckel tells us that his hundred plates