

Remarks on the nature, objects, and evidences of ethnological science : an address read at the Ethnological Society, at a conversazione, on Wednesday, June 4th, 1851 / by Richard Cull.

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Royal Coll. of Surgeons
from the Ethnology Socy
REMARKS

1857

ON THE

NATURE, OBJECTS, AND EVIDENCES

12.

OF

ETHNOLOGICAL SCIENCE:

AN ADDRESS

READ AT

THE ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY,

AT A CONVERSAZIONE,

ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4th, 1851.

BY RICHARD CULL,

FELLOW AND HONORARY SECRETARY OF THE ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY,

&c. &c. &c.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY,

BY WILLIAM M. WATTS, CROWN COURT, TEMPLE BAR.



REMARKS.

MANY well-educated persons, and some of them scientific men, have vague notions of the objects of our inquiry, and of the means of our investigation.

When the Zoologist describes our study as the natural history of man, he only partially describes our pursuit. If a work were written on the natural history of man in the same way as a Zoologist writes the natural history of the elephant, for instance, he would leave the most important objects of our investigation untouched. The Zoologist describes the peculiarities of the elephant as he is found in Africa and in Asia, and ends there. The Ethnologist describes man as he is found in various localities, with all the peculiarities of physical structure and mental constitution ; but this is only the basis of a wide inquiry concerning man. The Ethnologist proceeds to investigate man in groups, as a people, a nation, and variety ; he proceeds to study the history of those peoples, nations, and varieties, tracing them as far back as history is able to conduct him ; he endeavours to discover the sources of those peoples, nations, and varieties ; he seeks out their affinities and connexions ; and struggles after that dim and shadowy knowledge of man as he existed before the dawn of history.

Ethnology, then, is not the mere natural history of man, in the same sense as we apply the term natural history in zoology.

When the Phrenologist describes our study as that of the physiology of the brain of the several varieties of man that exist on the earth, he, too, only partially describes our study. I will not undervalue the collection of specimens of national crania. I am fully alive to the importance of Phrenology, for its own sake as well as for its numerous applications. I know its value in ethnological research. But when the Phrenologist

describes ethnology as the phrenology of the several varieties of man, he only partially describes our science.

Mr. Deville made a collection of national crania; such a collection has been made by the Edinburgh Phrenological Society; and there is Dr. Morton's magnificent collection. These collections are probably sufficient to idealize into typical forms the crania of certain varieties of man, in the way that Mr. Cox has shewn the typical form of cranium of the Esquimaux, and also of that of the Cingalese. But such typical forms must be obtained of all the varieties now existing, before we are prepared to discuss, on such evidence, the connexion and affiliation of the varieties of man.

Ethnology, then, is something more than phrenology.

When the Philologist has studied the connections and relationships of several languages, and from those relationships infers certain affiliations of the peoples speaking those languages, he is apt to exclaim, and sometimes he does coolly declare to us, that philology is ethnology. This is, as you are prepared to decide, a great mistake. Ethnology is something more than philology. Philological evidence is of great value, but is only one line of evidence, and requires other evidence to corroborate it.

It has been declared by some that ethnology like zoology and botany is only a part of geography, adopting the term geography in an enlarged sense, to include the whole fauna. Such a declaration asserts that the several varieties of man are indigenous to their several localities, in the same sense as ferns and lichens, crocodiles and kangaroos, are indigenous to their localities. Such declarations assume as truths the very things that are to be investigated. If geography, in its enlarged sense, is to include a description of man as he is now found in the several regions, in the same way as it includes the fauna, it is evident that it will include only the zoological or natural history description of man, and not the ethnological description of man.

Geographical contiguity and ethnological connexion are very different things. All the Jews are ethnologically connected, although they may be natives of Great Britain, of America, or of China.

It has been stated that the Ethnologist, like the Naturalist, is unsatisfied with the study of man as he now exists, but that he studies man as he was, and, by the torch of history, brings to light the nations of antiquity, even those that have entirely disappeared, and gives a picture of the changes which their physical nature has undergone in the vicissitudes of time. And so the Naturalist, unsatisfied with the natural history of plants and animals as they now exist, seeks in the crust of the earth, for those fossils of former plants and animals which lie embedded in its strata, and is thus enabled to restore whole genera and species which have long since become extinct; and by these remains is able to supply many links in his chain of beings which otherwise would be broken. This is all very interesting, but, unfortunately for the Naturalist who has rushed into our domain, it is not true. The Ethnologist does not study the past history of man for any such object as the Naturalist studies the fossils of the earth's crust. The Ethnologist studies the past history to trace descent and origin. But who ever heard of a Naturalist studying fossils to trace descent and origin? The Naturalist studies fossils in order to ascertain the physical condition of our planet at different bygone epochs. Thus the study of the fossils of Chelonian reptiles found in Great Britain throws a flood of light on the physical condition of this part of the globe at a period long anterior to historic times.

The Ethnologist, who studies the bones, and especially the crania, which are found in tumuli and ancient burying-places—those for instance in the North of Europe and Asia—has no idea of restoring lost genera or species of man, but is simply desirous of ascertaining the type of cranium of those ancient inhabitants of this country and of Scandinavia, before we were overrun by the Celts, and Scandinavia by the Lappes and Fins; and of determining, by similar evidence, if the race inhabiting Siberia and the whole of North Asia were of a similar type.

These few remarks are intended to point out the errors into which certain classes of educated men fall, in conceiving the nature and scope of our inquiries. I now proceed briefly to state the objects of our science, and the kinds of evidence, and thence of inquiry, on which, as a science, it rests.

The great object is man ; not, however, as an individual, but as a people or nation. The word 'Ethnology' is composed of two Greek roots, viz. *ἔθνος*, 'a people or nation,' and *λογία*, 'a discourse.'

From the circumpolar regions to the equator, in every latitude from the snow-built dwellings of the Esquimaux to the sandy desert of the torrid zone, do we find man. We find him existing under widely-different circumstances, presenting great physical differences, yet always characterized by those physical and mental characters which distinguish him from the brute creation, and loudly proclaim him to be of far higher rank in the animal kingdom.

When the navigators in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries discovered America and the West Indies, they found human inhabitants in those countries ; and when at a later period the numerous islands in the Pacific were discovered, every group was found to be inhabited by man. This great fact naturally suggests the question, How came those hitherto unknown countries and islands to be inhabited ? Were there separate creations for those localities ? Or did they migrate from other countries ? Are the peculiar physical characters which are found in different races of men the result of the climate and other physical causes merely modifying an original type ; or are those physical characters inherent, special, and unchangeable by external physical causes ? In other words, is the black complexion of the Negro, his woolly hair, his protruding jaw, which appears to be more nearly allied to the muzzle of an ape than to the human form of a European—are these the result of the physical causes which are in operation on the Western Coast of Africa ? And are the light brown complexion, beautifully glossy black hair and regular features of the Berbers, Moroquins, Tuaricks, Tunisians, and others on the northern coast of Africa, the result of physical causes in operation on that coast ? If these causes, whatever they are, effect such different results, do they merely modify one set of previous characteristics, or do they originate those physical characters ? Such questions lead us to ask if it be possible that the Negro, the Chinese, the North-American Indian, the Hindoo, and the European, are descended from one pair

originally. Can we admit the unity of the human race? or shall we dream of the creation of several Adams?

Questions concerning the origin and cause of things claim our attention, and awaken inquiry with an interest peculiarly their own; and the discovery of one source and one cause yields a corresponding pleasure. "*Felix quia potuit rerum cognoscere causas.*" But questions concerning the origin of nations, the causes of peculiarities of the physical structure of man, the causes of his intellectual and moral peculiarities, the causes of his lingual peculiarities, and of every other specialty that distinguishes one tribe and people from another, are of that absorbing interest to which all other departments of natural knowledge seem to be greatly inferior, if not of only slight importance.

But in our anxiety to know the origin of the several nations that people the earth we must constantly be on our guard against forming a rash judgment. We ought to know the bias of our own minds to guard against its undue influence in the formation of our opinions. We must not rest satisfied with one-sided evidence, but must carefully obtain evidence from every source; and, after impartially examining its value and character in relation to the question at issue, we must conscientiously give our decision.

I urge this, because I have heard some men, on the one hand, say, that all that can be known of the peopling of the earth, of the origin of nations, and of the causes of the diversity of physical characteristics in man, is plainly stated in the early books of the Bible; that is, in the books of Moses. I hear others, on the other hand, confidently assert that the Holy Scriptures can be no guide, nor even evidence at all, on the subject.

Such discordant opinions would not be entertained, much less expressed with dogmatic confidence, if clear ideas of the objects of Ethnological science had previously been formed. Our science attempts to solve two series of questions. One concerning

1. THE PRESENT TIME; and the other,

2. THE PAST TIME. Thus,

What are the physical and mental conditions of man in all

countries of the earth as *now* presented to us? And what were the physical and mental conditions of man in all countries of the earth as he *formerly* existed?

To answer the first question, or rather group of questions, we travel to the various nations of the earth, and observe man under the different influences of climate, of food, of local situation, of clothing, of nutrition. We observe him in his domestic habits, his occupations, his wars, his sports, his pleasures, his moral bearing to himself and his fellows, and his religious bearing to his Creator and to those real or imaginary beings whom he worships, whether from love or fear. We observe his customs and his language. Thus we study his form, and both the material and intellectual products of his mind; and in short, we study him in space, or as he exists in the present time.

This knowledge prepares our minds to receive a knowledge of man as he exists in time—in the past, and that not merely in the historical epoch, but beyond it. The annals of most nations carry us but a little way back; but even so far back as authentic history carries us, the evidence is historical, and mainly depends on records. The acumen and honesty of the historian are requisite for this part of our investigation;—acumen, to perceive what bears on the subject; and honesty, to rightly estimate its value.

But to ascend higher up the stream of time than our records will carry us demands other kind of evidence, viz. antiquarian evidence. This palæontological part of ethnology is of high interest and of great value. It often happens that this evidence is stronger, and even more direct, than the historical evidence for a later period. This you will observe is just as it is in geology, where the discovery of fossils in strata is evidence sometimes of far greater value than any historical documents can be as to the existence and character of certain changes which have taken place in the earth's crust. The examination of man as he now exists belongs to science; the examination of man as he formerly existed during the historical period, by means of studying those historical and other documents relating to him, belongs chiefly to literature; and the examination of man as he existed in the pre-historic period is a species

of antiquarian and palæontographical research, demanding a combination both of science and literature.

These considerations convince us, that those who assert, on the one hand, that the Bible teaches all that can be known of ethnology, and the origin of nations, are in error; for although it contains most valuable information relating to Palestine and the adjacent region, it contains none whatever concerning America, Australia, New Zealand, the Islands of the Pacific, and many other large areas of the earth's surface. And those who assert, on the other hand, the uselessness of the Bible in our inquiries, are also in error; for where else shall we find so ancient a history? It is true that the early history is chiefly that of Abraham and his posterity; but we must remember that the Holy Scriptures are not written to teach us ethnology, but religion, and it is only from its incidental statements that we gather from it some ethnology. Thus, we do not even know what complexion Abraham was, or Moses, much less Noah or Adam.

Ethnology, like other sciences, consists of facts and reasonings. The principles of the science must bind together the facts, or they are valueless; and we must necessarily have most confidence in those great principles which are established by the concurrent testimony of distinct lines of evidence. Thus, if the anatomical and physiological evidence is supported by the philological, and this again is concurrent with the historical, we cannot escape the conviction of the truth of our principles. But if the physiological should not only not coincide, but run counter to the philological, we should require a much larger amount of evidence, and that, too, of a more decided character, to induce us to yield to the philological side.

I will briefly illustrate these two positions.

The anatomical characters of the Hindoos strikingly distinguish them from the non-Hindoos, *i.e.* from the Bhils, Ghonds, and other mountain tribes of India.

The customs, religion, habits, and mode of thought, also distinguish them.

The language or philology also distinguishes them.

Their history and tradition also distinguish them.

Here you see they are distinguished by distinct lines of concurrent evidence.

We, however, go further. Not only does the testimony stamp them as different, but it stamps these various tribes of non-Hindoos as one distinct people.

Now, with all this evidence, we cannot escape the conclusion of the distinction in these peoples.

Such a conclusion is again the starting-point of other inquiries; but enough is said for my object.

Now, let us take the Indo-Germanic group of languages. The philological line of evidence points out an affinity which is unsupported by the physiological, and also by the historical lines of evidence.

The philological line of evidence connects the Hindoos, Germans, Italians, Celts, and some others, together; but the physical characters of the Hindoos, Germans, Italians, and Celts are very different; and there is neither history nor tradition in support nor against that connection. In such a case the philological and physiological lines of evidence are antagonistic, while history is silent, and therefore indifferent. The philological line of evidence is positive, the physiological negative, and the historical indifferent to the conclusion.

With regard to the people that inhabited this country before the Celts: they lived in pre-historic times. We therefore not only have no philological evidence, but no historical, and are entirely dependent on archæological evidence. We have only bones, crania, and some implements belonging to this ancient people, which are brought to light by opening tumuli of the primæval or stone period of barrows. When we possess only one line of evidence it behoves us to be very careful in sifting that evidence before we base any general views on it.

There are conclusions, however, of an ethnological character, that are perfectly valid, which rest only on such evidence.

There are some conclusions, too, which are based exclusively on philological evidence, of so sound a character as not to be shaken. Thus the linguistic researches of Colonel Rawlinson have decided some questions as to the ethnography of the Assyrian Empire.

The cuniform inscriptions, like the celebrated one at Behistun, are, in almost every instance, trilingual and triliteral.

They are cut in three languages, and each language has its own peculiar alphabet. The inscriptions record the glories of the house of Archæmenes. They are trilingual, in order to enable the people subject to the Assyrian sway to read and know the records; just as, at the present day, a Governor of Baghdad would have an edict published in three languages—the Persian, the Turkish, and Arabic, in order for it to be generally understood. And it is very remarkable, that, in the time of Cyrus and Darius, the Assyrian empire was ethnographically constituted as the region is at present. The population then had to be addressed in those three languages from which the modern Persian, Turkish, and Arabic are derived, and which at that period represented those languages.

It will be observed that we have no lines of historical or physiological evidence to sanction our philological, but yet we have every confidence in our conclusions.

I have said enough in these few remarks to shew the broad basis on which ethnology is built; the many and varied researches which are required for its advancement; and the large amount of exact knowledge which is required in order to cultivate our science. As the solid foundations of geology could not be laid until some other sciences were well advanced, so the solid foundations of ethnology required an advanced state at least of anatomy, physiology, philology, and archæology.

