

**ALFRED
RUSSEL
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SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT
AND MORAL PROGRESS

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Alfred Russel Wallace

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PART I.—HISTORICAL

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

Before entering on the question of the relation of morality to our existing social environment, it will be advisable to inquire what we mean by moral progress, and what evidence there is that any such progress has occurred in recent times, or even within the period of well-established history.

By morals we mean right conduct, not only in our immediate social relations, but also in our dealings with our fellow citizens and with the whole human race. It is based upon the possession of clear ideals as to what actions are right and what are wrong and the determination of our conduct by a constant reference to those ideals.

The belief was once prevalent, and is still held by many

persons, that a knowledge of right and wrong is inherent or instinctive in everyone, and that the immoral person may be justly punished for such wrongdoing as he commits. But that this cannot be wholly, if at all, true is shown by the fact that in different societies and at different periods the standard of right and wrong changes considerably. That which at one time and place is held to be right and proper is, at another time or place, considered to be not only wrong, but one of the greatest of crimes. The most striking example of this change of opinion is that as to slavery, which was held to be quite justifiable by the most highly civilised people of antiquity, and hardly less so by ourselves within the memory of persons still living. The owners of sugar estates in Jamaica cultivated by slaves were not stigmatised as immoral by their relatives in England or by the public at large; and it was the horror excited by the slave-trade in Africa, and in the "middle passage" on the slave ships, rather than by the slavery itself, that so excited public opinion as to lead to the abolition first of the one and then of the other.

We are obliged to conclude, therefore, that what is commonly termed morality is not wholly due to any inherent perception of what is right or wrong conduct, but that it is to some extent and often very largely a matter of convention, varying at different times and places in accordance with the degree and kind of social development which has been attained often under different and even divergent conditions of existence. The actual morality of a community is largely a product of the environment, but it is local

and temporary, not permanently affecting the character.

To bring together the evidence in support of this view, to distinguish between what is permanent and inherited and what is superficial and not inherited, and to trace out some of the consequences as regards what we term "morality" is the purpose of the present volume.

CHAPTER II

MORALITY AS BASED UPON CHARACTER

Though much of what we term morality has no absolute sanction in human nature, yet it is to some extent, and perhaps very largely, based upon it. It will be well, therefore, to consider briefly the nature and probable origin of what we term "character"—in individuals, in societies, and especially in those more ancient and more fundamental divisions of mankind which we term "races."

Character may be defined as the aggregate of mental faculties and emotions which constitute personal or national individuality. It is very strongly hereditary, yet it is probably subject to more inherent variation than is the form and structure of the body. The combinations of its constituent elements are so numerous as, in common language, to be termed infinite; and this gives to each person a very distinct individuality, as manifested in speech, in emotional expression, and in action.

The mental faculties which go to form the "character" of each man or woman are very numerous, a large proportion of them being such as are required for the preservation of the individual and of the race, while others are pre-eminently social or ethical. These latter, which impel us to truth, to justice, and

to benevolence, when in due proportion to all the other mental faculties, go to form what we distinguish as a good or moral character, and will in most cases result in actions which meet with the general approval of that section of society in which we live; and this approval reacts upon the character so that it often appears to be better than it really is.

So great is the effect of this approval of our fellows that it sometimes leads to behaviour quite different from what it would be if this approval were absent. This is especially the case when the approval leads to wealth or positions of dignity or advantage. Occasionally, in cases of this kind the individual cannot resist his natural impulses, and then acts so as to show his underlying real character. We term such persons hypocrites for making us believe that they were inherently good, instead of being so in appearance only when the good action was profitable to them. Hence in a highly complex state of civilisation it becomes exceedingly difficult correctly to appraise characters as moral or immoral, good or bad; while there is no such difficulty as regards the intellectual and emotional aspects of character, which are less influenced by the general environment, and which there is less temptation to conceal.

All the evidence we possess tends to show that although the actions of most individuals are to a considerable extent determined by their social environment, that does not imply any alteration in their character. Everyone's experience of life, and especially the example of his friends and associates, leads him

to repress his passions, regulate his emotions, and in general to use his judgment before acting, so as to secure the esteem of his fellows and greater happiness for himself; and these restraints, becoming habitual, may often give the appearance of an actual change of character till some great temptation or violent passion overcomes the usual restraint and exhibits the real nature, which is usually dormant.

Now it is this inherent and unchangeable character itself that tends to be transmitted to offspring, and this being the case, there can be no progressive improvement in character without some selective agency tending to such improvement. By means of a general discussion of the nature and origin of "Character," I have elsewhere shown that there is no proof of any real advance in it during the whole historical period.¹ I show later on what the required selective agency is, and how it will come into action automatically when, and not until, our social system is so reformed as to afford suitable conditions. (See [Chapter XVI](#).)

¹ See *Character and Life*, edited by P. L. Parker, pp. 19-31. (Williams and Norgate; November, 1912.)

CHAPTER III

PERMANENCE OF CHARACTER

I will now call attention to a few of the facts which lead to the conclusion as to the stationary condition of general character from the earliest periods of human history, and presumably from the dawn of civilisation. In the earliest records which have come down to us from the past we find ample indications that general ethical conceptions, the accepted standard of morality, and the conduct resulting from these, were in no degree inferior to those which prevail to-day, though in some respects they differed from ours.

As examples of great moral teachers in very early times we have Socrates and Plato, about 400 B.C.; Confucius and Buddha, one or two centuries earlier; Homer, earlier still; the great Indian Epic, the Maha-Bharata, about 1500 B.C. All these afford indications of intellectual and moral character quite equal to our own; while their lower manifestations, as shown by their wars and love of gambling, were no worse than corresponding immoralities to-day.

In the beautiful translation by the late Mr. Romesh Dutt, of such portions of the Maha-Bharata as are best fitted to give English readers a proper conception of the whole work, there is a striking episode entitled "Woman's Love," in which the heroine, a princess, by repeated petitions and reasonings persuades Yama,

the god of death, to give back her husband's spirit to the body. It is described in the following verses:

"And the sable King was vanquished, and he turned on her again,
And his words fell on Savitri like the cooling summer rain:
'Noble woman, speak thy wishes, name thy boon and purpose high,
What the pious mortal asketh gods in heaven may not deny!'

""Thou hast,' so Savitri answered, 'granted father's realm and might,
To his vain and sightless eyeballs hath restored the blessed light;
Grant him that the line of monarchs may not all untimely end,
That his kingdom to Satyavan and Savitri's sons descend!'

""Have thy wishes,' answered Yama; 'thy good lord shall live again,
He shall live to be a father, and your children, too, shall reign;
For a woman's troth endureth longer than the fleeting breath,
And a woman's love abideth higher than the doom of death.'"

And when at the end of the epic, the kings and warriors welcome each other in the spirit world, we find the following noble conception of the qualities and actions which give them a place there:

"These and other mighty warriors, in the earthly battle slain,
By their valour and their virtue walk the bright ethereal plain!
They have lost their mortal bodies, crossed the radiant gate
of heaven,
For to win celestial mansions unto mortals it is given!
Let them strive by kindly action, gentle speech, endurance
long,
Brighter life and holier future unto sons of men belong!"

Mr. Dutt informs us that he has not only reproduced, as nearly as possible, the metre of the original, but has aimed at giving us a literal translation. No one can read his beautiful rendering without feeling that the people it describes were our intellectual and moral equals.

The wonderful collection of hymns known as the Vedas is a vast system of religious teaching as pure and lofty as those of the finest portions of the Hebrew scriptures. A few examples from the translation by Sir Monier Monier-Williams will show that its various writers were fully our equals in their conceptions of the universe, and of the Deity, expressed in the finest poetic language. The following is a portion of a hymn to "The Investing Sky":

"The mighty Varuna, who rules above, looks down
Upon these worlds, his kingdom, as if close at hand.
When men imagine they do aught by stealth, he knows it.
No one can stand or walk, or softly glide along
Or hide in dark recess, or lurk in secret cell

But Varuna detects him and his movements spies.

* * * *

This boundless earth is his,
His the vast sky, whose depth no mortal e'er can fathom.
Both oceans find a place within his body, yet
In the small pool he lies contained; whoe'er should flee
Far, far beyond the sky would not escape the grasp
Of Varuna, the king. His messengers descend
Countless from his abode—for ever traversing
This world, and scanning with a thousand eyes its inmates.
Whate'er exists within this earth, and all within the sky,
Yea, all that is beyond King Varuna perceives.
May thy destroying snares cast sevenfold round the wicked,
Entangle liars, but the truthful spare, O King."

The following passage from a "Hymn to Death," shows a perfect confidence in that persistence of the human personality after death, which is still a matter of doubt and discussion to-day:

"To Yama, mighty king, he gifts and homage paid.
He was the first of men that died, the first to brave
Death's rapid rushing stream, the first to point the road
To heaven, and welcome others to that bright abode.
No power can rob us of the home thus won by thee.

O king, we come; the born must die, must tread the path
That thou hast trod—the path by which each race of men,
In long succession, and our fathers too, have passed.
Soul of the dead! depart; fear not to take the road—
The ancient road—by which thy ancestors have gone;
Ascend to meet the god—to meet thy happy fathers,
Who dwell in bliss with him.
Return unto thy home, O soul! Thy sin and shame
Leave thou behind on earth; assume a shining form—
Thy ancient shape—refined and from all taint set free."

In this we find many of the essential teachings of the most advanced religious thinkers—the immediate entrance to a higher life, the recognition of friends, the persistence of the human form, and the shining raiment, typical of the loss of earthly taint.

But besides these special deities, we find also the recognition of the one supreme God, as in the following hymn:

"What god shall we adore with sacrifice?
Him let us praise, the golden child that rose
In the beginning, who was born the Lord—
The one sole lord of all that is—who made
The earth, and formed the sky, who giveth life,
Who giveth strength, whose bidding gods revere,
Whose hiding place is immortality,
Whose shadow, death; who by his might is king
Of all the breathing, sleeping, waking world—
Who governs men and beasts; whose majesty

These snowy hills, this ocean with its rivers,
Declare; of whom these spreading regions form
The arms by which the firmament is strong,
Earth firmly planted, and the highest heavens
Supported, and the clouds that fill the air
Distributed and measured out; to whom
Both earth and heaven, established by his will,
Look up with trembling mind; in whom revealed
The rising sun shines forth above the world."

If we make allowance for the very limited knowledge of Nature at this early period, we must admit that the mind which conceived and expressed in appropriate language, such ideas as are everywhere apparent in these Vedic hymns, could not have been in any way inferior to those of the best of our religious teachers and poets—to our Miltons and our Tennysons.

CHAPTER IV

PERMANENCE OF HIGH INTELLECT

Accompanying this fine literature and moral teaching in Ancient India was a civilisation equal to that of early classical races, in grand temples, forts and palaces, weapons and implements, jewelry and exquisite fabrics. Their architecture was highly decorative and peculiar, and has continued to quite recent times. Owing perhaps to the tropical or sub-tropical climate, with marked wet and dry seasons, the oldest buildings that have survived, even as ruins, are less ancient than those of Greece or Rome—but those corresponding in age to the period of our Gothic cathedrals are immensely numerous, and show an originality of design, a wealth of ornament, and a perfection of workmanship equal to those of any other buildings in the world.

Two other great civilisations of which we have authentic records are those of Egypt and Mesopotamia, both of which appear to have been much older than those of India or Greece. But whereas Egypt has left us the most continuous series of tombs, temples, and palaces in the world, abundant works of art in statues and sculptures, together with characteristic reliefs and wall paintings, showing the whole public and domestic life of the people, Mesopotamia is represented only by vast masses of

ruins on the sites of the ancient cities of Nineveh and Babylon, from which have been disinterred many fine statues and reliefs, exhibiting a very distinct style of art. For more than 2,000 years the history and remains of this once greatest of civilisations was absolutely unknown, except by a few doubtful facts and names in Greek and Hebrew writings. But during the latter half of the nineteenth century a band of explorers and students, such as Layard and Rawlinson, made known, first the works of art, and, latterly, an enormous quantity of small bricks and stone slabs, thickly covered with a peculiar kind of writing known as the cuneiform inscriptions, which, after an enormous amount of labour, have at length been translated. Whole libraries of these brick-books have been discovered, and as the reading and translating goes on, we obtain a knowledge of the history, laws, customs, and daily life of this ancient people almost equal to that we now possess of the ancient Indians and Egyptians.

For our present purpose, however, Egyptian civilisation is the most important, because it presents us with the most definite proof of the attainment of a high degree of what is specially scientific attainment at the very dawn of historical knowledge. This is well exhibited by that most wonderful work of constructive art—the Great Pyramid of Gizeh—which, though not quite the earliest, is the largest and most remarkable of about seventy pyramids in various parts of Egypt, and has been more thoroughly explored and studied, both as to its proportions, construction and uses, than any of the others.

This pyramid is known historically to have been built by the order of King Cheops (or Khufu), and the date of its design and erection can be pretty accurately fixed as about 3700 B.C., or nearly 2,000 years earlier than that of the civilisation depicted in the Indian and Greek epics. The internal structure of this pyramid is its most interesting feature, because it shows clearly that it was designed to be not only the tomb of the king who built it, but also a true astronomical observatory during his life. This has been denied by some modern historians. In Harmsworth's *History of the World* (p. 2034) it is said: "For the pyramids are nothing but tombs. They have no astronomical meaning or intention whatever." And then, after referring to the ideas of Piazzi Smyth and others as "vain imaginings," it is added: "There is nothing marvellous about these great tombs, except their size and the accuracy of their building." An almost exactly similar statement is made in the great *Historian's History of the World*, and in "Chambers's Encyclopædia."

If the writers of these histories had read Mr. R. A. Proctor's book, *The Great Pyramid: Observatory, Tomb and Temple*, they would have known that this statement is entirely erroneous. The size, shape, and angles of the internal passages have been described and measured by many competent students, among the most careful and exact of whom was Piazzi Smyth, then Astronomer Royal of Scotland. It is true he had many "vain imaginings," but his measurements were among the most trustworthy. The "pyramid religion," which he helped to establish

by a series of "coincidences" in the dimensions of various parts of the pyramid with astronomical dimensions, of which the pyramid builders could have had no knowledge whatever (such as the distance of the sun, the precession of the equinoxes, etc.), was no doubt a "vain imagining," but he frankly claimed it as a divine inspiration. All these are rejected by Mr. Proctor, who clearly explains the purpose of the greater part of the internal structure as only an experienced practical astronomer could do. I will now state as briefly as possible what are the well-established facts, as well as the conclusions at which Mr. Proctor arrives.

The Great Pyramid and the two smaller ones near it, forming the pyramids of Gizeh, are placed on a small rocky plateau near the apex of the delta of the Nile. The largest of these is situated so that its northern face rises from the very edge of this plateau. The reason of this seems to have been that the builders wished to place it as nearly as possible on the 30th parallel of latitude. It is really about a mile and a third south of that parallel, and it is shown that such an error is a small one for that early period, and would matter but very little for the purpose required. The next feature is that it is truly oriented; that is, the four sides run north and south, east and west. It is also a true square, the four sides being of equal length, and the four corners are on a truly level plane.

The first thing the builders had to do was to get a true meridian line, and they could have done this in two ways—by observations of the sun or of the pole star, the latter being much the more

accurate, though more laborious and costly. At the time the pyramid was built the pole star was Alpha Draconis, which was farther from the pole than our pole star and revolved around the true pole in a circle of $7^{\circ} 24'$ in diameter. In order to observe the direction of this star at its lowest point, the builders excavated in the solid rock a tunnel about 4 feet in diameter, so as to keep this star visible each day at the lowest point of its circuit. This tunnel extended 350 feet through the rock to a point nearly under the centre of the pyramid, where, by a small vertical boring, a plumb-line could have been dropped so as to obtain the exact line of the meridian on the surface, and afterwards on each successive step of the pyramid as it was built up. While the building went on the sloping tunnel was continued backwards to its northern face; and a tunnel ascending to the south was formed of the same size and making the same angle with the horizon. This had puzzled all previous explorers of the pyramid till Mr. Proctor showed that, by stopping up the downward passage at the angle and filling the hollow with water the pole star could be observed by reflexion and thus give the exact direction of the meridian on the upper surface of the pyramid with extreme accuracy, as it was built up slowly year by year.

But at a distance of 127 feet a new feature appears. The ascending tunnel is changed into what is called the Great Gallery, which, while continuing exactly the same floor line as the tunnel, is suddenly raised to a height of 28 feet, with a width of 7 feet on the floor and $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet at the top. Along each side there is a ledge

or seat, 20 inches broad and 21 inches high. The sides do not slope inwards, but are formed of seven courses of stone, each one overlapping the one below by about 3 inches. The whole of this gallery, or inclined corridor, is formed of limestone beautifully smooth, or even polished. The length of this gallery is 156 feet, and its floor terminated at the platform of the pyramid, upon the central line from east to west, when it had reached two-thirds of its total height. This is on the level of the King's Chamber; and it was probably only after the king was dead and his body embalmed and placed in his sarcophagus that the pyramid was completed, the openings of the passages carefully closed up, and the whole exterior covered with a smooth casing of stone, very small portions of which now remain. There are two other features of this gallery which have puzzled the merely antiquarian explorers. These are square holes cut in the sloping benches close to the side walls, and about $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet apart, there being eighteen on each side exactly opposite each other. On each side of the gallery, about half-way up, is a longitudinal groove, which would serve to carry transverse screens which could be slid up or down, and easily wedged in position in order to mark exactly the central line, like the cross hairs in an astronomical telescope. The holes on the benches would serve to carry cross seats on which the observer could be firmly and comfortably seated while observing a transit of sun, star, or planet.

Being open to the south, the Great Gallery would give a magnificent view of the southern sky, and enable observers

to determine the altitudes and azimuths of many stars, and of the superior planets Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. The star Alpha Centauri, which was at that period of the first magnitude though now much diminished in brightness, would, when crossing the meridian, have been situated about the centre of the field of view as seen from this remarkable feature of the pyramid which, Mr. Proctor considers, was the finest transit-instrument ever constructed for naked-eye observations. Tycho Brahé, with his celebrated Quadrant at Uranienburg, did not attain such a degree of accuracy as did these Eastern astronomers nearly 6,000 years ago. One great superiority of the subterranean observatory over any open-air observations that can be made without telescopes is, that by closing up the end, except for the small aperture required to see the object, the brighter stars could be well observed in the daytime.

When we remember that the Great Pyramid covers $13\frac{1}{2}$ acres of ground, that it is truly square and on a truly horizontal base, that each side is accurately directed to a point of the compass, that the angle of its slope is such that the area of each of the four triangular faces is equal to that of a square whose sides are equal to the height of the pyramid; and, further, that the slope of the long descending tunnel is precisely such as to point accurately to the pole star of the epoch at the lowest part of its circuit round the true pole; and, lastly, that all this could only be done, as accurately as it has been done, by the system of subterranean tunnels and galleries that actually exists, while

almost all the details of their construction are shown to be adapted for astronomical observations of the nature required, the conclusion becomes irresistible that they were designed and used for such observations, and that by no other means could the same amount of accuracy have been attained.

I have given a rather full account of what the Pyramid builders really did, because it forms a very important part of the argument I am developing as to the stationary condition of the human intellect during the historical period.

The great majority of educated persons hold the opinion that our wonderful discoveries and inventions in every department of art and science prove that we are really more intellectual and wiser than the men of past ages—that our mental faculties have increased in power. But this idea is totally unfounded. We are the inheritors of the accumulated knowledge of all the ages; and it is quite possible and even probable, that the earliest steps taken in the accumulation of this vast mental treasury required even more thought and a higher intellectual power than any of those taken in our own era.

We can perhaps best understand this by supposing any one of our great men of science to have been born and educated in one of the earliest of the civilisations. If Newton had been born in Egypt in the era of the Pyramid builders, when there were no such sciences as mathematics, perhaps even no decimal notation which makes arithmetic so easy to us, he could probably have done nothing more than they have actually done. In building

up the sciences each of the early steps was the work of a genius. But now that there has been nearly a hundred centuries of discovery and specialisation by thousands or even millions of workers, that by means of writing and of the printing press every discovery is quickly made known, and that ever larger and larger numbers devote their lives to study, the rate of progress becomes quicker and quicker, till the total result is amazingly great. But that does not prove any superiority of the later over the earlier discoveries. There is, therefore, no proof of continuously increasing intellectual power.

But we have now evidence of another kind, which adds to the force of this argument.

Quite recently, papyri have been discovered which give us information as to the ideas, the beliefs, and the aspirations of a period even earlier than that of the Great Pyramid. The result of the study of these and other records of early Egypt is thus stated by Professor Adolf Erman in *The Historian's History of the World*:

"But when one considers the ancient resident of the valley of the Nile as a human being, with desires, emotions, and aspirations almost precisely like our own; a man struggling to solve the same problems of practical Socialism that we are struggling for to-day—then, and then only, can the lessons of ancient Egyptian history be brought home to us in their true meaning, and with their true significance. And clearest of all will that significance be, perhaps, if we constantly bear in mind the possibility that the

whole sweep of Egyptian history, during the three or four thousand years that separated the Pyramid builders from the contemporaries of Alexander, was a time of national decay—a dark age, if you will—in Egyptian history."

That a great historian, from a study of the ideas and social aspirations of the earliest known civilisations, should have arrived at similar views as to the identity of their mental capacity with our own as I have deduced from their scientific attainments, must be held to be a very strong argument in support of the accuracy of our independent conclusions.

CHAPTER V

SPEECH AND WRITING AS PROOFS OF INTELLIGENCE

There is yet another proof that the faculties of mankind at a very early epoch were fully equal to those of our own time. There is perhaps nothing more difficult in its nature, more utterly beyond the mere lower animal, than the faculty of articulate speech possessed by every race of mankind. We cannot but believe that its acquisition was an extremely slow process, and that it is rendered possible by special cerebral developments giving the necessary mental power for its acquirement.

How long a process this would be, it is impossible to say, but it would certainly have had to reach a high degree of perfection before the equally difficult process of inventing a mode of writing could have been brought to such perfection as to facilitate the further development of the higher faculties through poetry on the one hand and the preservation of facts and discoveries, as well as trains of reasoning, on the other.

Now, I wish to call attention to the very important fact that the origin and development of speech, and later, of writing, were apparently almost simultaneous, and certainly quite independent of each other, in countries not very distant apart. This is shown by the radical diversity of the different groups of languages in

Europe, Eastern Asia and North Africa, and the equal diversity of Egyptian, Assyrian, and Chinese writing. All other written characters are believed to be derived from one or other of these, and it is known that the forms and peculiarities of alphabetic characters have been greatly modified by the various materials employed, such as wood and stone slabs, clay, or wax; papyrus, paper or parchment; and whether engraved, impressed or painted, whether written with a reed or quill pen, or with a small brush.

But if intellectual man as a species of mammal had developed by the preservation of variations of survival-value, we should expect to find such an important faculty as speech to have originated in one centre and to have spread rapidly over the world with only slight modifications in isolated communities. The fundamental diversities we find seem to accord better with the conception that when, as a mere animal, his material organism had reached the required degree of perfection, there occurred the spiritual influx which alone enabled him to begin that course of intellectual and moral development, and that marvellous power over the forces of Nature, in which speech and writing, followed by printing, have been such important factors.

In order for man to develop speech he must have possessed a brain and an intellect far above that of the brutes. As in the more fundamental problem of the origin of life, it is admitted that organisation is a product of life—not life of organisation—so we must believe that speech was a product of a brain and an intellect

sufficient for their development. But such brain and intellect were not necessary for the lower animals, which have reached their highest lines of development in the dog, horse, elephant, and ape without making any definite approach to the acquirement of such higher faculties.

CHAPTER VI

SAVAGES NOT MORALLY INFERIOR TO CIVILISED RACES

If the facts and arguments set forth in the preceding chapters are correct we should not expect to find any living examples of the unspiritualised man, since the assumption is that the whole race received the influx which started them on their course of purely human development within a strictly limited period, perhaps of a very few generations or even one generation. The ancestral form—the supposed missing link—would then have become extinct.

If this were not so we should expect to find some isolated groups of speechless man, and of this there is no example; but, on the contrary, the very lowest of existing races are found to possess languages which are often of extreme complexity in grammatical structure and in no way suggestive of the primitive man-animal of which they are supposed to be surviving relics. So long as we got our knowledge respecting them from the low-class Europeans who captured them for slaves or shot them down as wild beasts, we could not possibly acquire any real knowledge of them as human beings. But now that we have more trustworthy accounts of them by intelligent travellers or missionaries, we find ample evidence that when by kindness and sympathy we

penetrate to their inner nature, we discover that they possess human qualities of the same kind as our own. A few examples of what unprejudiced witnesses say of them will be very instructive.

Darwin, after attending a meeting between Captain Fitzroy and the chief of a small island near Tahiti to settle a question of compensation for injury to an English ship, says: "I cannot sufficiently express our surprise at the extreme good sense, the reasoning powers, moderation, candour, and prompt resolution which were displayed on all sides."

Captain Cook himself, who saw them in their primitive condition, speaks of the natives of the Friendly Isles as being "liberal, brave, open and candid, without either suspicion or treachery, cruelty, or revenge"; and a century later Admiral Erskine remarks that "they carry their habits of cleanliness and decency to a higher point than the most civilised nations"; while all the Polynesian races are kind and attentive to the sick and aged, and unlimited hospitality is everywhere practised by them.

Even the Australian aborigines, who are often said to be one of the lowest of human races, are found to possess many good qualities by those who know them best. Mr. Curr, who was for forty years protector of the aborigines in Victoria, says:

"Socially, the black is polite, gay, fond of laughter, and has much *bonhomie* in his composition. . . . The natives are very strict in obeying their laws and customs, even under great temptation. The horror of marrying a woman within the prohibited degrees of relationship, the extreme

grief they manifest at the death of children or relatives, and sometimes even for white men, as illustrated by the native boy who was the sole companion of the unfortunate Kennedy when he was murdered, are sufficient to indicate that they possess affections and a sense of right and wrong not very different from our own."

The fact that the physical characteristics of the Australians are substantially those of the Caucasian race in its lowest types has led me to conclude that these interesting people may have been descended from much more civilised remote ancestors, and are thus an example of degradation rather than of survival.²

Many other illustrations of both intelligence and morality are met with among savage races in all parts of the world; and these, taken as a whole, show a substantial identity of human character, both moral and emotional, with no marked superiority in any race or country. In intellect, where the greatest advance is supposed to have occurred, this may be wholly due to the cumulative effect of successive acquisitions of knowledge handed down from age to age. Euclid and Archimedes were probably the equals of any of our greatest mathematicians of to-day, while the architecture of Greece, of India, and of Central America is little inferior to mediæval Gothic. But none of these, though so different in style, can be said to prove any real advance in intellectual power from that of the builders of the much more ancient temples and

² See my *Australia and New Zealand*, Chap. V., "The Australian Aborigines," where this view was first set forth. (Stanford, 1893.) For cases of *morality* among savages see my *Natural Selection and Tropical Nature*, pp. 199-201.

pyramids of Egypt. This latter country, too, in its high material civilisation and its remarkable religious system, shows itself the equal of any that has succeeded it.

CHAPTER VII

A SELECTIVE AGENCY NEEDED TO IMPROVE CHARACTER

The general result of the facts and arguments now set forth in the merest outline leads us to conclude that there has been no definite advance of morality from age to age, and that even the lowest races, at each period, possessed the same intellectual and moral nature as the higher. The manifestations of this essentially human nature in habits and conduct were often very diverse, in accordance with diversities of the social and moral environment. This is quite in accordance with the now well-established doctrine that the essential character of man, intellectual, emotional, and moral, is inherent in him from birth; that it is subject to great variation from individual to individual; and that its manifestations in conduct can be modified in a very high degree by the influence of public opinion and systematic teaching. These latter changes, however, are *not* hereditary, and it follows that no definite advance in morals can occur in any race *unless there is some selective or segregative agency at work.*

As there is a great amount of misconception on this subject some explanation may be advisable. Many well-educated and intelligent persons seem to think that whatever characters or faculties are hereditary are also necessarily cumulative. They

hear that mental as well as physical characteristics are hereditary; their own observation tells them that there are musical families as well as tall families. They hear that the late Sir Francis Galton wrote a book on *Hereditary Genius*, and perhaps they have read it; but they do not observe that neither he nor anyone else has proved that genius of any kind is cumulative, that is that a man or woman of genius will have, on the average, some one or more children with a greater amount of that special power or faculty than their own. The very contrary of this is really the case. The more a person's talent or mental power is above the average the less chance there is that any of his or her children will have still more of that power than he has. A really great poet, or painter, or musician, appears suddenly in a family of mediocre ability or of no ability at all in that special direction. A few examples may be instructive.

Sir William Herschell was the son of a German musician, and was himself a musician by profession; but he became an astronomical genius, one of the greatest of his age. His son, Sir John Herschell, was a very clever man, with advantages of education and position. He followed his father as an astronomer, and was a great mathematician, but is never considered to be equal to his father. Darwin's most eminent son was a mathematician, not a naturalist.

The reason of this is that heredity follows the law of "recession to mediocrity." This is, that all groups of living things vary around an average or mean as regards each of their characters;

and those near the average are always numerous, while as we approach the extremes in either direction the numbers become less and less. Families follow the same law. If you take a family for three or four generations, including perhaps some hundreds of persons, some will be short, some tall; but the majority will be near the mean, and the tallest of all will be less likely to have taller descendants than themselves than those nearer the average. But the children of the tallest, though generally shorter than their parents, will still tend to be above the average height.

When a character is so useful to its possessor in the struggle for existence as to be of what is termed "survival value," then those that vary most above the average will be preserved or selected generation after generation as long as the increase is useful.

It is because the higher intellectual or moral powers are so rarely of life-preserving value, and are not unfrequently the reverse, that they are not *cumulative*, though they are *hereditary*.

With this explanation we will now proceed to examine somewhat closely our moral position as a nation; what is the nature of our social environment; how it came to be what it is, and what lessons we may learn from it.

CHAPTER VIII

ENVIRONMENT DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

During the eighteenth century our material civilisation, which had long been almost stationary, began to advance with the growth of the physical sciences, but at first with extreme slowness. The earliest steps were made by the application of machinery to some of the domestic arts. Some refinements were made in the manners and customs of our daily life; but there were few, if any, indications of permanent or widespread change, either for better or worse, in our intellectual or moral nature.

The nineteenth century, however, saw the initiation of a great change in the economic environment due to the rapid invention of labour-saving machinery; which, with the equally rapid application of steam power, led to an increase of wealth production such as had never been known on the earth before. During the same period new modes of locomotion were brought into daily use, the facilities for inter-communication were increased a hundred-fold, scientific discoveries opened up to us new and unthought-of mysteries of the universe, and the whole earth was ransacked for its treasures, both vegetable and mineral, to an extent that surpassed all that had been accomplished since the dawn of civilisation.

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