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WOLF-CHILDREN

It is a pity that the present age is so completely absorbed in materialities, at a time when the facilities are so singularly great for a philosophy which would inquire into the constitution of our moral nature. In the North Pacific, we are in contact with tribes of savages ripening, sensibly to the eye, into civilised communities; and we are able to watch the change as dispassionately as if we were in our studies examining the wonders of the minute creation through a microscope. In America, we have before us a living model, blind, mute, deaf, and without the sense of smell; communicating with the external world by the sense of touch alone; yet endowed with a rare intelligence, which permits us to see, through the fourfold veil that shrouds her, the original germs of the human character.¹ Nearer home, we have been from time to time attracted and astonished by the spectacle of children, born of European parents, emerging from forests where they had been lost for a series of years, fallen back, not into the moral condition of savages, but of wild beasts, with the sentiments and even the instincts of their kind obliterated for ever. And now we have several cases before us, occurring in India, of the same lapses from humanity, involving circumstances curious in themselves, but more important than curious, as throwing a strange light upon what before was an impenetrable mystery. It is to these we mean to direct our attention on the present occasion; but before doing so, it will be well just to glance at the natural history of the wild children of Europe.²

The most remarkable specimen, and the best type of the class, was found in the year 1725, in a wood in Hanover. With the appearance of a human being—of a boy about thirteen years of age—he was in every respect a wild animal, walking on all-fours, feeding on grass and moss, and lodging in trees. When captured, he exhibited a strong repugnance to clothing; he could not be induced to lie on a bed, frequently tearing the clothes to express his indignation; and in the absence of his customary lair among the boughs of a tree, he crouched in a corner of the room to sleep. Raw food he devoured with relish, more especially cabbage-leaves and other vegetables, but turned away from the sophistications of cookery. He had no articulate language, expressing his emotions only by the sounds emitted by various animals. Although only five feet three inches, he was remarkably strong; he never exhibited any interest in the female sex; and even in his old age—for he was supposed to be seventy-three when he died—it was only in external manners he had advanced from the character of a wild beast to that of a good-tempered savage, for he was still without consciousness of the Great Spirit.

In other children that were caught subsequently to Peter, for that was the name they gave him, the same character was observable, although with considerable modifications. One of them, a young girl of twelve or thirteen, was not merely without sympathy for persons of the male sex, but she held them all her life in great abhorrence. Her temper was ungovernable; she was fond of blood, which she sucked from the living animal; and was something more than suspected of the cannibal propensity. On one occasion, she was seen to dive as naturally as an otter in a lake, catch a fish, and devour it on the spot. Yet this girl eventually acquired language; was even able to give some indistinct account of her early career in the woods; and towards the close of her life, when subdued by long illness, exhibited few traces of having once been a wild animal. Another, a boy of eleven or twelve, was caught in

¹ See 'The Rudimental,' in No. 391.

² A paper on this subject will be found in *Chambers's Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts*, vol. v. No. 48.

the woods of Canne, in France. He was impatient, capricious, violent; rushing even through crowded streets like an ill-trained dog; slovenly and disgusting in his manners; affected with spasmodic motions of the head and limbs; biting and scratching all who displeased him; and always, when at comparative rest, balancing his body like a wild animal in a menagerie. His senses were incapable of being affected by anything not appealing to his personal feelings: a pistol fired close to his head excited little or no emotion, yet he heard distinctly the cracking of a walnut, or the touch of a hand upon the key which kept him captive. The most delicious perfumes, or the most fetid exhalations, were the same thing to his sense of smell, because these did not affect, one way or other, his relish for his food, which was of a disgusting nature, and which he dragged about the floor like a dog, eating it when besmeared with filth. Like almost all the lower animals, he was affected by the changes of the weather; but on some of these occasions, his feelings approached to the human in their manifestations. When he saw the sun break suddenly from a cloud, he expressed his joy by bursting into convulsive peals of laughter; and one morning, when he awoke, on seeing the ground covered with snow, he leaped out of bed, rushed naked into the garden, rolled himself over and over in the snow, and stuffing handfuls of it into his mouth, devoured it eagerly. Sometimes he shewed signs of a true madness, wringing his hands, gnashing his teeth, and becoming formidable to those about him. But in other moods, the phenomena of nature seemed to tranquillise and sadden him. When the severity of the season, as we are informed by the French physician who had charge of him, had driven every other person out of the garden, he still delighted to walk there; and after taking many turns, would seat himself beside a pond of water. Here his convulsive motions, and the continual balancing of his whole body, diminished, and gave way to a more tranquil attitude; his face gradually assumed the character of sorrow or melancholy reverie, while his eyes were steadfastly fixed on the surface of the water, and he threw into it, from time to time, some withered leaves. In like manner, on a moonlight night, when the rays of the moon entered his room, he seldom failed to awake, and to place himself at the window. Here he would remain for a considerable time, motionless, with his neck extended, and his eyes fixed on the moonlight landscape, and wrapped in a kind of contemplative ecstasy, the silence of which was interrupted only by profound inspirations, accompanied by a slight plaintive noise.

We have only to add, that by the anxious care of the physician, and a thousand ingenious contrivances, the senses of this human animal, with the exception of his hearing, which always remained dull and impassive, were gradually stimulated, and he was even able at length to pronounce two or three words. Here his history breaks off.

The scene of these extraordinary narratives has hitherto been confined to Europe; but we have now to draw attention to the wild children of India. It happens, fortunately, that in this case the character of the testimony is unimpeachable; for although brought forward in a brief, rough pamphlet, published in a provincial town, and merely said to be 'by an Indian Official,' we recognise both in the manner and matter the pen of Colonel Sleeman, the British Resident at the court of Lucknow, whose invaluable services in putting down thuggee and dacoitee in India we have already described to our readers.³

The district of Sultanpoor, in the kingdom of Oude, a portion of the great plain of the Ganges, is watered by the Goomtee River, a navigable stream, about 140 yards broad, the banks of which are much infested by wolves. These animals are protected by the superstition of the Hindoos, and to such an extent, that a village community within whose boundaries a single drop of their blood has been shed, is believed to be doomed to destruction. The wolf is safe—but from a very different reason—even from those vagrant tribes who have no permanent abiding-place, but bivouac in the jungle, and feed upon jackals, reptiles—anything, and who make a trade of catching and selling such wild animals as they consider too valuable to eat. The reason why the vulpine ravager is spared by

³ See 'Gang-Robbers of India,' in Nos. 360 and 361 of this Journal. The title of the pamphlet alluded to is, *An Account of Wolves nurturing Children in their Dens*. By an Indian Official. Plymouth: Jenkin Thomas, printer. 1852.

these wretches is—*that wolves devour children!* Not, however, that the wanderers have any dislike to children, but they are tempted by the jewels with which they are adorned; and knowing the dens of the animals, they make this fearful gold-seeking a part of their business. The adornment of their persons with jewellery is a passion with the Hindoos which nothing can overcome. Vast numbers of women—even those of the most infamous class—are murdered for the sake of their ornaments, yet the lesson is lost upon the survivors. Vast numbers of children, too, fall victims in the same way, and from the same cause, or are permitted, by those who shrink from murder, to be carried off and devoured by the wolves; yet no Indian mother can withstand the temptation to bedizen her child, whenever it is in her power, with bracelets, necklaces, and other ornaments of gold and silver. So much is necessary as an introduction to the incidents that follow.

One day, a trooper, like Spenser's gentle knight, 'was pricking on the plain,' near the banks of the Goomtee. He was within a short distance of Chandour, a village about ten miles from Sultanpoor, the capital of the district, when he halted to observe a large female wolf and her whelps come out of a wood near the roadside, and go down to the river to drink. There were four whelps. Four!—surely not more than three; for the fourth of the juvenile company was as little like a wolf as possible. The horseman stared; for in fact it was a boy, going on all-fours like his comrades, evidently on excellent terms with them all, and guarded, as well as the rest, by the dam with the same jealous care which that exemplary mother, but unpleasant neighbour, bestows upon her progeny. The trooper sat still in his saddle watching this curious company till they had satisfied their thirst; but as soon as they commenced their return, he put spurs to his horse, to intercept the boy. Off ran the wolves, and off ran the boy helter-skelter—the latter keeping close up with the dam; and the horseman, owing to the unevenness of the ground, found it impossible to overtake them before they had all entered their den. He was determined, nevertheless, to attain his object, and assembling some people from the neighbouring village with pickaxes, they began to dig in the usual way into the hole. Having made an excavation of six or eight feet, the garrison evacuated the place—the wolf, the three whelps, and the boy, leaping suddenly out and taking to flight. The trooper instantly threw himself upon his horse, and set off in pursuit, followed by the fleetest of the party; and the ground over which they had to fly being this time more even, he at length headed the chase, and turned the whole back upon the men on foot. These secured the boy, and, according to prescriptive rule, allowed the wolf and her three whelps to go on their way.

'They took the boy to the village,' says Colonel Sleeman, 'but had to tie him, for he was very restive, and struggled hard to rush into every hole or den they came near. They tried to make him speak, but could get nothing from him but an angry growl or snarl. He was kept for several days at the village, and a large crowd assembled every day to see him. When a grown-up person came near him, he became alarmed, and tried to steal away; but when a child came near him, he rushed at it with a fierce snarl, like that of a dog, and tried to bite it. When any cooked meat was put near him, he rejected it in disgust; but when raw meat was offered, he seized it with avidity, put it upon the ground, under his hands, like a dog, and ate it with evident pleasure. He would not let any one come near while he was eating, but he made no objection to a dog's coming and sharing his food with him.'

This wild boy was sent to Captain Nicholetts, the European officer commanding the 1st regiment of Oude Local Infantry, stationed at Sultanpoor. He lived only three years after his capture, and died in August 1850. According to Captain Nicholetts' account of him, he was very inoffensive except when teased, and would then growl and snarl. He came to eat anything that was thrown to him, although much preferring raw flesh. He was very fond of uncooked bones, masticating them apparently with as much ease as meat; and he had likewise a still more curious partiality for small stones and earth. So great was his appetite, that he has been known to eat half a lamb at one meal; and buttermilk he would drink by the pitcher full without seeming to draw breath. He would never submit to wear any article of dress even in the coldest weather; and when a quilt stuffed with cotton was given to him, 'he tore it to pieces, and ate a portion of it—cotton and all—with his bread every day.' The

countenance of the boy was repulsive, and his habits filthy in the extreme. He was never known to smile; and although fond of dogs and jackals, formed no attachment for any human being. Even when a favourite pariah dog, which used to feed with him, was shot for having fallen under suspicion of taking the lion's share of the meal, he appeared to be quite indifferent. He sometimes walked erect; but generally ran on all-fours—more especially to his food when it was placed at a distance from him.

Another of these wolf-children was carried off from his parents at Chupra (twenty miles from Sultanpoor), when he was three years of age. They were at work in the field, the man cutting his crop of wheat and pulse, and the woman gleaning after him, with the child sitting on the grass. Suddenly, there rushed into the family party, from behind a bush, a gaunt wolf, and seizing the boy by the loins, ran off with him to a neighbouring ravine. The mother followed with loud screams, which brought the whole village to her assistance; but they soon lost sight of the wolf and his prey, and the boy was heard no more of for six years. At the end of that time, he was found by two sipahis associating, as in the former case, with wolves, and caught by the leg when he had got half-way into the den. He was very ferocious when drawn out, biting at his deliverers, and seizing hold of the barrel of one of their guns with his teeth. They secured him, however, and carried him home, when they fed him on raw flesh, hares, and birds, till they found the charge too onerous, and gave him up to the public charity of the village till he should be recognised by his parents. This actually came to pass. His mother, by that time a widow, hearing a report of the strange boy at Koeleapoor, hastened to the place from her own village of Chupra, and by means of indubitable marks upon his person, recognised her child, transformed into a wild animal. She carried him home with her; but finding him destitute of natural affection, and in other respects wholly irreclaimable, at the end of two months she left him to the common charity of the village.

When this boy drank, he dipped his face in the water, and sucked. The front of his elbows and knees had become hardened from going on all-fours with the wolves. The village boys amused themselves by throwing frogs to him, which he caught and devoured; and when a bullock died and was skinned, he resorted to the carcass like the dogs of the place, and fed upon the carrion. His body smelled offensively. He remained in the village during the day, for the sake of what he could get to eat, but always went off to the jungle at night. In other particulars, his habits resembled those already described. We have only to add respecting him, that, in November 1850, he was sent from Sultanpoor, under the charge of his mother, to Colonel Sleeman—then probably at Lucknow—but something alarming him on the way, he ran into a jungle, and had not been recovered at the date of the last dispatch.

We pass over three other narratives of a similar kind, that present nothing peculiar, and shall conclude with one more specimen of the Indian wolf-boy. This human animal was captured, like the first we have described, by a trooper, with the assistance of another person on foot. When placed on the pommel of the saddle, he tore the horseman's clothes, and, although his hands were tied, contrived to bite him severely in several places. He was taken to Bondee, where the rajah took charge of him till he was carried off by Janoo, a lad who was khidmutgar (table-attendant) to a travelling Cashmere merchant. The boy was then apparently about twelve years of age, and went upon all-fours, although he could stand, and go awkwardly on his legs when threatened. Under Janoo's attention, however, in beating and rubbing his legs with oil, he learned to walk like other human beings. But the vulpine smell continued to be very offensive, although his body was rubbed for some months with mustard-seed soaked in water, and he was compelled during the discipline to live on rice, pulse, and bread. He slept under the mango-tree, where Janoo himself lodged, but was always tied to a tent-pin.

One night, when the wild boy was lying asleep under his tree, Janoo saw two wolves come up stealthily, and smell at him. They touched him, and he awoke; and rising from his reclining posture, he put his hands upon the heads of his visitors, and they licked his face. They capered round him, and he threw straw and leaves at them. The khidmutgar gave up his protégé for lost; but presently he became convinced that they were only at play, and he kept quiet. He at length gained confidence

enough to drive the wolves away; but they soon came back, and resumed their sport for a time. The next night, three playfellows made their appearance, and in a few nights after, four. They came four or five times, till Janoo lost all his fear of them. When the Cashmere merchant returned to Lucknow, where his establishment was, Janoo still carried his pet with him, tied by a string to his own arm; and, to make him useful according to his capacity, with a bundle on his head. At every jungle they passed, however, the boy would throw down the bundle, and attempt to dart into the thicket; repeating the insubordination, though repeatedly beaten for it, till he was fairly subdued, and became docile by degrees. The greatest difficulty was to get him to wear clothes, which to the last he often injured or destroyed, by rubbing them against posts like a beast, when some part of his body itched. Some months after their arrival at Lucknow, Janoo was sent away from the place for a day or two on some business, and on his return he found that the wild boy had escaped. He was never more seen.

It is a curious circumstance, that the wild children, whether of Europe or Asia, have never been found above a certain age. They do not grow into adults in the woods. Colonel Sleeman thinks their lives may be cut short by their living exclusively on animal food; but to some of them, as we have seen, a vegetable diet has been habitual. The probability seems to be, that with increasing years, their added boldness and consciousness of strength may lead them into fatal adventures with their brethren of the forest. As for the protection of the animal by which they were originally nurtured becoming powerless from age, which is another hypothesis, that supposes too romantic a system of patronage and dependence. The head of the family must have several successive series of descendants to care for after the arrival of the stranger, and it is far more probable that the wild boy is obliged to turn out with his playmates, when they are ordered to shift for themselves, than that he alone remains a fixture at home. That protection of some kind at first is a necessary condition of his surviving at all, there can be no manner of doubt, although it does not follow that a wolf is always the patron. The different habits of some of the European children we have mentioned, shew a totally different course of education. If, for instance, they had been nurtured by wolves, they would no more have learned to climb trees than to fly in the air. As for the female specimen we have mentioned, hers was obviously an exceptional case. She was lost, as appeared from her own statement, when old enough to work at some employment, and a club she used as a weapon was one of her earliest recollections.

The wild children of India, however, were obviously indebted to wolves for their miserable lives; and it is not so difficult as at first sight might be supposed, to imagine the possibility of such an occurrence. The parent wolves are so careful of their progeny, that they feed them for some time with half-digested food, disgorged by themselves; and after that—if we may believe Buffon, who seems as familiar with the interior of a den as if he had boarded and lodged in the family—they bring home to them live animals, such as hares and rabbits. These the young wolves play with, and when at length they are hungry, kill: the mother then for the first time interfering, to divide the prey in equal portions. But in the case of a child being brought to the den—a child accustomed, in all probability, to tyrannise over the whelps of pariah dogs and other young animals, they would find it far easier to play than to kill; and if we only suppose the whole family going to sleep together, and the parents bringing home fresh food in the morning—contingencies not highly improbable—the mystery is solved, although the marvel remains. It may be added, that such wolves as we have an opportunity of observing in menageries, are always gentle and playful when young, and it is only time that develops the latent ferocity of a character the most detestable, perhaps, in the whole animal kingdom. Cowardly and cruel in equal proportion, the wolf has no defenders. 'In short,' says Goldsmith—probably translating Buffon, for we have not the latter at hand to ascertain—'every way offensive, a savage aspect, a frightful howl, an insupportable odour, a perverse disposition, fierce habits, he is hateful while living, and useless when dead.'

But what, then, is man, whom mere accidental association for a few years can strip of the faculties inherent in his race and convert into a wolf? The lower animals retain their instincts in all circumstances. The kitten, brought up from birth on its mistress's lap, imbibes none of her tastes in

food or anything else. It rejects vegetables, sweets, fruits, all drinks but water or milk, and although content to satisfy its hunger with dressed meat, darts with an eager growl upon raw flesh. Man alone is the creature of imitation in good or in bad. His faculties and instincts, although containing the *germ* of everything noble, are not independent and self-existing like those of the brutes. This fact accounts for the difference observable, in an almost stereotyped form, in the different classes of society; it affords a hint to legislators touching their obligation to use the power they possess in elevating, by means of education, the character of the more degraded portions of the community; and it brings home to us all the great lesson of sympathy for the bad as well as the afflicted—both victims alike of *circumstances*, over which they in many cases have nearly as little control as the wild children of the desert.

THE LITERATURE OF PARLIAMENT

The Imperial Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland, in addition to its other varied and important functions, fulfils, through one of its branches, that of a great national book manufactory. Every session, the House of Commons issues a whole library of valuable works, containing information of the most ample and searching kind on subjects of a very miscellaneous character. These are the Blue-books, of which everybody has heard: many jokes are extant as to their imposing bulk and great weight, literally and figuratively; and a generation eminently addicted to light reading, may well look with horror on these thick and closely-printed folios. But, in truth, they are not for the mere *reader*: they are for the historian, and student of any given subject; they are storehouses of material, not digested treatises. True it is, that their great size sometimes defeats its object—the valuable portion of the material is sometimes buried under the comparatively worthless heap that surrounds it—the golden grains lost amid the chaff. But in a case of this kind, the error of redundancy is one on the safe side; let a subject in all its bearings be thoroughly and fully brought up, and it is the fault or failing of him who sets about the study of it, if he is appalled at the amount of information on which he has to work, or cannot discriminate and seize upon the salient points, or on those which are necessary for his own special purposes.

Few persons, we believe, who have not had occasion to consult these parliamentary volumes in a systematic manner, are at all aware of the immense labour that is bestowed upon them, and the care and completeness with which they are compiled and arranged. Indeed, we daresay few readers have any accurate notions of the actual number of parliamentary papers annually issued, or of the nature of their contents. From even a very cursory examination of the literary result of a parliamentary session, the previously uninformed investigator could not fail to rise with a greatly augmented estimate of the functions of the great ruling body of the state—the guarding and directing power in the multitudinous affairs of the British Empire—an empire that extends over every possible variety of country and climate, and includes under its powerful, yet mild and beneficent sway, tribes of every colour of skin, and of every shade of religious belief. Such a survey, in fact, tends to impress one more fully and immediately than could well be fancied, with the magnitude of the business of the British legislature, and the consequent weighty responsibilities imposed upon its members. But, great as the burden is, it is distributed over so many shoulders, that it appears to press heavily, and really does so, only on a few who support it at the more trying points.

The session 1851 is the latest of whose labours, as they appear in the form of parliamentary records, an account can be given. By the admirable system of arrangement we have referred to, each parliamentary 'paper,' whether it issues in the shape of a bulky Blue-book—that is to say, as a thick, stitched folio volume, in a dark-blue cover—or as a mere 'paper'—an uncovered folio of a single sheet of two or four pages, or several stitched together, but not attaining the dignity of the blue cover—is marked as belonging to a certain class; and when the issue of the session is complete, a full set of 'Titles, Contents, and Indexes' to the whole is supplied, so that they can all be classified and bound up in due order with the utmost ease and celerity. The *Titles, Contents, and Indexes to the Sessional Printed Papers of Session 1851* are at present before us, in the shape of a folio Blue-book about an inch and a half thick, from which we think we may pick some facts of interest.

It must be premised, that the session 1851 was considered by politicians a peculiarly barren and unfruitful one, as the Great Exhibition, in conjunction with ministerial difficulties, and the monster debates on the Ecclesiastical Titles' Bill, tended greatly to impede the ordinary business of the Houses, and gave an air of tedium and languor to the whole proceedings. Nevertheless, the papers for the year amount to no less than sixty volumes! Of these, the first six contain Public Bills. A bill, as most of our readers must be aware, is a measure submitted to the consideration of parliament with the view of its being adopted into the legal code of the country, for which it must receive the sanction of both

Houses and the assent of the crown. When a bill has 'passed' through the Lords and Commons, and received the royal assent, it becomes an 'act'—that is, a law. A bill, in passing through the Houses, is subjected to numerous amendments and alterations in form, and is often printed, for the use of members and other parties interested, three or four times after such alterations, before it comes forth in its final and permanent form as an act. Thus, the famous Ecclesiastical Titles' Bill is to be found in three several shapes among the bills before it reappears for the fourth time as an act. Again, the word 'public' prefixed to these six volumes of bills, reminds us of the vast amount of business that comes before parliament and its committees in the shape of 'private' bills, of which no record appears here. These are bills of special and individual application, such as when a public company seeks an act of incorporation, the possessor of an entailed estate desires to sell a portion of ground, a railway directory asks for powers of various kinds, and so on.

An examination of the contents of these six volumes would shew how many and diverse are the subjects that turn up in parliament in the course of a single and brief session; but to enter on it satisfactorily would require a great amount of space, and might, after all, be more tedious than profitable. A glance at those actually passed may suffice. These were 106 in number: the first is, 'An Act to amend the Passengers' Act of 1849;' and the hundred and sixth, 'An Act to appoint Commissioners to inquire into the Existence of Bribery in St Albans.' Besides the acts of an ordinary or routine character, we find the following among the subjects legislated on:—The Marine Forces, Leases for Mills in Ireland, Protection of Original Designs, the Protection of Servants and Apprentices, the Sale of Arsenic, Highways in Wales, Sites for Schools, Herring-Fishery, Prisons in Scotland, Common Lodging-Houses, Window and House Duties, Marriages in India, Ecclesiastical Titles, Smithfield Market, Settlement of the Boundaries of Canada and New Brunswick, Highland Roads and Bridges, Gunpowder Magazine at Liverpool, Management of the Insane in India, Lands in New Zealand, Representative Peers of Scotland, Emigration, Law of Evidence, Criminal Justice, &c.

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