

CHAPTER 2 DIFFERENCES IN CIVILIZATION —TO WHAT DUE

In attempting to discover the law of human progress, the first step must be to determine the essential nature of these differences which we describe as differences in civilization.

That the current philosophy, which attributes social progress to changes wrought in the nature of man, does not accord with historical facts, we have already seen. And we may also see, if we consider them, that the differences between communities in different stages of civilization cannot be ascribed to innate differences in the individuals who compose these communities. That there are natural differences is true, and that there is such a thing as hereditary transmission of peculiarities is undoubtedly true; but the great differences between men in different states of society cannot be explained in this way. The influence of heredity, which it is now the fashion to rate so highly, is as nothing compared with the influences which mold the man after he comes into the world. What is more ingrained in habit than language, which becomes not merely an automatic trick of the muscles, but the medium of thought? What persists longer, or will quicker show nationality? Yet we are not born with a predisposition to any language. Our mother tongue is our mother tongue only because we learned it in infancy. Although his ancestors have thought and spoken in one language for countless generations, a child who hears from the first nothing else, will learn with equal facility any other

We must first determine the essential nature of differences in civilization.

They are not differences in the nature of man, or differences in the individuals who compose these communities.

The influence of heredity is nothing compared with the influences of the community in which a child is raised. From the community he gets his language

and customs.

tongue. And so of other national or local or class peculiarities. They seem to be matters of education and habit, not of transmission. Cases of white children captured by Indians in infancy and brought up in the wigwam show this. They become thorough Indians. And so, I believe, with children brought up by gypsies.

That this is not so true of children of other distinctly marked races brought up by whites is, I think, because these children aren't treated the same as white children.

That this is not so true of the children of Indians or other distinctly marked races brought up by whites is, I think, due to the fact that they are never treated precisely as white children. A gentleman who had taught a colored school once told me that he thought the colored children, up to the age of ten or twelve, were really brighter and learned more readily than white children, but that after that age they seemed to get dull and careless. He thought this proof of innate race inferiority, and so did I at the time. But I afterward heard a highly intelligent Negro gentleman (Bishop Hillery) incidentally make a remark which to my mind seems a sufficient explanation. He said: "Our children, when they are young, are fully as bright as white children, and learn as readily. But as soon as they get old enough to appreciate their status—to realize that they are looked upon as belonging to an inferior race, and can never hope to be anything more than cooks, waiters, or something of that sort, they lose their ambition and cease to keep up." And to this he might have added, that being the children of poor, uncultivated and unambitious parents, home influences told against them. For, I believe it is a matter of common observation that in the primary part of education the children of ignorant parents are quite as receptive as the children of intelligent parents, but by and by the latter, as a general rule, pull ahead and make the most intelligent men and women. The reason is plain. As to the first simple things which they learn only at school, they are

on a par, but as their studies become more complex, the child who at home is accustomed to good English, hears intelligent conversation, has access to books, can get questions answered, etc., has an advantage which tells.

The same thing may be seen later in life. Take a man who has raised himself from the ranks of common labor, and just as he is brought into contact with men of culture and men of affairs, will he become more intelligent and polished. Take two brothers, the sons of poor parents, brought up in the same home and in the same way. One is put to a rude trade, and never gets beyond the necessity of making a living by hard daily labor; the other, commencing as an errand boy, gets a start in another direction, and becomes finally a successful lawyer, merchant, or politician. At forty or fifty the contrast between them will be striking, and the unreflecting will credit it to the greater natural ability which has enabled the one to push himself ahead. But just as striking a difference in manners and intelligence will be manifested between two sisters, one of whom, married to a man who has remained poor, has her life fretted with petty cares and devoid of opportunities, and the other of whom has married a man whose subsequent position brings her into cultured society and opens to her opportunities which refine taste and expand intelligence. And so deteriorations may be seen. That "evil communications corrupt good manners" is but an expression of the general law that human character is profoundly modified by its conditions and surroundings.

Human character is profoundly modified by its conditions and surroundings.

I remember once seeing, in a Brazilian seaport, a Negro man dressed in what was an evident attempt at the height of fashion, but without shoes and stockings. One of the sailors with whom I was in company, and who had made some runs in the slave trade, had a theory that a Negro was not a man, but a sort of monkey, and pointed to this as evidence in

Many of the facts offered as examples of hereditary transmission really do not apply.

For instance, that many criminals and recipients of public relief in New York have descended from a pauper three or four generations back, is cited as showing hereditary transmission. But this simply shows what children raised by paupers or criminals may absorb from their surroundings.

proof, contending that it was not natural for a Negro to wear shoes, and that in his wild state he would wear no clothes at all. I afterward learned that it was not considered "the thing" there for slaves to wear shoes, just as in England it is not considered the thing for a faultlessly attired butler to wear jewelry, though for that matter I have since seen white men at liberty to dress as they pleased get themselves up as incongruously as the Brazilian slave. But a great many of the facts adduced as showing hereditary transmission have really no more bearing than this of our forecastle Darwinian.

That, for instance, a large number of criminals and recipients of public relief in New York have been shown to have descended from a pauper three or four generations back is extensively cited as showing hereditary transmission. But it shows nothing of the kind, inasmuch as an adequate explanation of the facts is nearer. Paupers will raise paupers, even if the children be not their own, just as familiar contact with criminals will make criminals of the children of virtuous parents. To learn to rely on charity is necessarily to lose the self respect and independence necessary for self-reliance when the struggle is hard. So true is this that, as is well known, charity has the effect of increasing the demand for charity, and it is an open question whether public relief and private alms do not in this way do far more harm than good. And so of the disposition of children to show the same feelings, tastes, prejudices, or talents as their parents. They imbibe these dispositions just as they imbibe from their habitual associates. And the exceptions prove the rule, as dislikes or revulsions may be excited.

And there is, I think, a subtler influence which often accounts for what are looked upon as atavisms of character—the same influence that makes the boy who reads dime novels want to be a pirate. I once knew a gentleman in whose veins

ran the blood of Indian chiefs. He used to tell me traditions learned from his grandfather, which illustrated what is difficult for a white man to comprehend—the Indian habit of thought, the intense but patient blood thirst of the trail, and the fortitude of the stake. From the way in which he dwelt on these, I have no doubt that under certain circumstances, highly educated, civilized man that he was, he would have shown traits which would have been looked on as due to his Indian blood; but which in reality would have been sufficiently explained by the broodings of his imagination upon the deeds of his ancestors.¹

In any large community we may see, as between different classes and groups, differences of the same kind as those which exist between communities which we speak of as differing in civilization—differences of knowledge, belief, customs, tastes, and speech, which in their extremes show among people of the same race, living in the same country, differences almost as great as those between civilized and savage communities. As all stages of social development, from the stone age up, are yet to be found in contemporaneously existing communities, so in the same country and in the same city are to be found, side by side, groups which show similar diversities. In such countries as England and Germany, children of the same race, born and reared in the same place, will grow up, speaking the language differently, holding different beliefs, following different customs, and showing different tastes; and even in such a country as the

In a single city may be found, side by side, groups which show considerable diversities, with different modes of speech, different beliefs, different customs and tastes.

¹ Wordsworth, in his "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle" has in highly poetical form alluded to this influence:

Armor rusting in his halls
On the blood of Clifford calls:
"Quell the Scot," exclaims the lance;
"Bear me to the heart of France,"
Is the longing of the shield.

United States differences of the same kind, though not of the same degree, may be seen between different circles or groups.

These differences are not innate, but are derived from association.

But these differences are certainly not innate. No baby is born a Methodist or Catholic, to drop its h's or to sound them. All these differences which distinguish different groups or circles are derived from association in these circles.

The Janissaries were made up of youths torn from Christian parents at an early age, but they were none the less fanatical Moslems and none the less exhibited all the Turkish traits; the Jesuits and other orders show distinct character, but it is certainly not perpetuated by hereditary transmissions; and even such associations as schools or regiments, where the components remain but a short time and are constantly changing, exhibit general characteristics, which are the result of mental impressions perpetuated by association.

It is this body of traditions, beliefs, customs, laws, habits, and associations, which arise in every community and surround every individual, that is the great element in determining national character.

Now, it is this body of traditions, beliefs, customs, laws, habits and associations, which arise in every community and which surround every individual—this “super-organic environment,” as Herbert Spencer calls it, that, as I take it, is the great element in determining national character. It is this, rather than hereditary transmission, which makes the Englishman differ from the Frenchman, the German from the Italian, the American from the Chinaman, and the civilized man from the savage man. It is in this way that national traits are preserved, extended, or altered.

Heredity may develop or alter qualities, but this is more true of the physical than of the mental parts of a man, and more true of animals than even of the physical part of man.

Within certain limits, or, if you choose, without limits in itself, hereditary transmission may develop or alter qualities, but this is much more true of the physical than of the mental part of a man, and much more true of animals than it is even of the physical part of man. Deductions from the breeding of pigeons or cattle will not apply to man, and the reason is clear. The life of man, even in his rudest state, is infinitely

more complex. He is constantly acted on by an infinitely greater number of influences, amid which the relative influence of heredity becomes less and less. A race of men with no greater mental activity than the animals—men who only ate, drank, slept, and propagated—might, I doubt not, by careful treatment and selection in breeding, be made, in course of time, to exhibit as great diversities in bodily shape and character as similar means have produced in the domestic animals. But there are no such men; and in men as they are, mental influences, acting through the mind upon the body, would constantly interrupt the process. You cannot fatten a man whose mind is on the strain, by cooping him up and feeding him as you would fatten a pig. In all probability men have been upon the earth longer than many species of animals. They have been separated from each other under differences of climate that produce the most marked differences in animals, and yet the physical differences between the different races of men are hardly greater than the difference between white horses and black horses—they are certainly nothing like as great as between dogs of the same subspecies, as, for instance, the different varieties of the terrier or spaniel. And even these physical differences between races of men, it is held by those who account for them by natural selection and hereditary transmission, were brought out when man was much nearer the animal—that is to say, when he had less mind.

And if this be true of the physical constitution of man, in how much higher degree is it true of his mental constitution? All our physical parts we bring with us into the world; but the mind develops afterward.

There is a stage in the growth of every organism in which it cannot be told, except by the environment, whether the animal that is to be will be fish or reptile, monkey or man.

Because man is acted upon by so many more influences than are animals, the relative importance of heredity is much less in man than in animals.

The mental constitution of man must be even less influenced by heredity, since all our physical parts we bring with us into the world, but the mind develops afterward.

Whether the mind of the newborn develops to be English, German, American, or Chinese, depends entirely on the social environment in which it is placed.

If infants from a highly developed country somehow were raised without civilization, they would be worse off than savages.

And children of savages, if raised in a civilized community, would be just like the children of civilization.

And so with the newborn infant; whether the mind that is yet to awake to consciousness and power is to be English or German, American or Chinese—the mind of a civilized man or the mind of a savage—depends entirely on the social environment in which it is placed.

Take a number of infants born of the most highly civilized parents and transport them to an uninhabited country. Suppose them in some miraculous way to be sustained until they come of age to take care of themselves, and what would you have? More helpless savages than any we know of. They would have fire to discover; the rudest tools and weapons to invent; language to construct. They would, in short, have to stumble their way to the simplest knowledge which the lowest races now possess, just as a child learns to walk. That they would in time do all these things I have not the slightest doubt, for all these possibilities are latent in the human mind just as the power of walking is latent in the human frame, but I do not believe they would do them any better or worse, any slower or quicker, than the children of barbarian parents placed in the same conditions. Given the very highest mental powers that exceptional individuals have ever displayed, and what could mankind be if one generation were separated from the next by an interval of time, as are the seventeen-year locusts? One such interval would reduce mankind, not to savagery, but to a condition compared with which savagery, as we know it, would seem civilization.

And, reversely, suppose a number of savage infants could, unknown to the mothers, for even this would be necessary to make the experiment a fair one, be substituted for as many children of civilization, can we suppose that growing up they would show any difference? I think no one who has mixed much with different peoples and classes will think so. The

great lesson that is thus learned is that “human nature is human nature all the world over.” And this lesson, too, may be learned in the library. I speak not so much of the accounts of travelers, for the accounts given of savages by the civilized men who write books are very often just such accounts as savages would give of us did they make flying visits and then write books; but of those mementos of the life and thoughts of other times and other peoples, which, translated into our language of today, are like glimpses of our own lives and gleams of our own thought. The feeling they inspire is that of the essential similarity of men. “This,” says Emanuel Deutsch— “this is the end of all investigation into history or art. They were even as we are.”

Human nature is human nature all the world over.

There is a people to be found in all parts of the world who well illustrate what peculiarities are due to hereditary transmission and what to transmission by association. The Jews have maintained the purity of their blood more scrupulously and for a far longer time than any of the European races, yet I am inclined to think that the only characteristic that can be attributed to this Is that of physiognomy, and this is in reality far less marked than is conventionally supposed, as any one who will take the trouble may see on observation. Although they have constantly married among themselves, the Jews have everywhere been modified by their surroundings—the English, Russian, Polish, German, and Oriental Jews differing from each other in many respects as much as do the other people of those countries. Yet they have much in common, and have everywhere preserved their individuality. The reason is clear. It is the Hebrew religion— and certainly religion is not transmitted by generation, but by association—which has everywhere preserved the distinctiveness of the Hebrew race. This religion, which children derive, not as

The Jews provide an example. They have maintained purity of blood, yet everywhere have been modified by their surroundings—the Jews in various countries differing from each other in many respects as much as do others in those countries.

That Jews have everywhere preserved their individuality is due to their religion, transmitted not by generation but by association.

They have built up and maintained a certain peculiar environment which gives a distinctive character.

they derive their physical characteristics, but by precept and association, is not merely exclusive in its teachings, but has, by engendering suspicion and dislike, produced a powerful outside pressure which, even more than its precepts, has everywhere constituted of the Jews a community within a community. Thus has been built up and maintained a certain peculiar environment which gives a distinctive character. Jewish intermarriage has been the effect, not the cause of this. What persecution which stopped short of taking Jewish children from their parents and bringing them up outside of this peculiar environment could not accomplish, will be accomplished by the lessening intensity of religious belief, as is already evident in the United States, where the distinction between Jew and Gentile is fast disappearing.

The influence of this environment will explain what is so often taken as proof of race differences.

And it seems to me that the influence of this social net or environment will explain what is so often taken as proof of race differences—the difficulty which less civilized races show in receiving higher civilization, and the manner in which some of them melt away before it. Just as one social environment persists, so does it render it difficult or impossible for those subject to it to accept another.

The Chinese in California provide another example. They acquire American modes of working and trading, but in other respects do not change, because the Chinese environment still surrounds them, living in Chinese communities.

The Chinese character is fixed if that of any people is. Yet the Chinese in California acquire American modes of working, trading, the use of machinery, etc., with such facility as to prove that they have no lack of flexibility, or natural capacity. That they do not change in other respects is due to the Chinese environment that still persists and still surrounds them. Coming from China, they look forward to return to China, and live while here in a little China of their own, just as the Englishmen in India maintain a little England. It is not merely that we naturally seek association with those who share our peculiarities, and that thus language, religion and

custom tend to persist where individuals are not absolutely isolated; but that these differences provoke an external pressure, which compels such association.

These obvious principles fully account for all the phenomena which are seen in the meeting of one stage or body of culture with another, without resort to the theory of ingrained differences. For instance, as comparative philology has shown, the Hindoo is of the same race as his English conqueror, and individual instances have abundantly shown that if he could be placed completely and exclusively in the English environment (which, as before stated, could be thoroughly done only by placing infants in English families in such a way that neither they, as they grow up, nor those around them, would be conscious of any distinction) one generation would be all required to thoroughly implant European civilization. But the progress of English ideas and habits in India must be necessarily very slow, because they meet there the web of ideas and habits constantly perpetuated through an immense population, and interlaced with every act of life.

Mr. Bagehot (Physics and Politics) endeavors to explain the reason why barbarians waste away before our civilization, while they did not before that of the ancients, by assuming that the progress of civilization has given us tougher physical constitutions. After alluding to the fact that there is no lament in any classical writer for the barbarians, but that everywhere the barbarian endured the contact with the Roman and the Roman allied himself to the barbarian, he says (pp. 47-8):

“Savages in the first year of the Christian era were pretty much what they were in the eighteen hundredth; and if they stood the contact of ancient civilized men and cannot stand ours, it follows that our race is

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Bagehot says that modern civilized man has a tougher physical constitution than barbarians, and that's why barbarians who come in contact with civilized society tend to contract diseases and die.

presumably tougher than the ancient; for we have to bear, and do bear, the seeds of greater diseases than the ancients carried with them. We may use, perhaps, the unvarying savage as a meter to gauge the vigor of the constitution to whose contact he is exposed."

Mr. Bagehot does not attempt to explain how it is that eighteen hundred years ago civilization did not give the like relative advantage over barbarism that it does now. But there is no use of talking about that, or of the lack of proof that the human constitution has been a whit improved. To any one who has seen how the contact of our civilization affects the inferior races, a much readier though less flattering explanation will occur.

But there is no proof that our constitutions are tougher. Rather, we have the knowledge and means to treat such diseases, while the barbarian has neither.

It is not because our constitutions are naturally tougher than those of the savage, that diseases which are comparatively innocuous to us are certain death to him. It is that we know and have the means of treating those diseases, while he is destitute both of knowledge and means. The same diseases with which the scum of civilization that floats in its advance inoculates the savage would prove as destructive to civilized men, if they knew no better than to let them run, as he in his ignorance has to let them run; and as a matter of fact they were as destructive, until we found out how to treat them. And not merely this, but the effect of the impingement of civilization upon barbarism is to weaken the power of the savage without bringing him into the conditions that give power to the civilized man. While his habits and customs still tend to persist, and do persist as far as they can, the conditions to which they were adapted are forcibly changed. He is a hunter in a land stripped of game; a warrior deprived of his arms and called on to plead in legal technicalities. He is not merely placed between cultures, but, as Mr. Bagehot says of the European half-breeds in India, he is placed between moralities, and learns the vices of civilization without its virtues. He loses his accus-

When he encounters civilization, his environment is changed but his way of dealing with it is not. He learns the vices of civilization without its virtues.

tomed means of subsistence, he loses self-respect, he loses morality; he deteriorates and dies away. The miserable creatures who may be seen hanging around frontier towns or railroad stations, ready to beg, or steal, or solicit a viler commerce, are not fair representatives of the Indian before the white man had encroached upon his hunting grounds. They have lost the strength and virtues of their former state, without gaining those of a higher. In fact, civilization, as it pushes the red man, shows no virtues. To the Anglo-Saxon of the frontier, as a rule, the aborigine has no rights which the white man is bound to respect. He is impoverished, misunderstood, cheated, and abused. He dies out, as, under similar conditions, we should die out. He disappears before civilization as the Britons disappeared before Saxon barbarism.

The true reason why there is no lament in any classic writer for the barbarian, but that the Roman civilization assimilated instead of destroying, is, I take it, to be found not only in the fact that the ancient civilization was much nearer akin to the barbarians which it met, but in the more important fact that it was not extended as ours has been. It was carried forward, not by an advancing line of colonists, but by conquest which merely reduced the new province to general subjection, leaving the social, and generally the political organization of the people to a great degree unimpaired, so that, without shattering or deterioration, the process of assimilation went on. In a somewhat similar way the civilization of Japan seems to be now assimilating itself to European civilization.

In America the Anglo-Saxon has exterminated, instead of civilizing, the Indian, simply because he has not brought the Indian into his environment, nor yet has the contact been in such a way as to induce or permit the Indian web of habitual thought and custom to be changed rapidly enough to meet

He loses his means of subsistence and cannot survive.

Roman civilization conquered existing societies, leaving their structure largely intact.

But in America we have exterminated the Indian, instead of aiding him in adapting to our environment.

The Jesuits in Paraguay, and other missionaries, have shown that it is possible for Indians to be received into our civilization.

Evidence shows that man has not improved physically nor mentally within any time of which we have knowledge

the new conditions into which he has been brought by the proximity of new and powerful neighbors. That there is no innate impediment to the reception of our civilization by these uncivilized races has been shown over and over again in individual cases. And it has likewise been shown, so far as the experiments have been permitted to go, by the Jesuits in Paraguay, the Franciscans in California, and the Protestant missionaries on some of the Pacific islands.

The assumption of physical improvement in the race within any time of which we have knowledge is utterly without warrant, and within the time of which Mr. Bagehot speaks, it is absolutely disproved. We know from classic statues, from the burdens carried and the marches made by ancient soldiers, from the records of runners and the feats of gymnasts, that neither in proportions nor strength has the race improved within two thousand years. But the assumption of mental improvement, which is even more confidently and generally made, is still more preposterous. As poets, artists, architects, philosophers, rhetoricians, statesmen, or soldiers, can modern civilization show individuals of greater mental power than can the ancient? There is no use in recalling names—every schoolboy knows them. For our models and personifications of mental power we go back to the ancients, and if we can for a moment imagine the possibility of what is held by that oldest and most widespread of all beliefs—that belief which Lessing declared on this account the most probably true, though he accepted it on metaphysical grounds—and suppose Homer or Virgil, Demosthenes or Cicero, Alexander, Hannibal or Cæsar, Plato or Lucretius, Euclid or Aristotle, as re-entering this life again in the nineteenth century, can we suppose that they would show any inferiority to the men of today? Or if we take any period since the classic

age, even the darkest, or any previous period of which we know anything, shall we not find men who in the conditions and degree of knowledge of their times showed mental power of as high an order as men show now? And among the less advanced races do we not today, whenever our attention is called to them, find men who in their conditions exhibit mental qualities as great as civilization can show? Did the invention of the railroad, coming when it did, prove any greater inventive power than did the invention of the wheelbarrow when wheelbarrows were not? We of modern civilization are raised far above those who have preceded us and those of the less advanced races who are our contemporaries. But it is because we stand on a pyramid, not that we are taller. What the centuries have done for us is not to increase our stature, but to build up a structure on which we may plant our feet.

Our higher level of civilization is built on the achievements of earlier societies.

Let me repeat: I do not mean to say that all men possess the same capacities, or are mentally alike, any more than I mean to say that they are physically alike. Among all the countless millions who have come and gone on this earth, there were probably never two who either physically or mentally were exact counterparts. Nor yet do I mean to say that there are not as clearly marked race differences in mind as there are clearly marked race differences in body. I do not deny the influence of heredity in transmitting peculiarities of mind in the same way, and possibly to the same degree, as bodily peculiarities are transmitted. But nevertheless, there is, it seems to me, a common standard and natural symmetry of mind, as there is of body, toward which all deviations tend to return. The conditions under which we fall may produce such distortions as the Flatheads produce by compressing the heads of their infants or the Chinese by binding their daughters' feet. But as Flathead babies continue to be born with naturally shaped heads and

Chinese babies with naturally shaped feet, so does nature seem to revert to the normal mental type. A child no more inherits his father's knowledge than he inherits his father's glass eye or artificial leg; the child of the most ignorant parents may become a pioneer of science or a leader of thought.

But this is the great fact with which we are concerned: That the differences between the people of communities in different places and at different times, which we call differences of civilization, are not differences which inhere in the individuals, but differences which inhere in the society; that they are not, as Herbert Spencer holds, differences resulting from differences in the units; but that they are differences resulting from the conditions under which these units are brought in the society. In short, I take the explanation of the differences which distinguish communities to be this: That each society, small or great, necessarily weaves for itself a web of knowledge, beliefs, customs, language, tastes, institutions, and laws. Into this web, woven by each society, or rather, into these webs, for each community above the simplest is made up of minor societies, which overlap and interlace each other, the individual is received at birth and continues until his death. This is the matrix in which mind unfolds and from which it takes its stamp. This is the way in which customs, and religions, and prejudices, and tastes, and languages, grow up and are perpetuated. This is the way that skill is transmitted and knowledge is stored up, and the discoveries of one time made the common stock and stepping stone of the next. Though it is this that often offers the most serious obstacles to progress, it is this that makes progress possible. It is this that enables any schoolboy in our time to learn in a few hours more of the universe than Ptolemy knew; that places the most humdrum scientist far above the

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level reached by the giant mind of Aristotle. This is to the race what memory is to the individual. Our wonderful arts, our far-reaching science, our marvelous inventions—they have come through this.

Human progress goes on as the advances made by one generation are in this way secured as the common property of the next, and made the starting point for new advances.

Advances made by one generation thus become common property of the next, supporting new advances.