

Notes on the Capabilities of the Negro for Civilisation. By HENRY
F. J. GUPPY, F.A.S.L.

It is with much diffidence that I bring before the Anthropological Society a few observations on the apparent capabilities of the negro race for civilisation, so far, that is to say, as my own limited experience extends. I say *apparent*, because in Trinidad and other West India colonies, it has been contended that the negroes have been brutalised and reduced below their true standard, by slavery. However true this may have been at the time of emancipation, a sufficient number of years has now elapsed for a new generation, free from any oppressing influences, to show forth the natural powers of the negro mind. That slavery does not necessarily degrade the negro, however much other races might be affected thereby, has been proved by the observations of several persons, for we find in Dr. Waitz's valuable volume, so ably translated by Mr. Collingwood (p. 72), that it is stated in many cases, despite of slavery, his contact with the superior race in the Slave States of North America has considerably softened down his more animal characteristics, and rendered even his countenance more like that of a thinking being. And to counterbalance any deterioration that may have been produced by slavery, the descendants of the slaves have had the means of improvement and of civilisation brought to their very doors, and their adoption enforced by the most improved methods of education known to the highest civilised race. The possible effect of slavery on the physical and mental organisation of the negro has, to say the least, been grossly exaggerated. It confessedly requires several generations at least to effect any great or permanent change in this respect, and as regards the slaves in these colonies, a large proportion, if not the majority of them, at the emancipation were either native Africans, or the immediate descendants of such. And may it be asked, what example can be adduced of the slavery, however brutal, of one or two generations of a race producing such an effect, that the children, on having the means of improvement placed before them, have been found so far below their progenitors as to be unable to make an equal, or nearly equal, use of them? My own observations, slight as they are, fully bear out the remarks made on the subject by our respected president at the meeting of the British Association at Newcastle.* Leaving out, as he proposes, the mixed race, there are, within my experience, but very few examples of the pure black holding places of trust and confidence; such of them as do so, certainly have their features much more nearly approaching to those of Europeans than one would have imagined possible, that is to say, when compared with the general bulk of the negroes; so much so, indeed, is this the case in some instances, as almost to lead one to doubt the purity of their descent. It has been remarked, that when equally coloured individuals intermarry, their offspring become darker and darker; it might be worth while, perhaps, to ascertain how far the influence of the lighter and (let us

* Vide Anthropological Review for November 1863, p. 386.

assume) the superior race would extend. Would it continue to affect the features and form when the complexion had returned to the dark tint of the inferior race? And if so, would the mental powers in any measure correspond? These are interesting questions that it would be, no doubt, premature to answer. But if an affirmative could be given, we might, perhaps, explain, at least in some cases, the apparent anomaly of a completely black individual possessing bodily and mental characteristics exceeding much the standard of his race. As to the rebellious propensities of the negroes, it may be remarked, that when an outbreak does occur amongst them, as at St. Vincent a short while since, the object is generally one of lust or ease, and not one caused by ambitious and domineering ideas; we have seen this exemplified in Hayti, where the *extermination* of the numerically inferior race was determined on by the blacks, and not their subjugation, for that, indeed, was impracticable.

That it is far from being always the case that when the negro has opportunities of improvement he will use them, we have, unfortunately, too many instances in this island alone to prove. For example, there were some negroes conveyed hither after the American war of independence, in which they had fought on the side of the British, and who were allotted pieces of land, some ten or twelve miles from S. Fernando, the second town of the island. Their descendants, far from being improved, notwithstanding the advantages of having schools in their midst, and the constant efforts of clergymen and others to induce them to become more civilised, have decidedly retrograded. The original settlers, of whom a few are still alive, are found to be civil and well-ordered, whereas their children are wild and almost ferocious savages, extremely inhospitable, and jealous of the designs of visitors. The negroes generally have a tendency to withdraw themselves from the neighbourhood of their fellow colonists, and to bury themselves in the valleys and woods, there to live a merely animal life, cultivating, perhaps, a small patch of land, no more than is barely sufficient to supply themselves with scanty clothing, and, perhaps, to purchase a few such luxuries as tobacco or rum. This conduct is probably to be attributed to their natural and uneradicated desire for ease, and dislike for labour of any kind, having liberty to express itself by their possession of land, the cultivation of a very small portion of which being sufficient for a savage existence. Their distance, too, though small it be, from the pressure and presence of a more energetic people, no doubt contributes to this effect. This dislike of steady work and want of thrift has rendered the bulk of the negroes utterly unfit for labourers, and has necessitated the introduction, into some of these colonies, of Coolies from India and China. If the cultivation of these islands had, indeed, depended upon the exertions of the liberated slaves and their offspring, we should, long ere this, have sunk to such a low ebb, that our present condition is wealth comparatively, to what it would have been, though we are still struggling under many difficulties.

The negro, in effect, requires constant stimulation, and the hard

teaching of necessity to force him to activity. He has no ambition of rising either in intelligence or in wealth. When left to himself but for a short time, he falls back rapidly into a mere listless condition, in which he cares not for the outer world, or, indeed, for anything out of his own personal existence. As for knowledge, the progress of his fellow-beings, the improvements made in arts or sciences, all these are blanks to him; he seemingly comprehends not their import; and though their importance may be impressed on his mind for a while, he soon forgets all that he has heard, and quickly relapses into his former apathy. How different from this are the Chinese and Hindoos, with whom we are able, in some measure, to compare him, in this and other colonies, where the immigration of these races has been carried on for some years. With far less opportunities, both the Chinese and the Indian coolies, more especially, perhaps, the former, have already turned their advantages to some account. They trade, they speculate, and endeavour in other modes to emulate the wealth and prosperity of their fellow-citizens; indeed, it is a common observation here that some of our chief merchants will some day be of Chinese descent, if not Chinese themselves. There is barely an instance of such foresight and industry to be found in the pure negro, at all events, as existing here. He has no ambition for advancement, as I said before, and this may be said to sum up his character. If we were to take an average English labourer, and place him in similar circumstances, and in such a situation that by steady application to work he would soon attain independence, I am confident that he would prove, in a short time, that such a tempting prospect was sufficient to urge him on to renewed exertions.

In the discussion that ensued on the reading of Dr. Hunt's paper, Mr. Craft observed that the agricultural labourers in England were bent (in figure) as well as the negro. It may be observed that the majority of aboriginal races who, like the negroes, dislike labour, or, at all events, the labour of tilling the soil (which is the cause of the bend in the English labourer), are finely formed, and exceedingly straight, as for instance the Indians of North America and the Maoris, both of which races are undoubtedly highly capable of improvement, and who yet themselves admit the superiority of the Caucasian race.

If Mr. Craft's observations with regard to the intellectual power and independence of character of the Haytians be correct, how is it that that fine and beautiful island has so notoriously retrograded since its independence and erection into a negro state? Statistics and observations show the wild and desolate condition it has attained from the utter neglect of its inhabitants, who, taken up with continual and petty political squabbles and the mockery of a court, have left their fertile plantations and allowed them to return to a condition only worthy of a people utterly savage, and careless of progression. An island that before its independence produced more sugar than the whole of the other West India colonies (150,000 hogsheads), within twenty years after the negroes had had full possession, produced less than the smallest isle inhabited by Europeans; in 1823, for example,

it was estimated that the exports of sugar from St. Domingo amounted to but 6 or 700 hogsheads; and the deficiency was by no means made up by other products.*

As to Professor Wilson's remarks, it is not at all true that the negroes are to be compared to the inmates of a workhouse. I speak, of course, of those in the West Indies. They (the negroes) have liberty of action unrestrained, a climate that enables them to live upon little, and a soil that would allow them to procure a competence and even wealth, by the expenditure of a certain amount of energy; education can be had by every one, if they only think it worth the attendance at school.

The negro seems unable to adopt even the inventions of the Europeans for saving labour, or do so very slowly and clumsily indeed, whereas many other primitive peoples, the Maoris, for instance, have shown themselves the very contrary to this, and employ all the contrivances for saving labour possible for them to obtain, and learn with avidity of more.

It would, however, be undoubtedly wrong to say that the negro possesses no capacity for mental improvement; for that would be placing him in a very low rank of the animal creation indeed; but it would certainly seem that his capacity must be left, in a great measure, to itself, to develop into anything worthy of the name of civilisation. He does not comprehend that of the European; it is, as it were, out of his sphere. Such civilisation as he is capable of will be *sui generis*, and utterly unlike that of the Caucasian races. We shall not, probably, have any opportunity of witnessing this negro civilisation in the western hemisphere; for observation fully bears out Sir Alexander Tulloch's remark, "that before a century has passed, the negro race will almost have disappeared from the British colonies in the West Indies." As to the American negroes, the same in effect has been said of them by Nott, De Bow and others.

These remarks are made with reference solely to the pure negro; the mixed race, as might be naturally supposed, shows a great variety of conformation, both bodily and mentally, the latter especially perceptibly improving as the individual approaches more nearly to the European race. There are many men of great intelligence, and who occupy very respectable positions here, of the mulatto and lighter coloured classes; there is one thing that may be remarked of these, that they are, as a rule, neither so robust as either the European or the negro, and are certainly more liable to chest diseases.

May I be allowed to protest against the use of the word *African* as being synonymous with *negro*. The latter has, no doubt, its faults, but it is certainly more distinctive than the former, for we know very well that the negro, strictly so called, occupies but a small district comparatively speaking, of the immense continent of which he is a native, and to which he is peculiar. It is to be remarked that the former is a name that is affected by many of the coloured people, as conveying less reproach, as they think, than the other designation.

* Vide Quarterly Review, January 1824, p. 577.

The PRESIDENT said he so fully agreed with the author of the paper that it was unnecessary for him to speak on the subject immediately after it had been read. He wished to state, however, that he had had no communication with Mr. Guppy, though from the identity of opinion between them—on the incapacity of the negro for comprehending European civilisation—it might have been so supposed. This coincidence of opinion was the more remarkable as his own observations on the incapacity of the negro for European civilisation were not contained in the paper he had read at the meeting of the British Association, and which only had been seen by Mr. Guppy, but were introduced when he afterwards read the paper in that Society.

Mr. REDDIE considered the paper of Mr. Guppy's a very appropriate sequel to the one that had been read before it. It was a clear statement of facts of the condition of emancipated negroes, devoid of speculation. They could see from that statement that there was a great deal to be done in comparing the different degrees of intelligence in man without descending to a comparison with brutes. In endeavouring to establish a comparison in the latter case there was this difficulty, that they had no facts to depend on. It could be seen and ascertained how far the negro is capable of understanding the higher grades of human intelligence, but with regard to inferior animals the difference was not one of degree but of kind.

Mr. PIKE remarked that it had been just said by Mr. Reddie that he approved of the paper because it contained a lucid statement of facts and not speculation; but at the same time he had asserted that the difference between man and brutes is one of kind and not of degree, which assertion was a speculation and not a fact.

Mr. WALLACE said the author of the paper dwelt much on a fact which no one had denied—that the negro is very inferior in intellectual capacity to the European. The only question to be determined was, how far that inferiority extends. The African negro was often spoken of as being the lowest race of mankind; but he believed that the negro is not the lowest grade. The Australians, the North and South American Indians, and even the Malays, he considered to be inferior to the negro. The negro, he believed, possesses a considerable amount of intelligence and energy that might enable him to rise much higher than he has done yet. It was not fair to compare a negro emancipated from a state of slavery with Hindoos and Chinese who belong to the oldest civilised nations on the earth. It was true, indeed, that the negro would not work and exert himself, except under the pressure of necessity; but that remark was applicable to mankind in general, for everyone required a stimulus to exertion. They had never seen the negro in that state of stimulus fitted to develop his moral and intellectual faculties and to enable him to appreciate the benefits of civilisation. When the negroes in our West Indian possessions were emancipated they ought to have been placed in circumstances that would have given them a stimulus to labour. There was no necessity to have given them the land on which they were located. If it had been an established rule that the negroes were to pay rent for the land they occupied, that would have obliged them to

labour, and we should have had a different state of things from that described by Mr. Guppy. The necessity to provide money for the payment of rent and to enable them to live would have given them a stimulus to work. The necessity of exertion to obtain a livelihood was even among ourselves an excellent means of improvement. We had never seen the negro under favourable circumstances. We had always seen him either as a slave or perfectly free without any stimulus to exertion. Allowance should be made for the contrast between his present condition of perfect freedom and his former state of slavery. We had not yet seen the negro under the circumstances that would show him to the greatest advantage.

Mr. S. E. BOUVERIE PUSEY observed that the emancipated negroes of our West Indian colonies were placed under very unfavourable circumstances. When in a state of slavery they were treated by the planters with great severity and in a very different manner from the slaves in the Confederate States of America. The planters were always in debt and they forced their slaves to work hard and behaved to them with barbarity. The planters had no ideas of political economy, and when the slaves were emancipated they thought the negroes were bound to work for a fixed price. But the negroes, on being released from such harsh bondage, would not be compelled to work. They migrated, and, in some instances, they squatted, and indulged in what to them was the luxury of idleness. He agreed with Mr. Wallace in thinking that sufficient allowance had not, under such circumstances, been made for the negro, and that we should not judge of his mental capacity by his present low degree of intellectual development.

Mr. PINKERTON thought that too much had been said both on the one side and the other about the capabilities of the negro for European civilisation, and that they should look on him in the state he was found and see what he is. It was useless to speak of the negro as he might have been under different circumstances. When compared with the Hindoos and Chinese there could be no doubt the negro was very different.

Mr. C. CARTER BLAKE noticed the allusion in the paper to the observations of Mr. Craft in the discussion of Dr. Hunt's paper on the negro at the last meeting of the British Association. Mr. Craft had there stated that the agricultural labourers in England were bent in figure as well as the negro; but the fact was suppressed by him that, in the case of the English labourer, the stooping figure was not concomitant with any anatomical peculiarity. The agricultural labourer exhibits the "European type" as characteristically as any of the white races of mankind. With respect to the negro, however, it was well known that the angle of the occipital foramen is different from that of the white races, and there are other distinctions in his anatomical characters. With regard to the assertions sometimes made, that the civilisation of the negro is capable of altering his cranium from the true character of the race, what were the facts? One of the most degraded skulls of the negro type which is yet known is that of a civilised negro who was a Wesleyan deacon in the West Indian islands. Mr. Wallace had stated that

no one denies, and that no one had ever denied, the inferior mental capacity of the negro, but he could have paid little attention to what had been again and again asserted by the advocates of the negro, or he would not have said so. If they turned to the popular literature, it would be found there stated not only that the negro is equal, but that he is superior to Europeans, and it had been recommended by some persons on the other side of the Atlantic, that the European races there should be improved by mixture with the negro.

The PRESIDENT considered it to be due to the author of the paper to say a few words in support of his opinions. In the first place, he would observe that the paper showed that the volumes published by the Anthropological Society had got out to Trinidad, one of the results of which had been the production of the interesting communication which they had just heard. Mr. Guppy had told them very properly that slavery does not degrade the negro, and when they hear so much about what slavery has done to degrade them it was well that they should now have the statement of a gentleman, founded on observation of the facts of the case, that the opposite effect was produced by slavery. The children of the slaves, who have had the means of improvement and of civilisation, were, on his evidence, worse than their parents when in a state of slavery, and were said to have greatly deteriorated. The cause of this was, that the children who are free want the stimulus of necessity to work. Mr. Wallace, indeed, said that all men require that stimulus, and would do nothing without it. He (the President) did not believe that to be the case with Europeans. There were, for example, upwards of 10,000 men in this metropolis who work daily without any necessity for so doing. At the last meeting of the British Association it had been asserted by Professor Wilson that there were in the English workhouses many men whose mental capacities were not superior to those of negroes, and that if the latter had the opportunity, they would become equal to the white man. In the instance of Hayti, however, the contrary was seen; the free negroes were there either savages, or were quickly becoming so. The opinion expressed by the author of the paper that the mulattoes are not so robust as either the European or the negro, agreed with the opinions of other good authorities and with experience, for it is known that they die off fearfully. Mr. Wallace had said that the negro is not the lowest of the human races, and that there are several lower than he is. That assertion fully agreed with the statement in his (the President's) paper on the negro, in which he said there were six races lower. If they looked to the facts of the case, as recommended by Mr. Pinkerton, and examined the condition of the negro in every possible condition, they found the same result—that the highest state of civilisation and mental development which the negroes exhibited was when they were in a state of slavery under the treatment of a kind proprietor. They were treated, as had been observed, very differently in some parts of America from the cruel manner in which they were formerly treated in the West Indies. The treatment most of the negroes received in the Confederate States was well adapted to improve them, and it had produced

that effect. At present they were dying off very quickly in America. He thanked Mr. Guppy for having contributed so valuable a paper; and he hoped that other gentlemen would send their opinions on the subject. He had been accused of being prejudiced, and of having interested motives in his representation of the incapacity of the negro for European civilisation. He begged to assure the meeting, however, that he had no prejudice on the question, but he thought it was the duty of anthropologists to oppose the opinion attempted to be established of the equality of the negro and the white man; and, as to the alleged interested motives, it was well known that the men who made such charges were generally those who were themselves most influenced by such motives.

Mr. PUSEY rose to explain that he considered himself opposed to the opinions expressed in the paper. The freed negro did not work because he was not adequately and steadily paid for his labour. With regard to the state of the negroes in Hayti, there were peculiar circumstances in that case, which prevented it from being fairly taken as an illustration.

The PRESIDENT then briefly noticed that the translation of Broca's work on Human Hybridity was now ready; and he proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Carter Blake for the careful and prompt manner in which the work had been edited. This proposal was seconded by Mr. REDDIE, and carried unanimously.

The meeting then adjourned to the 5th of April.

APRIL 5TH, 1864.

DR. JAMES HUNT, PRESIDENT, IN THE CHAIR.

THE minutes of the proceedings of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

The thanks of the Society were given to the following gentlemen for donations to the library:—Professor Rudolph Wagner; M. Georges Pouchet; J. Frederick Collingwood, Esq.; T. Bendyshe, Esq.; the Royal Society of London; and the Cotteswold Club.

The following new members were announced as having been elected since the last meeting.

John Brinton, Esq.; Handel Cossham, Esq., F.G.S.; E. Bickerton Evans, Esq.; Edward C. Healey, Esq.; J. Byerley, Esq.; G. S. Gibson, Esq.; Lieutenant-Colonel H. Clerk, R.A.; W. Cory, Esq.; David Gray, Esq.; John S. Burke, Esq.; Edmund Farmer, Esq.; Antonio Brady, Esq., F.G.S.

The following papers were then read.