

## MISCELLANEOUS.

### "SAVAGE LIFE AND CUSTOM."

*To the Editor of The Open Court:*

I have only just seen Dr. W. Thornton Parker's communication in *The Open Court* for August last, but as the subject is one of supreme importance to the great States who control aboriginal races, perhaps you will once again allow me a reply. Dr. Parker holds, as many other men hold who have come in contact with savage races, that it is *right* and proper they should disappear and be replaced by other races who can boast of a superior civilization: in other words, that primitive races "should go under."

In my articles describing the morals and customs of modern savages, I endeavored to show how mistaken were the popular conceptions of what constitutes "savage life." I tried to indicate that these early and partly civilized members of our race were really human, "even as you and I," and I fail to see that anything Dr. Parker has written, taken from personal experiences, proves the contrary.

So far as we anthropologists can reconstruct the moral character of the American Indian, before his contact with the white race, he was the superior of the white man, in ethics as well as in manners. I have myself been connected with anthropological science in this country for over thirty-five years; but what I have to say here shall be solely taken from American sources, and not culled from English writers who might be thought to be influenced by insular prejudice.

When we speak of "inferior" and "superior" human races, *what* do we mean? Is the race that insists on the early training of the young; the race that hates the liar; that does not steal from its fellows; that does not poison itself with alcohol; that is practically free from terrible diseases—tuberculosis, small-pox, and the *other diseases* which are known to modern medical science—is such a race an *inferior* or a *superior* one? There is surely no need to reply! in all such matters nature herself has the last word, and it will be in *her* Court that the final decision will be given.

Meantime, what have the most recent American researches told us respecting the Indians that once roamed the prairies and the plains of the New World? The name of Miss Alice C. Fletcher of Washington is not unknown to the people of the United States of America. In a summary of the morality of the American Indian (for which she and the late Washington Matthews, of the United States Army, were jointly responsible) we are told that the *natives* had standards of right conduct and of character; that abundant evidence exists to

"show that Indians were often actuated by motives of pure benevolence," and took a delight in generous acts. Honesty was insisted upon; personal property in the tribe was secure. Murder was always punished. "Truth, honesty and the safeguarding of human life were everywhere recognized as essential;" adultery was punished; and the care of one's family regarded as a social duty.

Take one or two of these points—is adultery *punished* in America or Europe to-day? Is murder also *always* punished? Are "truth, honesty, and the safeguarding of human life *everywhere* recognized" among the Christian nations of Europe and America as essential among all classes of their population? If these questions cannot truthfully be answered in the affirmative, then which of the two is the inferior, the savage or the Christian?

Dr. Parker is a medical man; he has written on medical subjects in American scientific journals; he therefore will be more or less cognizant of the fearful havoc wrought by *modern* diseases. Those diseases were unknown to the red man; they were bequeathed to him by the white, as Dr. Ales Hrdlicka and other American authorities have conclusively proved: is freedom from disease a sign of inferiority, and does it evidence the assertion that the red man deserves to go the way of his own buffalo?

There is no more terrible chapter in the history of modern civilization than that of the treatment of the colored races by their white brothers; and if my own research in the anthropological field has taught me anything it has taught me this—that there will be a day when the truth of that treatment shall be known to all those who represent all that is best in modern civilized lands, just as that truth is known now to the few; and who, when that day comes, will look back on the past as a terrible nightmare, and declare that all the material wealth that has accrued to them by the possession of Naboth's vineyard, is poor compensation for that real wealth which was once the possession of the white man, as it was also of the man he has now displaced—a healthy body and a healthy soul.

EDWARD LAWRENCE.