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SCOPE OF SOCIAL  
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# The Scope of Social Anthropology

A LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL, MAY 14TH, 1908

BY

J. G. FRAZER, D.C.L., LL.D., LITT.D.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE  
PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

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## THE SCOPE OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

THE subject of the chair which I have the honour to hold is Social Anthropology. As the subject is still comparatively new and its limits are still somewhat vague, I shall devote my inaugural lecture to defining its scope and marking out roughly, if not the boundaries of the whole study, at least the boundaries of that part of it which I propose to take for my province.

Strange as it may seem, in the large and thriving family of the sciences, Anthropology, or the Science of Man, is the latest born. So young indeed is the study that three of its distinguished founders in England, Professor E. B. Tylor, Lord Avebury, and Mr. Francis Galton, are happily still with us. It is true that particular departments of man's complex nature have long been the theme of special studies. Anatomy has investigated his body, psychology has explored his mind, theology and metaphysics have sought to plumb the depths of the great mysteries by which he is encompassed on every hand. But it has been reserved for the present generation, or rather for the generation which is passing away, to attempt the comprehensive study of man as a whole, to enquire not merely into the physical and mental structure of the individual, but to compare the various races of men, to trace their affinities, and by means of a wide collection of facts to follow as far as may be the

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evolution of human thought and institutions from the earliest times. The aim of this, as of every other science, is to discover the general laws to which the particular facts may be supposed to conform. I say, may be supposed to conform, because research in all departments has rendered it antecedently probable that everywhere law and order will be found to prevail if we search for them diligently, and that accordingly the affairs of man, however complex and incalculable they may seem to be, are no exception to the uniformity of nature. Anthropology, therefore, in the widest sense of the word, aims at discovering the general laws which have regulated human history in the past, and which, if nature is really uniform, may be expected to regulate it in the future.

Hence the science of man coincides to a certain extent with what has long been known as the philosophy of history as well as with the study to which of late years the name of Sociology has been given. Indeed it might with some reason be held that Social Anthropology, or the study of man in society, is only another expression for Sociology. Yet I think that the two sciences may be conveniently distinguished, and that while the name of Sociology should be reserved for the study of human society in the most comprehensive sense of the words, the name of Social Anthropology may with advantage be restricted to one particular department of that immense field of knowledge. At least I wish to make it perfectly clear at the outset that I for one do not pretend to treat of the whole of human society, past, present, and future. Whether any single man's compass of mind and range of learning suffice for such a vast undertaking, I will not venture to say, but I do say without hesitation or ambiguity that mine certainly do not. I can only speak of what I have studied, and my studies have been mostly confined to a small, a very small part of man's social history. That part is the origin, or rather the rudi-

mentary phases, the infancy and childhood, of human society, and to that part accordingly I propose to limit the scope of Social Anthropology, or at all events my treatment of it. My successors in the chair will be free to extend their purview beyond the narrow boundaries which the limitation of my knowledge imposes on me. They may survey the latest developments as well as the earliest beginnings of custom and law, of science and art, of morality and religion, and from that survey they may deduce the principles which should guide mankind in the future, so that those who come after us may avoid the snares and pitfalls into which we and our fathers have slipped. For the best fruit of knowledge is wisdom, and it may reasonably be hoped that a deeper and wider acquaintance with the past history of mankind will in time enable our statesmen to mould the destiny of the race in fairer forms than we of this generation shall live to see.

*Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then  
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's desire!*

But if you wish to shatter the social fabric, you must not expect your professor of Social Anthropology to aid and abet you. He is no seer to discern, no prophet to foretell a coming heaven on earth, no mountebank with a sovran remedy for every ill, no Red Cross Knight to head a crusade against misery and want, against disease and death, against all the horrid spectres that war on poor humanity. It is for others with higher notes and nobler natures than his to sound the charge and lead it in this Holy War. He is only a student, a student of the past, who may perhaps tell you a little, a very little, of what has been, but who cannot, dare not tell you what ought to be. Yet even the little that he can contribute to the elucidation of the past may have its utility as well as its interest when

it finally takes its place in that great temple of science to which it is the ambition of every student to add a stone. For we cherish a belief that if we truly love and seek knowledge for its own sake, without any ulterior aim, every addition we may make to it, however insignificant and useless it may appear, will yet at last be found to work together with the whole accumulated store for the general good of mankind.

Thus the sphere of Social Anthropology as I understand it, or at least as I propose to treat it, is limited to the crude beginnings, the rudimentary development of human society: it does not include the maturer phases of that complex growth, still less does it embrace the practical problems with which our modern statesmen and lawgivers are called upon to deal. The study might accordingly be described as the embryology of human thought and institutions, or, to be more precise, as that enquiry which seeks to ascertain, first, the beliefs and customs of savages, and, second, the relics of these beliefs and customs which have survived like fossils among peoples of higher culture. In this description of the sphere of Social Anthropology it is implied that the ancestors of the civilised nations were once savages, and that they have transmitted, or may have transmitted, to their more cultured descendants ideas and institutions which, however incongruous with their later surroundings, were perfectly in keeping with the modes of thought and action of the ruder society in which they originated. In short, the definition assumes that civilisation has always and everywhere been evolved out of savagery. The mass of evidence on which this assumption rests is in my opinion so great as to render the induction incontrovertible. At least, if any one disputes it I do not think it worth while to argue with him. There are still, I believe, in civilised society people who hold that the earth is flat and that the sun goes round it; but no sensible man will waste time in the vain attempt to convince such persons of their error,

even though these flatteners of the earth and circulators of the sun appeal with perfect justice to the evidence of their senses in support of their hallucination, which is more than the opponents of man's primitive savagery are able to do.

Thus the study of savage life is a very important part of Social Anthropology. For by comparison with civilised man the savage represents an arrested or rather retarded stage of social development, and an examination of his customs and beliefs accordingly supplies the same sort of evidence of the evolution of the human mind that an examination of the embryo supplies of the evolution of the human body. To put it otherwise, a savage is to a civilised man as a child is to an adult; and just as the gradual growth of intelligence in a child corresponds to, and in a sense recapitulates, the gradual growth of intelligence in the species, so a study of savage society at various stages of evolution enables us to follow approximately, though of course not exactly, the road by which the ancestors of the higher races must have travelled in their progress upward through barbarism to civilisation. In short, savagery is the primitive condition of mankind, and if we would understand what primitive man was we must know what the savage now is.

But here it is necessary to guard against a common misapprehension. The savages of to-day are primitive only in a relative, not in an absolute sense. They are primitive by comparison with us; but they are not primitive by comparison with truly primæval man, that is, with man as he was when he first emerged from the purely bestial stage of existence. Indeed, compared with man in his absolutely pristine state even the lowest savage of to-day is doubtless a highly developed and cultured being, since all evidence and all probability are in favour of the view that every existing race of men, the rudest as well as the most civilised, has reached its present level of culture, whether it be high or low, only after a slow

and painful progress upwards, which must have extended over many thousands, perhaps millions, of years. Therefore when we speak of any known savages as primitive, which the usage of the English language permits us to do, it should always be remembered that we apply the term primitive to them in a relative, not in an absolute sense. What we mean is that their culture is rudimentary compared with that of the civilised nations, but not by any means that it is identical with that of primæval man. It is necessary to emphasise this relative use of the term primitive in its application to all known savages without exception, because the ambiguity arising from the double meaning of the word has been the source of much confusion and misunderstanding. Careless or unscrupulous writers have made great play with it for purposes of controversy, using the word now in the one sense and now in the other as it suited their argument at the moment, without perceiving, or at all events without indicating, the equivocation. In order to avoid these verbal fallacies it is only necessary to bear steadily in mind that while Social Anthropology has much to say of primitive man in the relative sense, it has nothing whatever to say about primitive man in the absolute sense, and that for the very simple reason that it knows nothing whatever about him, and, so far as we can see at present, is never likely to know anything. To construct a history of human society by starting from absolutely primordial man and working down through thousands or millions of years to the institutions of existing savages might possibly have merits as a flight of imagination, but it could have none as a work of science. To do this would be exactly to reverse the proper mode of scientific procedure. It would be to work *a priori* from the unknown to the known instead of *a posteriori* from the known to the unknown. For we do know a good deal about the social state of the savages of to-day and yesterday, but we know nothing

whatever, I repeat, about absolutely primitive human society. Hence a sober enquirer who seeks to elucidate the social evolution of mankind in ages before the dawn of history must start, not from an unknown and purely hypothetical primæval man, but from the lowest savages whom we know or possess adequate records of; and from their customs, beliefs, and traditions as a solid basis of fact he may work back a little way hypothetically through the obscurity of the past; that is, he may form a reasonable theory of the way in which these actual customs, beliefs, and traditions have grown up and developed in a period more or less remote, but probably not very remote, from the one in which they have been observed and recorded. But if, as I assume, he is a sober enquirer, he will never expect to carry back this reconstruction of human history very far, still less will he dream of linking it up with the very beginning, because he is aware that we possess no evidence which would enable us to bridge even hypothetically the gulf of thousands or millions of years which divides the savage of to-day from primæval man.

It may be well to illustrate my meaning by an example. The matrimonial customs and modes of tracing relationships which prevail among some savage races, and even among peoples at a higher stage of culture, furnish very strong grounds for believing that the systems of marriage and consanguinity which are now in vogue among civilised peoples must have been immediately preceded at a more or less distant time by very different modes of counting kin and regulating marriage; in fact, that monogamy and the forbidden degrees of kinship have replaced an older system of much wider and looser sexual relations. But to say this is not to affirm that such looser and wider relations were characteristic of the absolutely primitive condition of mankind; it is only to say that actually existing customs and traditions clearly indicate the extensive

prevalence of such relations at some former time in the history of our race. How remote that time was, we cannot tell ; but, estimated by the whole vast period of man's existence on earth, it seems probable that the era of sexual communism to which the evidence points was comparatively recent ; in other words, that for the civilised races the interval which divides that era from our own is to be reckoned by thousands rather than by hundreds of thousands of years, while for the lowest of existing savages, for example, the aborigines of Australia, it is possible or probable that the interval may not be greater than a few centuries. Be that as it may, even if on the strength of the evidence I have referred to we could demonstrate the former prevalence of a system of sexual communism among all the races of mankind, this would only carry us back a single step in the long history of our species ; it would not justify us in concluding that such a system had been practised by truly primæval man, still less that it had prevailed among mankind from the beginning down to the comparatively recent period at which its existence may be inferred from the evidence at our disposal. About the social condition of primæval man, I repeat, we know absolutely nothing, and it is vain to speculate. Our first parents may have been as strict monogamists as Whiston or Dr. Primrose, or they may have been just the reverse. We have no information on the subject, and are never likely to get any. In the countless ages which have elapsed since man and woman first roamed the happy garden hand in hand or jabbered like apes among the leafy boughs of the virgin forest, their relations to each other may have undergone innumerable changes. For human affairs, like the courses of the heaven, seem to run in cycles : the social pendulum swings to and fro from one extremity of the scale to the other : in the political sphere it has swung from democracy to despotism, and back again from despotism to democracy ; and so in the domestic sphere it may



have oscillated many a time between libertinism and monogamy.

If I am right in my definition of Social Anthropology, its province may be roughly divided into two departments, one of which embraces the customs and beliefs of savages, while the other includes such relics of these customs and beliefs as have survived in the thought and institutions of more cultured peoples. The one department may be called the study of savagery, the other the study of folklore. I have said something of savagery: I now turn to folklore, that is, to the survivals of more primitive ideas and practices among peoples who in other respects have risen to a higher plane of culture. That such survivals may be discovered in every civilised nation will hardly now be disputed by anybody. When we read, for example, of an Irishwoman roasted to death by her husband on a suspicion that she was not his wife but a fairy changeling,<sup>1</sup> or again, of an Englishwoman dying of lockjaw because she had anointed the nail that wounded her instead of the wound,<sup>2</sup> we may be sure that the beliefs to which these poor creatures fell victims were not learned by them in school or at church, but had been transmitted from truly savage ancestors through many generations of outwardly though not really civilised descendants. Beliefs and practices of this sort are therefore rightly called superstitions, which means literally survivals. It is with superstitions in the strict sense of the word that the second department of Social Anthropology is concerned.

If we ask how it happens that superstitions linger among a people who in general have reached a higher level of culture, the answer is to be found in the natural, universal, and ineradicable inequality

<sup>1</sup> This happened at Ballyvadlea, in the county of Tipperary, in March 1895. For details of the evidence given at the trial of the murderers, see "The 'Witch-burning' at Clonmel," *Folk-lore*, vi. (1895) pp. 373-384.

<sup>2</sup> This happened at Norwich in June 1902. See *The People's Weekly Journal for Norfolk*, July 19, 1902, p. 8.

of men. Not only are different races differently endowed in respect of intelligence, courage, industry, and so forth, but within the same nation men of the same generation differ enormously in inborn capacity and worth. No abstract doctrine is more false and mischievous than that of the natural equality of men. It is true that the legislator must treat men as if they were equal, because laws of necessity are general and cannot be made so as to fit the infinite variety of individual cases. But we must not imagine that because men are equal before the law they are therefore intrinsically equal to each other. The experience of common life sufficiently contradicts such a vain imagination. At school and at the universities, at work and at play, in peace and in war, the mental and moral inequalities of human beings stand out too conspicuously to be ignored or disputed. On the whole the men of keenest intelligence and strongest characters lead the rest and shape the moulds into which, outwardly at least, society is cast. As such men are necessarily few by comparison with the multitude whom they lead, it follows that the community is really dominated by the will of an enlightened minority<sup>1</sup> even in countries where the ruling power is nominally vested in the hands of the numerical majority. In fact, disguise it as we may, the government of mankind is always and everywhere essentially aristocratic. No juggling with political machinery can evade this law of nature. However it may seem to lead, the dull-witted majority in the end follows a keener-witted minority. That is its salvation and the secret of progress. The higher human intelligence sways the lower, just as the intelligence of man gives him the mastery over the brutes. I do not mean that the ultimate direction of society rests with its nominal governors, with its kings,

<sup>1</sup> I say "an enlightened minority," because in any large community there are always many minorities, and some of them are very far from enlightened. It is possible to be below as well as above the average level of our fellows.

its statesmen, its legislators. The true rulers of men are the thinkers who advance knowledge; for just as it is through his superior knowledge, not through his superior strength, that man bears rule over the rest of the animal creation, so among men themselves it is knowledge which in the long run directs and controls the forces of society. Thus the discoverers of new truths are the real though uncrowned and unscathed kings of mankind; monarchs, statesmen, and law-givers are but their ministers, who sooner or later do their bidding by carrying out the ideas of these master minds. The more we study the inward workings of society and the progress of civilisation, the more clearly shall we perceive how both are governed by the influence of thoughts which, springing up at first we know not how or whence in a few superior minds, gradually spread till they have leavened the whole inert lump of a community or of mankind. The origin of such mental variations, with all their far-reaching train of social consequences, is just as obscure as is the origin of those physical variations on which, if biologists are right, depends the evolution of species, and with it the possibility of progress. Perhaps the same unknown cause which determines the one set of variations gives rise to the other also. We cannot tell. All we can say is that on the whole in the conflict of competing forces, whether physical or mental, the strongest at last prevails, the fittest survives. In the mental sphere the struggle for existence is not less fierce and internecine than in the physical, but in the end the better ideas, which we call the truth, carry the day. The clamorous opposition with which at their first appearance they are regularly greeted whenever they conflict with old prejudices may retard but cannot prevent their final victory. It is the practice of the mob first to stone and then to erect useless memorials to their greatest benefactors. All who set themselves to replace ancient error and superstition by truth and reason must lay

their account with brickbats in their life and a marble monument after death.

\* I have been led into making these remarks by the wish to explain why it is that superstitions of all sorts, political, moral, and religious, survive among peoples who have the opportunity of knowing better. The reason is that the better ideas, which are constantly forming in the upper stratum, have not yet filtered through from the highest to the lowest minds. Such a filtration is generally slow, and by the time that the new notions have penetrated to the bottom, if indeed they ever get there, they are often already obsolete and superseded by others at the top. Hence it is that if we could open the heads and read the thoughts of two men of the same generation and country but at opposite ends of the intellectual scale, we should probably find their minds as different as if the two belonged to different species. Mankind, as it has been well said, advances in *échelons*; that is, the columns march not abreast of each other but in a straggling line, all lagging in various degrees behind the leader. The image well describes the difference not only between peoples, but between individuals of the same people and the same generation. Just as one nation is continually outstripping some of its contemporaries, so within the same nation some men are constantly outpacing their fellows, and the foremost in the race are those who have thrown off the load of superstition which still burdens the backs and clogs the footsteps of the laggards. To drop metaphor, superstitions survive because, while they shock the views of enlightened members of the community, they are still in harmony with the thoughts and feelings of others who, though they are drilled by their betters into an appearance of civilisation, remain barbarians or savages at heart. That is why, for example, the barbarous punishments for high treason and witchcraft and the enormities of slavery were tolerated and defended in

this country down to modern times. Such survivals may be divided into two sorts, according as they are public or private; in other words, according as they are embodied in the law of the land or are practised with or without the connivance of the law in holes and corners. The examples I have just cited belong to the former of these two classes. Witches were publicly burned and traitors were publicly disembowelled in England not so long ago, and slavery survived as a legal institution still later. The true nature of such public superstitions is apt, through their very publicity, to escape detection, because until they are finally swept away by the rising tide of progress, there are always plenty of people to defend them as institutions essential to the public welfare and sanctioned by the laws of God and man.

It is otherwise with those private superstitions to which the name of folklore is usually confined. In civilised society most educated people are not even aware of the extent to which these relics of savage ignorance survive at their doors. The discovery of their wide prevalence was indeed only made last century, chiefly through the researches of the brothers Grimm in Germany. Since their day systematic enquiries carried on among the less educated classes, and especially among the peasantry, of Europe have revealed the astonishing, nay, alarming truth that a mass, if not the majority, of people in every civilised country is still living in a state of intellectual savagery, that, in fact, the smooth surface of cultured society is sapped and mined by superstition. Only those whose studies have led them to investigate the subject are aware of the depth to which the ground beneath our feet is thus as it were honeycombed by unseen forces. We appear to be standing on a volcano which may at any moment break out in smoke and fire to spread ruin and devastation among the gardens and palaces of ancient culture wrought so laboriously by the hands of many genera-

tions. After looking on the ruined Greek temples of Paestum and contrasting them with the squalor and savagery of the Italian peasantry, Renan said, "I trembled for civilisation, seeing it so limited, built on so weak a foundation, resting on so few individuals even in the country where it is dominant."<sup>1</sup>

If we examine the superstitious beliefs which are tacitly but firmly held by many of our fellow-countrymen, we shall find, perhaps to our surprise, that it is precisely the oldest and crudest superstitions which are most tenacious of life, while views which, though also erroneous, are more modern and refined, soon fade from the popular memory. For example, the high gods of Egypt and Babylon, of Greece and Rome, have for ages been totally forgotten by the people and survive only in the books of the learned; yet the peasants, who never even heard of Isis and Osiris, of Apollo and Artemis, of Jupiter and Juno, retain to this day a firm belief in witches and fairies, in ghosts and hobgoblins, those lesser creatures of the mythical fancy in which their fathers believed long before the great deities of the ancient world were ever thought of, and in which, to all appearance, their descendants will continue to believe long after the great deities of the present day shall have gone the way of all their predecessors. The reason why the higher forms of superstition or religion (for the religion of one generation is apt to become the superstition of the next) are less permanent than the lower is simply that the higher beliefs, being a creation of superior intelligence, have little hold on the minds of the vulgar, who nominally profess them for a time in conformity with the will of their betters, but readily shed and forget them as soon as these beliefs have gone out of fashion with the educated classes. But while they dismiss without a pang or an effort articles of faith which were only superficially imprinted on their minds by the weight of cultured opinion, the ignorant and

<sup>1</sup> E. Renan et M. Berthelot, *Correspondance* (Paris, 1898), pp. 75-79.

foolish multitude cling with a sullen determination to far grosser beliefs which really answer to the coarser texture of their undeveloped intellect. Thus while the avowed creed of the enlightened minority is constantly changing under the influence of reflection and enquiry, the real, though unavowed, creed of the mass of mankind appears to be almost stationary, and the reason why it alters so little is that in the majority of men, whether they are savages or outwardly civilised beings, intellectual progress is so slow as to be hardly perceptible.

Thus from an examination, first, of savagery and, second, of its survivals in civilisation, the study of Social Anthropology attempts to trace the early history of human thought and institutions. The history can never be complete, unless indeed science should discover some mode of reading the faded record of the past of which we in this generation can hardly dream. We know indeed that every event, however insignificant, implies a change, however slight, in the material constitution of the universe, so that the whole history of the world is, in a sense, engraved upon its face, though our eyes are too dim to read the scroll. It may be that in the future some wondrous reagent, some magic chemical, may yet be found to bring out the whole of nature's secret handwriting for a greater than Daniel to interpret to his fellows. That will hardly be in our time. With the resources at present at our command we must be content with a very brief, imperfect, and in large measure conjectural account of man's mental and social development in prehistoric ages. As I have already pointed out, the evidence, fragmentary and dubious as it is, only runs back a very little way into the measureless past of human life on earth; we soon lose the thread, the faintly glimmering thread, in the thick darkness of the absolutely unknown. Even in the comparatively short space of time, a few thousand years at most, which falls more or less within our ken, there are many deep and

wide chasms which can only be bridged by hypotheses, if the story of evolution is to run continuously. Such bridges are built in anthropology as in biology by the Comparative Method, which enables us to borrow the links of one chain of evidence to supply the gaps in another. For us who deal, not with the various forms of animal life, but with the various products of human intelligence, the legitimacy of the Comparative Method rests on the well-ascertained similarity of the working of the human mind in all races of men. I have laid stress on the great inequalities which exist not only between the various races, but between men of the same race and generation ; but it should be clearly understood and remembered that these divergencies are quantitative rather than qualitative, they consist in differences of degree rather than of kind. The savage is not a different sort of being from his civilised brother : he has the same capacities, mental and moral, but they are less fully developed : his evolution has been arrested, or rather retarded, at a lower level. And as savage races are not all on the same plane, but have stopped or tarried at different points of the upward path, we can to a certain extent, by comparing them with each other, construct a scale of social progression and mark out roughly some of the stages on the long road that leads from savagery to civilisation. In the kingdom of mind such a scale of mental evolution answers to the scale of morphological evolution in the animal kingdom.

From what I have said I hope you have formed some idea of the extreme importance which the study of savage life possesses for a proper understanding of the early history of mankind. The savage is a human document, a record of man's efforts to raise himself above the level of the beast. It is only of late years that the full value of the document has been appreciated ; indeed, many people are probably still of Dr. Johnson's opinion, who, pointing to the three large volumes of *Voyages to the South Seas* which had just come out, said : " Who will



read them through? A man had better work his way before the mast than read them through; they will be eaten by rats and mice before they are read through. There can be little entertainment in such books; one set of savages is like another.”<sup>1</sup> But the world has learned a good deal since Dr. Johnson’s day; and the records of savage life, which the sage of Bolt Court consigned without scruple to the rats and mice, have now their place among the most precious archives of humanity. Their fate has been like that of the Sibylline Books. They were neglected and despised when they might have been obtained complete; and now wise men would give more than a king’s ransom for their miserably mutilated and imperfect remains. It is true that before our time civilised men often viewed savages with interest and described them intelligently, and some of their descriptions are still of great scientific value. For example, the discovery of America naturally excited in the minds of the European peoples an eager curiosity as to the inhabitants of the new world, which had burst upon their gaze, as if at the waving of a wizard’s wand the curtain of the western sky had suddenly rolled up and disclosed scenes of glamour and enchantment. Accordingly some of the Spaniards who explored and conquered these realms of wonder have bequeathed to us accounts of the manners and customs of the Indians, which for accuracy and fulness of detail probably surpass any former records of an alien race. Such, for instance, is the great work of the Franciscan friar Sahagun on the natives of Mexico, and such the work of Garcilasso de la Vega, himself half an Inca, on the Incas of Peru. Again, the exploration of the Pacific in the eighteenth century, with its revelation of fairy-like islands scattered in profusion over a sea of eternal summer, drew the eyes and stirred the imagination of Europe; and to the curiosity thus raised in many minds, though not in Dr. Johnson’s, we owe

<sup>1</sup> J. Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*<sup>9</sup> (London, 1822), iv. 315.

some precious descriptions of the islanders, who, in those days of sailing ships, appeared to dwell so remote from us that the poet Cowper fancied their seas might never again be ploughed by English keels.<sup>1</sup>

These and many other old accounts of savages must always retain their interest and value for the study of Social Anthropology, all the more because they set before us the natives in their natural unsophisticated state, before their primitive manners and customs had been altered or destroyed by European influence. Yet in the light of subsequent research these early records are often seen to be very defective, because the authors, unaware of the scientific importance of facts which to the ordinary observer might appear trifling or disgusting, have either passed over many things of the highest interest in total silence or dismissed them with a brief and tantalising allusion. It is accordingly necessary to supplement the reports of former writers by a minute and painstaking investigation of the living savages in order to fill up, if possible, the many yawning gaps in our knowledge. Unfortunately this cannot always be done, since many savages have either been totally exterminated or so changed by contact with Europeans that it is no longer possible to obtain trustworthy information as to their old habits and traditions. But whenever the ancient customs and beliefs of a primitive race have passed away unrecorded, a document of human history has perished beyond recall. Unhappily this destruction of the archives, as we may call it, is going on apace. In some places, for example, in Tasmania, the savage is already extinct; in others, as in Australia, he is dying. In others again, for instance in Central and Southern Africa, where the numbers and inborn vigour of the race shew little or no sign of succumbing in the

<sup>1</sup> *In boundless oceans, never to be passed  
By navigators uninform'd as they,  
Or plough'd perhaps by British bark again.*

*The Task*, book i. 629 sqq.

struggle for existence, the influence of traders, officials, and missionaries is so rapidly disintegrating and effacing the native customs, that with the passing of the older generation even the memory of them will soon in many places be gone. It is therefore a matter of the most urgent scientific importance to secure without delay full and accurate reports of these perishing or changing peoples, to take permanent copies, so to say, of these precious monuments before they are destroyed. It is not yet too late. Much may still be learned, for example, in West Australia, in New Guinea, in Melanesia, in Central Africa, among the hill tribes of India and the forest Indians of the Amazons. There is still time to send expeditions to these regions, to subsidise men on the spot, who are conversant with the languages and enjoy the confidence of the natives; for there are such men who possess or can obtain the very knowledge we require, yet who, unaware or careless of its inestimable value for science, make no effort to preserve the treasure for posterity, and, if we do not speedily come to the rescue, will suffer it to perish with them. In the whole range of human knowledge at the present moment there is no more pressing need than that of recording this priceless evidence of man's early history before it is too late. For soon, very soon, the opportunities which we still enjoy will be gone for ever. In another quarter of a century probably there will be little or nothing of the old savage life left to record. The savage, such as we may still see him, will then be as extinct as the dodo. The sands are fast running out: the hour will soon strike: the record will be closed: the book will be sealed. And how shall we of this generation look when we stand at the bar of posterity arraigned on a charge of high treason to our race, we who neglected to study our perishing fellow-men, but who sent out costly expeditions to observe the stars and to explore the barren ice-bound regions of the poles, as if the polar ice would melt and the stars would

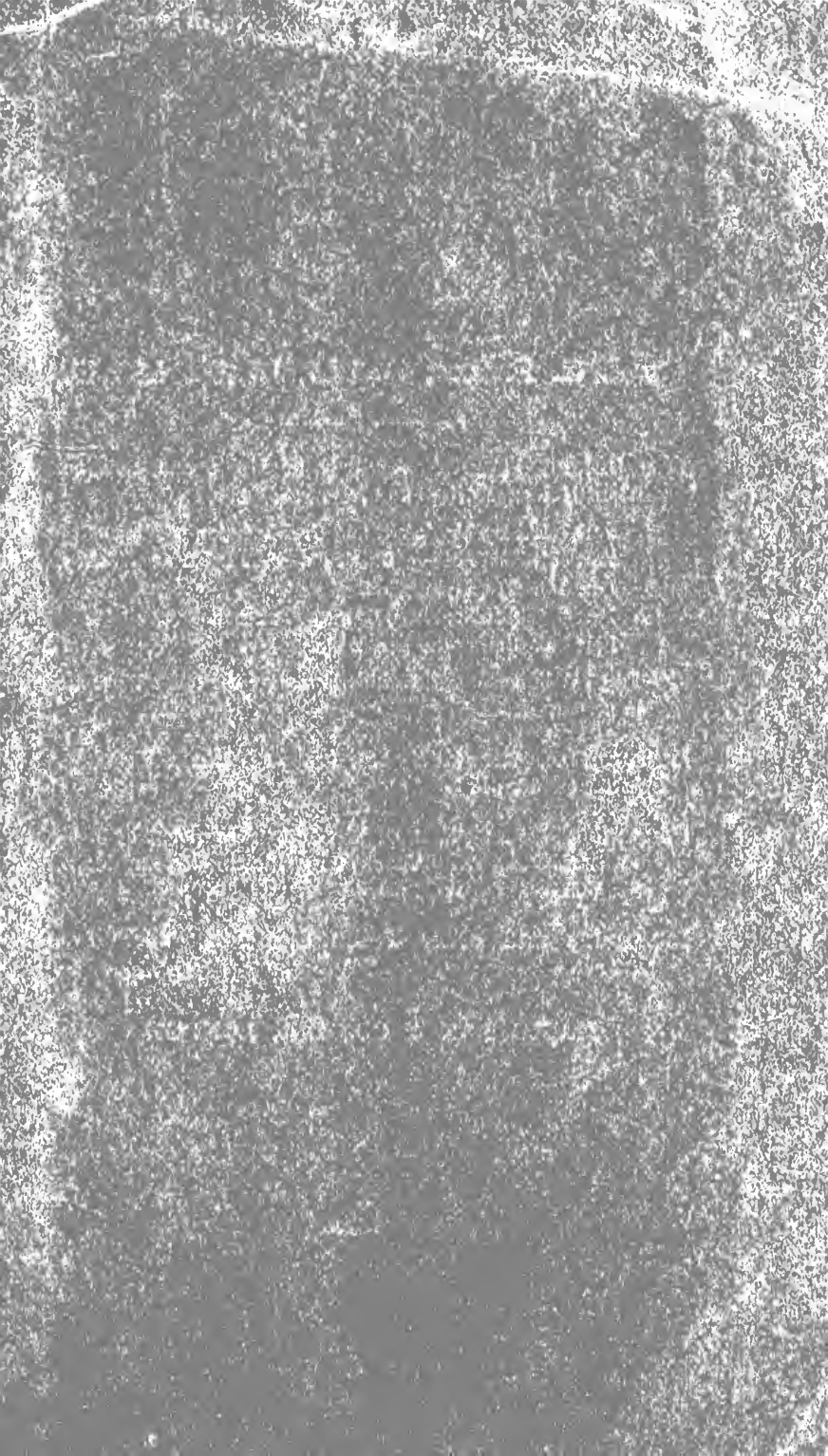
cease to shine when we are gone? Let us awake from our slumber, let us light our lamps, let us gird up our loins. The Universities exist for the advancement of knowledge. It is their duty to add this new province to the ancient departments of learning which they cultivate so diligently. Cambridge, to its honour, has led the way in equipping and despatching anthropological expeditions; it is for Oxford, it is for Liverpool, it is for every University in the land to join in the work.

More than that, it is the public duty of every civilised state actively to co-operate. In this respect the United States of America, by instituting a bureau for the study of the aborigines within its dominions, has set an example which every enlightened nation that rules over lower races ought to imitate. On none does that duty, that responsibility, lie more clearly and more heavily than on our own, for to none in the whole course of human history has the sceptre been given over so many and so diverse races of men. We have made ourselves our brother's keepers. Woe to us if we neglect our duty to our brother! It is not enough for us to rule in justice the peoples we have subjugated by the sword. We owe it to them, we owe it to ourselves, we owe it to posterity, who will require it at our hands, that we should describe them as they were before we found them, before they ever saw the English flag and heard, for good or evil, the English tongue. The voice of England speaks to her subject peoples in other accents than in the thunder of her guns. Peace has its triumphs as well as war: there are nobler trophies than captured flags and cannons. There are monuments, airy monuments, monuments of words, which seem so fleeting and evanescent, that will yet last when your cannons have crumbled and your flags have mouldered into dust. When the Roman poet wished to present an image of perpetuity, he said that he would be remembered so long as the Roman Empire endured, so long as the white-robed procession of the Vestals and

Pontiffs should ascend the Capitol to pray in the temple of Jupiter. That solemn procession has long ceased to climb the slope of the Capitol, the Roman Empire itself has long passed away, like the empire of Alexander, like the empire of Charlemagne, like the empire of Spain, yet still amid the wreck of kingdoms the poet's monument stands firm, for still his verses are read and remembered. I appeal to the Universities, I appeal to the Government of this country to unite in building a monument, a beneficent monument, of the British Empire, a monument

*Quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens  
Possit diruere, aut innumerabilis  
Annorum series, et fuga temporum.*





By J. G. Frazer, D.C.L., LL.D., Litt.D.

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