

The Canadian Practitioner and Review.

VOL. XXV.

TORONTO, AUGUST, 1900.

No. 8.

Original Communications.

IS THE ANGLO-SAXON RACE DEGENERATING?*

BY JAMES RUSSELL, M.D., HAMILTON, ONT.

The subject of this paper propounds a question, which to the ordinary observer may seem wholly at variance with common sense, and to the student of ethnology absurdly paradoxical. I freely admit that the spirit of the age and the general tone of public opinion as well as the pride of race are all averse to the presumption that even a suspicion of degeneracy surrounds the question of Anglo-Saxon dominance throughout the world. It is a subject, however, that will bear investigation if for nothing else than to discover what our racial assets are, and whether or not there may be an extravagant waste of brain energy which is leading us on to mental bankruptcy.

For the purpose of this inquiry I shall include all people who speak the Anglo-Saxon language, and whose racial characteristics and national aspirations conform to like methods of civilization. The racial line of cleavage at once includes Great Britain and her colonies and the North American Republic, for though a vast admixture of foreign races is included in this classification, yet with the exception of the Mongolian and African races, all the other branches of the great Aryan family are like ourselves. The process of assimilation conforms to Anglo-Saxon ideals, and in time they become incorporated into full citizenship and gradually become inspired with the national aspirations of the country which gives them the protection of a home.

*Read before the American Medico-Psychological Association at Richmond, Virginia, May 22nd, 1900.

The inquiry affords a wide field for historical and ethnological research, because it is only by tracing back the origin of our race and watching its rise and progress that we can have a proper conception of the causes which have contributed to its growth and development. It is also important to know what racial characteristics have been prominent in enabling the race to forge ahead of other races in the onward march of civilization, and why it occupies such a dominant place in the world's history. It is also pertinent to inquire whether this race-dominance is the outcome of natural causes which are permanent and enduring, or whether it may be subject to disintegrating forces, which, if not controlled, may undermine and destroy the whole national and social fabric of the race.

It may be said that the scope of the subject under review comes more within the range of ethnology and sociology than of psychology, and yet we find every branch of natural science so interdependent that we cannot study it intelligently as a whole without becoming conversant with it in all its branches. To study psychology successfully we must first have an acquaintance with biology, and to understand the sister branches of ethnology and sociology we must first have an acquaintance with both biology and psychology. As students of natural science in the specialty of psychology and as daily practical workers within our several institutions for the treatment of the insane, we are continually in danger of having our minds contracted and our mental vision obscured within the narrow limits of conventional methods for the care and comfort of those committed to our charge. The tendency is ever to get into deep ruts of official routine, to which we become more or less enslaved without taking thought of the great dynamic forces in co-operation around us. We would do well occasionally to cast our horoscope across a wider field of mental activity and take cognizance of the great world movements in operation, which are either making for the upbuilding and betterment of our race, or, it may be, sowing the seed of future national and social dissolution and racial decay. The field is an inviting one for the enterprising student of psychological phenomena to exploit. The great cosmic forces in operation as exhibited in the intense intellectuality of the age, as manifested in the fierce struggle for national supremacy, the competition among great powers in opening up and taking possession of the hitherto waste places of the earth, the subjugation of the weak by the strong, the formation of great corporations and trusts in place of individualism, the intense struggle for wealth and power, the wide diffusion of knowledge among the masses, the wealth of discovery and invention, the wonderful provision for the weak and degenerate classes as evidencing the altruistic spirit of the

age—all this, and much more I might mention, symbolize to-day, as it never did before in the world's history, the mighty expansion of brain power. This explosion (if I may so term it) of brain energy during the present century, and especially the latter half of it, has so revolutionized every department of our social, commercial and industrial economy, that we stand appalled and confounded at the magnitude and complexity of its operations. It is not to be wondered at that the great mass of the people were unprepared for such an upheaval of social and industrial energy, and that a large number of the more weakly endowed mentally would fail to adjust themselves to the altered conditions and swell the ranks of the dependent and degenerate classes.

RACE EVOLUTION.

The history of race evolution, as far as we can trace it, proves most conclusively that it is a slow and gradual process upward from the primary to the complex, from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, by a process of greater specialization in its organic and social structure. The whole phenomena of racial development teach us that it is acquired by a gradual adjustment of inner to external conditions, and whether we view it from the biological or the sociological standpoint, the same law of adaption of means to end is in progress. The natural law of progress is not by convulsive leaps and bounds, but by slow accretion and infinitesimal change in structure, and covering a long period of time. Looking back through the history of the past among the different races of people of whom we have any authentic record, we find that every epoch in the history of a race which has been marked by an intense expansion of mental force, whether expressed in art and literature or in military conquest, has been followed by reaction and national decay. Where are all the great races and nations of antiquity that were born, flourished, reached the zenith of their power and glory and fell into decay? All sleeping in oblivion with nothing left but the ruins of their former greatness, or perchance a literature to perpetuate the memory of their intellectual vigor as well as their stupendous folly. Reasoning from analogy, for we can only forecast the future by a knowledge of the past, what have we to say of the Anglo-Saxon race to which we belong? We know that less than two thousand years ago our forbears were comparatively barbarians, and with the most primitive form of civilization, and yet within that short period of time, after repeated invasions from Europe of Angles, Saxons, Normans and Danes, this admixture of races has produced the greatest civilization the world has ever known. Coming down through the centuries it has expanded itself from continent

to continent, and to the remote isles of the sea, with ever-increasing momentum and shedding light and knowledge into the dark places of the earth, until it has reached a culmination in the present century of such an expression of brain power and intellectual activity unrivalled in recorded history. What is to be the outcome of this intense civilization, with its highly vitalized brain energy manifesting itself in every department of human endeavor? Is it the natural outgrowth of the evolutionary process, or is it a dynamic, spasmodic operation of force, expending itself in unnatural waste and out of consonance with natural law? Is the human brain able to stand the test of such prodigious mental manifestation? Is it able to go on projecting itself into the future with an ever-increasing ratio of momentum *ad infinitum*, or is it doomed by perversion of natural law to exhaustion and decay?

These are problems to which as psychologists we should address ourselves. It is our business to study every phase of mental phenomena. We are the mind searchers as well as the mind healers of the race. It is our special province to speak *ex cathedra* on such questions, and public opinion has a right to hold us guilty if we remain silent. In the great struggle for existence between social and economic forces there is ever an increased complexity of relation requiring a greater differentiation of brain development, and as long as this is conducted on physiological lines there seems no limit to its attainment. On the other hand, if it can be shown that amid all this splendor of achievement there are exhausting, disintegrating processes at work which are slowly but surely undermining the whole moral and social fabric of the race, then it becomes us as scientists to sound the alarm, and to light up the hilltops of science with beacon fires of warning against impending dissolution.

LESSONS OF HISTORY.

History teaches us many useful and important lessons, but there is one lesson most pertinent to the present inquiry, and it is this, that all the nations of antiquity of which we have any authentic record, began to crumble and decay at the very time they had reached the zenith of their power and glory, and further that a proud imperialistic spirit and lust of empire were the immediate forerunners of national dissolution.

It is significant for us to note that, whether by coincidence or by historical sequence of like causes producing like effects, there is manifest to-day a growing imperialistic idea in every branch of the Anglo-Saxon race. We have been accustomed to regard imperialism as the outgrowth of monarchical institutions, but even in the free democratic institu-

tions of America we find an uncrowned imperialism already raising its haughty head. Coleridge in his Table Talks states, "The true key to the declension of the Roman Empire, and which is not to be found in all Gibbon's immense work, may be stated in two words—the imperial character overlying and finally destroying the national character." Let us hope history does not repeat itself in this particular, and that the imperialistic spirit of to-day, chastened and purified by the experience of the past, may be the harbinger of peace among the nations of the earth. The Roman Empire increased in size through conquest out of proportion to social and national structure, and there was no cohesive attraction between the conquered provinces and the central authority.

Autocratic and military despotism crushed out every feeling of national aspiration. The Roman Legions returned home in triumph laden with the spoils of foreign conquest, and Rome became the mistress of the world. Corrupted and enervated by wealth and intoxicated by power, the rulers fell into every form of extravagance and sensuality. Internal dissension and jealousy soon began to manifest itself, the central authority was weakened, the moral and social structure of the people was loosened and the nation crumbled into ruin and decay. It was no wonder the Empire fell an easy prey to the hardy Goths, Vandals and Huns of northern Europe.

In this rapid review of the decline and fall of Roman civilization we do well to institute a comparison in order to discover if any of the causes which led to the overthrow of that great empire are present with us to-day. We have an advantage over them of fifteen centuries of nation building, with many vicissitudes of fortune, in our attempts to build up an Anglo-Saxon civilization on Roman models. It cannot be denied that we have made great progress over them in the art of constitutional government and in the extension of the rights of citizenship; the last stronghold of special privilege to surrender was the divine right of kings to rule. All power is now vested in the hands of the people, and will be wielded wisely or unwisely in proportion to the diffusion of knowledge and the general standard of morality maintained.

PHILOSOPHY VS. CHRISTIANITY.

Unless we can show that the Anglo-Saxon race possesses inherent elements of permanence and continuity which the great nations of the past did not possess, what guarantee have we that history shall not repeat itself and that we shall pass through the same stages of national life that they did? It may be said that all the forms of civilization in the past were

doomed to decay because they had not the living, vitalizing power of Christianity within them. Their ethical and moral teaching as well as their national aspirations were based on a cold and lifeless philosophy. The philosophy of Hedonism was all directed to a mode of life conducive to the welfare of the individual, whereas the philosophy of Christ taught the relation of the individual to the community and to a divine power manifest in the universe. No civilization can be made to order. It must be the outcome of slow growth, and its permanence and endurance will be in proportion to its observance of the great moral, social and physical laws which govern the universe.

We see evidence of this in abortive attempts to engraft a nineteenth century civilization upon heathen races, forgetting that civilization is not a matter of mechanical acquirement, but requires many generations to effect a permanent modification of character. We may apply an external veneer of morality among them and they may comply with certain ordinances and formulas which they do not understand, but they remain heathen still in their feelings and habits of thought. That is the reason why there is a race problem in America which cannot be solved.

The attempt to impose a civilization upon the colored race which is foreign to every instinct of its nature and which can only be acquired after a long process of evolution, must necessarily end in failure.

If it be proved that Christianity is the chief corner-stone upon which our present civilization rests, it may be asked whether that agency is still potent to project that civilization into futurity with unabated vigor.

SCIENCE VS. THEOLOGY.

The early church had to contend against a learned philosophy for supremacy, which after a long struggle and many persecutions it overcame. In our day the Church has to contend against a more formidable force in natural science. Step by step science has pushed its conquests, beginning with the inorganic and denying the Mosaic cosmogony of creation as recorded in the book of Genesis. Passing to the organic it denies that man is a special creation of God and makes him a product of evolution; passing then from the organic to the psychical, it teaches that man expresses himself to his environment in direct ratio to the quantity and quality of his brain matter. In short, the conception of science to-day in the cosmogony of the universe, both organically and inorganically, is the reign of natural law. The conflict between science and theology has been long and bitter. At first the Church treated

every demonstration of science with contempt, but the time came when it either had to defend itself or surrender. A reconciliation was attempted, and theologians said a literal interpretation was absurd, and that many things rejected by science were susceptible of explanation in allegory, metaphor and symbolism. At last the Church stole the livery of science and began to teach evolution itself. An American divine, Henry Ward Beecher, was the first to preach it boldly from the pulpit, and for doing so he was anathematized by theologians everywhere, and yet only thirteen years after his death it has been generally accepted by the Church, and the immanence of God is now recognized in evolution through the operation of natural law. Truly it may be said the sceptic of one generation is the orthodox of the next. In the meantime the search for a *modus vivendi* between science and theology produced an alarming amount of scepticism in the form of materialism, which is still without the pale of the Church. The age seems ripe for another church reformation, and an intellectual and spiritual emancipation from obsolete creeds which cannot be preached, and from a dead formalism of traditional rite and ceremony, the outcome of mediæval superstition and spiritual darkness which are all the devices of men. A new flame of awakened spiritual consciousness begins to burn on the watch-towers of Zion, calling upon a recreant church to doff its external trappings of pride and presumption, and return to the beauty and simplicity of the early church democracy when rich and poor met in brotherly love to partake of the mystic symbols of a Saviour's passion in the bare upper room at Jerusalem. There is a sad lack of reverence for sacred things everywhere. People go to church to be amused rather than instructed, the preaching is undergoing a gradual process of extinction, and the musical part of the service is the great attraction, and churches compete with each other in providing high-class music to attract and entertain their congregations, and the emotional and sentimental is appealed to rather than the spiritual and intellectual.

And yet, notwithstanding the lack of reverence for spiritual things at no time was there ever a broader spirit of humanity abroad than the present. Human life was never held more sacred and the splendid provision made for every class of dependents and every class of suffering is one of the noblest tributes to our Christian civilization. Is the cry of famine heard in distant lands, then the purse-strings are opened and money pours out in rich abundance for its relief. Are our soldiers fighting in foreign lands to establish the rights of freemen, then a nation's gratitude is poured out to those who risk their lives in defence of the sacred cause of liberty.

In the social and commercial relations between individuals and nations we see evidence of a mutual business integrity without which everything would be chaos and confusion.

It may be said that this is only the natural evolution of man from lower to higher ideals of life and is quite irrespective of religious teaching. I do not so regard it. There can be no doubt that Christian teaching, imperfect though it may be, is the foundation upon which the whole fabric of our modern civilization rests. The fundamental basis of all civilization is egoism or selfishness and the growth of altruism or love of others. This is a purely psychological process, but must receive its impetus from some transcendent spiritualizing force which is foreign to man's human nature.

INTELLECTUALITY.

The literature of a race is a fair criterion of its intellectual vigor. Measured by this test we may fairly say that the Anglo-Saxon has exceeded all other races in the wealth of literature it has produced. On the other hand, we must not forget that the standard of mental superiority must be determined more by the quality than the quantity of its literature. The whole history of civilization, both ancient and modern, has been one of action and reaction, of development and decay. European civilization slumbered for one thousand years in darkness and gloom after the fall of the Roman Empire. The moral, social and intellectual forces of the people were exhausted, and a long process of rest was necessary for recuperation.

The dawn of the Renaissance and the revival of learning were the watch-word that Europe was rested, and that she had recovered from her social decrepitude and mental bankruptcy. In the meantime a new Teutonic civilization had engrafted itself on the old effete system, and bursting forth on the wings of a new inspiration, a mighty impetus was at once given to every branch of art, literature and science, light was evolved out of darkness, and the wheels of progress again began to revolve. It has gone on with an ever-increasing momentum until the last half of the present century has witnessed such a triumph of mind over matter that we stand appalled and confounded at the very richness and magnitude of our patrimony. The whole commercial, industrial and social conditions have so changed that we find ourselves at once face to face with complex conditions and problems requiring the very highest type of mental development for their solution.

That a large mass of the people are unequal to the task of adjusting themselves to the operation of such dynamic forces, and falter by the way, is not to be wondered at. It is only the

highly vitalized brain, richly endowed by hereditary transmission and equipped by the best educational processes, that is able to compete in the great struggle for existence. The submerged masses could not at once adapt themselves to such conditions, and the harvest of incapables who fall to the rear in the struggle must necessarily be large. We try to explain the large increase in our insanity returns by our larger humanity and the ampler provision made for their care, but the mighty upheaval in our social and industrial conditions must be credited with a large and ever-increasing proportion of it.

MENTAL DECLINE.

How long is this condition of things to go on? Are we to go on in the future still further exploiting the mysteries of science and adding discovery to discovery and invention to invention with an ever-increasing complexity of conditions, or is there a limit to brain expansion which cannot be overstepped with impunity? Is it possible that we may have already overstimulated the physiological process of brain activity, and that, suffering from brain exhaustion, we shall gradually undergo a process of mental decay?

From the Elizabethan period downward the pages of English literature have been adorned by the names of men who have made a profound impression on the age in which they lived in moulding the character and habits of the people. The last of these great men died the other day in the person of John Ruskin, who inscribed his name in imperishable gold on the pages of English literature.

Looking over the field of literature to-day it is sad to reflect that these men have left no successors, and, what is worse, there is no demand for them. At no age in the world's history was there ever such a surfeit of literature as to-day—in fact, in every sense it is an age of literary dissipation. At least 90 per cent. of it is fiction, and a good deal of it of a low and impure order at that. Nowadays men have no time for reading except for recreation or business demands. They scan the morning newspaper for the war news, the stock exchange reports, or the latest horse-race or prize-fight. The gambling spirit is dominant everywhere and is not confined to one sex. There is no time for deep reading or profound thinking. The mad struggle is after wealth. Literary barrenness is the consequence, and the tendency is everywhere to superficial thinking with a little knowledge of everything. There are no great living poets, philosophers or divines whom the masses are looking to for guidance. They are not forthcoming because there is no demand for them. The mind of the age is focussed on one great paramount idea—the acquisition of wealth.

Men are not satisfied nowadays to make wealth by the slow operation of individual effort, but it must be made on a great scale through the operation of great corporations or trusts. Individualism is crushed out under the iron heel of monopoly. The great commercial and industrial interests are in the hands of joint stock monopolies and controlled by joint stock brains. The Captains of industry and the Napoleons of finance will soon be an extinct type. This monopoly of opportunity necessarily results in enormous wealth with its correspondent extravagance. Men toil while their families live in idleness and luxury, the home is closed up, most of the time is spent in travel, the earth is traversed from the Occident to the Orient in search of change to relieve the monotonous *ennui* or the still more distressing neurasthenia, all the result of idleness and extravagant living. In no age, as far as history teaches us, has there been a race of people that withstood for any length of time the corrupting and enervating effects of wealth.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion I plead guilty to a desire to pursue this subject further, but I am reminded that I have already exceeded the limit of time assigned to me by this Association. I confess to have already carried the subject beyond the range of psychology proper and have endeavored to interpret it along the line of its varied manifestations in the practical every-day affairs of life. The human brain is a composite organ and susceptible of enormous expansion and development, but like everything human it has its limitations. Whether or not it can stand the enormous strain of the present rate of activity and continue to project itself with unabated vigor into the future is the great problem now before us for discussion. If we are to be guided by the history of the past then we must answer in the negative.

I have pointed out many disintegrating processes at work, which, if not corrected, will destroy the moral and intellectual fibre of the race. Two great laws are in operation, moral and physical, the observance of which make for the elevation of the race, and they cannot be disregarded with impunity.

The immense virility of the Anglo-Saxon race, like the sturdy oak, may resist the encroachments of the canker worm for generations, but unless purged and purified of the disease it will at last crumble and decay. Whatever undercurrent evidences of degeneration there may be, there is no apparent diminution of national power. The two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon family on both sides of the Atlantic never exhibited so much racial and national vitality as to-day. A great

field of operation lies before the race in carrying the torch-light of civil and constitutional liberty to the dark places of the earth. Wherever the Union Jack and Stars and Stripes are planted, there ignorance, vice and oppression die out, and peace, prosperity and liberty are established. Let us hope that these two branches of a great family will forever stand shoulder to shoulder in the maintenance of peace and in advancing the world's civilization. May their swords never be unsheathed except in smiting the oppressor and in establishing the rights of civil and religious liberty. Such a union of racial and national power might arbitrate the peace of the world, and go far to usher in that prophetic time,

“When the war-drum thrills no longer, and the battle-flags are furled,
In the parliament of man, the federation of the world.”