

NOTES.

"The student who applies the comparative method to the study of human customs and institutions is continually finding usages, beliefs, or laws existing in one part of the world that have long since ceased to exist in another part; yet where they have ceased to exist they have often left unmistakable traces of their former existence. In Australia we find types of savagery ignorant of the bow and arrow: in aboriginal North America, a type of barbarism familiar with the art of pottery, but ignorant of domestic animals or of the use of metals; among the earliest Romans, a higher type of barbarism, familiar with iron and cattle, but ignorant of the alphabet. Along with such gradations in material culture we find associated gradations in ideas, in social structure, and in deep-seated customs. Thus some kind of fetishism is apt to prevail in the lower stages of barbarism and some form of polytheism in the higher stages.

"In the most advanced societies we find numerous traces of such states of things as now exist only among savage or barbarous societies. Our own ancestors were once polytheists, with plenty of traces of fetishism. They were organized in clans, phratries, tribes. There was a time when they used none but stone tools and weapons, when there was no private property in land, and no political structure higher than the tribe. Among the forefathers of the present civilized inhabitants of Europe are unmistakable traces of human sacrifices, and of the reckoning of kinship through the mother only. When we have come to survey large groups of facts of this sort, the conclusion is irresistibly driven home to us that the more advanced societies have gone through various stages now represented here and there by less advanced societies; that there is a general path of social development, along which, owing to special circumstances, some peoples have advanced a great way, some a less way, some but a very little way, and that by studying existing savages and barbarians we get a valuable clue to the interpretation of pre-historic times. All these things are to-day common-places among students of history and archaeology; sixty years ago they would have been scouted as unintelligible and idle vagaries. Yet to this change is entirely due the superior power of modern historical methods. Formerly the historian told anecdotes or discussed particular lines of policy; now he can do that as much as ever, but he can also study nation-building, and discern some features of the general drift of events from the earliest to the most recent times."—*John Fiske, Pop. Science Monthly, Sept, 1891. pp. 585. 596.*

With the advance of time, interest increases in all that relates to the early condition of man. The words *ethnology*, *anthropology* and *archæology* are rapidly becoming as common as *geology*, *astronomy* and *geography*. Everything that illustrates a point in the life-history of existing primitive peoples is carefully noted; comparisons instituted, and conclusions either arrived at or attempted. A German traveller recently discovered a tribe of cave dwellers in Africa, and, thereupon, curiosity was aroused as to how the manners and customs of these modern troglodytes would bear out conclusions arrived at from an examination of ancient cave-dwellings in France, Belgium and England. Notwithstanding racial distinctions and lapse of time, the results of the comparison were said to be highly satisfactory.

But, although much has been written, especially during the last half century, on the beginnings and growth of society, one still hears a frequent repetition of the query, What does it matter to us how a lot of savages lived a hundred or a thousand years ago? A query of this kind always embodies a sneer; a sneer implying that time devoted to such matters is spent foolishly or absolutely thrown away.

"We are too apt," says Reclus,* "to look down scornfully from the heights of modern civilization upon the mental processes of former times, upon the ways of feeling, acting and thinking, which characterise human aggregations anterior to our own. How often we scoff without knowing anything about them! We have fancied that the ethnology of inferior races was nothing but a medley of

*Élie Reclus in "Primitive Folk," 1890, p. vii.