

# The Canadian Journal.

TORONTO, APRIL, 1853.

## On the Probable Number of the Native Indian Population of British America: Captain J. H. Lefroy, Royal Artillery.

(READ BEFORE THE CANADIAN INSTITUTE, MAY 1, 1852.)

There are probably few persons who, in the course of their reading in history, have not dwelt with peculiar interest upon the glimpses we catch through the mists of the past, of whole races of men that have vanished from the face of the earth, leaving no heirs or representatives to inherit the richer blessings of our age: of nations whose part in the great drama of human life we can never ascertain, whose sages are forgotten, whose warriors lie with "the mighty that were before Agamemnon" in the obscurity of oblivion. Then we may remember "how small a part of time we share" whose interests are so momentous for eternity; and may recognize, in the force of our sympathy, in the eagerness with which we interrogate the monuments that have descended to us; in the curiosity which all their reserve cannot baffle; a testimony to the truth of the declaration of the sacred historian, that the Creator 'hath made of one blood all the nations upon earth'; as well as the tie of relationship which unites all the descendants of our common parents, whatever their place in the stream, or their fortunes on the stage of life.

Naturalists have been able to number some half-dozen birds or animals that have become totally extinct within the period of authentic history. We have lately seen what general rejoicing, the discovery of a living specimen of one previously ranked in that number (the *Apteryx*), has created among them. The skull, the foot, and a few rude pictures of the Dodo, have furnished ample material for a quarto volume. How many might be written on the varieties of the human race that have ceased to exist within the same period! The Dodo was perfectly common at the Isles de Bourbon two centuries ago, it was neglected, hunted down, exterminated accordingly: and the Dutch seamen who made an easy prey of whole flocks, twenty or thirty at a time, in 1602, (the Dodo, page 15,) no more suspected that we should now be ransacking all the museums of Europe for scraps to elucidate its affinities, than the first settlers of Newfoundland did that we should also be seeking in vain for one relic of its aborigines. When happy and hospitable crowds welcomed the Spaniards to the shores of Hispaniola, those cavaliers little dreamt that in three centuries or less the numerous and warlike Caribs of that Island, like the Gauchos of the Canaries, would be extinct, as completely so as the Architects of the Cyclopean remains of Italy, or the race that preceded Saxon and Dane, and Celt, in the occupation of the British Isles. In half a century there will be no trace of a native race in some of the British colonies in the east. The natives of Van Dieman's Land, for example, who numbered 210 in 1835, were reduced

VOL. I, No. 9, APRIL, 1853.

to 38, in 1848.\* It even appears doubtful, whether that most interesting of all savage races, the Maoris of New Zealand, with its wonderful force of character, and faculty for civilization, will not die out faster than it can conform to its altered condition. Like those silent yet ceaseless operations of nature, which are wearing down, while we speak, the solid matter of every mountain chain, and water course on the globe, and substituting the luxuriant vegetation of the tropical coral reef for the barren wastes of the sea; so, slowly and imperceptibly, are the great changes effected, by which one race supercedes another in the occupation of portion after portion of the globe, bringing higher qualities, a different moral and physical organization, to work out higher destinies, and fulfil higher ends of the same controuling Providence.

These reflections have been suggested by the subject of the paper which I now propose to lay before this Society, containing the result of some enquiries I have made with a view to forming something like an authentic estimate of the number of the Indian race inhabiting the British possessions in America. A portion only, it is true, of the whole race, yet one which by reason of the great extent of those possessions, is commonly regarded as a very important one. If, as I think, it can be shown, that number is vastly smaller than most persons would suppose, and very rapidly diminishing, under circumstances which are nevertheless by no means unfavourable to its preservation; then it must be admitted that the prospects for the race at large are anything but encouraging—that the time may not be far remote when posterity may be counting its last remnants, and wishing that we in our day had been more alive to the facts, and more industrious in setting up marks by which they might measure the ebbing tide, and comprehend the destiny about to be consummated.

What constitutes density of population, is a question not easy to answer, when it relates to civilized communities, so wonderfully has Providence ordained that with fresh demands, and the heavier pressure of necessity, fresh resources should be found in nature for human sustenance; but in reference to uncivilized man, linked to nature by stronger ties, and having his existence bound up as it were, with those of her provisions which do not greatly vary from age to age, and are not so beyond our means of estimation, it does not seem impossible to assign limits beyond which his numbers can never far extend, and within which there is no reason that they should much vary, unless by the operation of external causes. However, I have no intention of attempting such an estimate here. We have evidence in the great Earthen Works of Ohio, requiring an immense number of hands for their erection, that at some period a considerable population occupied the fertile vallies of that region. We know that Agricultural pursuits prevailed among many tribes, which have since almost completely abandoned them; but with all this, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion, based on the desolating habits of Indian warfare, on the severity of the climate, and on the degraded position of the female sex, that upon the whole, the population of the middle and northern portion of the continent must, at all times, have been small in proportion to its area, and never on a par with the simplest of all natural resources, the animal life of the region. The materials for a specific estimate of their numbers at any one early period, are exceedingly scanty. The early travellers dealt in round numbers to an alarming extent. "*Qui dit un Canton d'Iroquois*" says de la Montan, "*dit un douzaine milliers, d'ames. Il s'en est trouve jusqua quatorze mille et l'on calculait ce nombre par deux mille Vieillardis quatre mille Femmes, deux mille Filles, et quatre mille Enfants.*" And as there were then five such cantons or Nations, this people, if the Baron or his authorities can be trusted, counted considerably less than

\* Our Antipodes by Colonel G. Mundy, 1852—Vol. II.