

The Race Myth Crumbles

By Harry Elmer Barnes

More and more we are coming to recognize the fundamental importance of race in human affairs. . . It is about the liveliest, most practical subject that can engage the attention of thinking men and women today. . .

Especially do we need to regard the racial factor when considering Europe. . . Whoever begins looking at Europe from the racial angle is astonished at the new light thrown upon its problems, at the apparent mysteries that are explained, at the former riddles that are solved. Europe's seemingly tangled history grows much simpler, while present-day conditions become more understandable.—Lothrop Stoddard, 1925.

THE racial phobia of the last three-quarters of a century, which has reappeared with a new virulence since 1916, has based much of its dogmatism upon an appeal to pseudo-history. Hence, it is curious that the critics of this monstrosity have rarely made a systematic appeal to the facts of substantial history to refute the contentions of writers from Gobineau to Chamberlain and Grant. The origins of the race myth must unquestionably be sought in vestiges from the primitive aversion-complex exhibited toward strangers, symbolized by the old phrases of Jew and Gentile, and Greek and Barbarian. In its modern form it first took shape with the theory of the eighteenth-century Romanticists with respect to the reality and the dominating importance of national character as the basis and matrix of the culture and institutions of any country. It was given a particularly forceful statement by Fichte in his famous "Addresses to the German nation" in 1807-1808, where he stated that perhaps the most precious element in the German heritage and culture lay in the German language or *Ursprache*. The emphasis of Fichte and others upon the importance of language in national character helped to produce the enthusiasm which created the origins of modern scientific philology in the notable works of the brothers Grimm, Max Muller, and others.

These philological researches stimulated interest in the study of the languages and institutions of Europe and Asia. The establishment of a relationship between the Eur-Asiatic languages was due primarily to the work of Bopp, who published his "Comparative Grammar" in 1835. During the next generation much important work was done in the way of investigating the origins, migration, and affinities of these so-called "Aryan" languages. It soon came to be rather commonly maintained that a primordial Aryan race lay back of these linguistic similarities and identities. In fact, Max Muller himself, though he later repudiated this position, confirmed this popular impression by holding that the Aryan languages were spoken by an Aryan race, hence supporting the current popular view of the identity of language and race.

This false assumption of linguistic and racial unity would not by itself, however, have furnished the basis for the racial psychosis. What was needed was a vigorous statement of the cultural supremacy and historic mission of particular races. This indispensable impetus was supplied in the famous "Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races" by Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, published in 1854. He contended that practically all of the worth-while cultures of the human past had been the product of the white race, and that most of these significant civilizations had been specifically the work of the Aryan branch of this superior white group. He also maintained that race mixture was a highly degenerating process. After Gobineau's time, therefore, it came to be regarded as a matter of great pride and significance to prove that one's nation was made up of the worthy Aryans.

At first this gave rise to relatively little nationalistic chauvinism in Europe because it was assumed that the broad similarities among the European languages, with the exception of Basque and certain of the Turanian dialects, meant that the overwhelm-

ing majority of all Europeans, within whatever national boundary, were thoroughbred Aryans. This benign illusion was, however, soon demolished by a number of Germanic writers, particularly J. G. Cuno (1871), Theodor Posche (1878), and Carl Penka (1883). These writers proved convincingly that the assumption of the identity between race and language was highly fallacious. A fairly well-unified race like the American Indians has more than a hundred distinct stock languages, while obviously different races may, due to cultural pressure and historic association, speak the same language. Hence it was apparent that not all Europeans were necessarily Aryans, and from the eighties onward there was a feverish effort on the part of writers in every state to prove themselves to be the only hundred per cent Aryans and their neighbors of inferior non-Aryan clay.

It has frequently been held that Teutonic writers were the only ones who succumbed to this fanaticism, but such a view is purely a product of modern propaganda. As an actual matter of fact, every state had its group of writers who interpreted national culture on the basis of racial superiority due to the Aryan heritage, England and France quite matching the Teutons in this respect. Such interpretations not only found expression in the obsessed writings of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Maurice Barres, Rudyard Kipling, and other essayists, but also in the nationalistic historical literature which held a supreme place in historical writing until near the close of the nineteenth century, being represented by such works as those of Droysen, Treitschke, von Sybel, Michelet, Martin, Kemble, Stubbs, Freeman, and other writers who are only slightly less distinguished and widely read.

The Nordic myth is but a later variant of the Aryan myth. There is a direct line of descent from Gobineau to Madison Grant. Many "Gobineau societies" were founded in Germany and elsewhere in the last half of the nineteenth century. One of Gobineau's most enthusiastic disciples was a renegade Scotchman, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, whose "Foundations of the Nineteenth Century" marks the transition from Aryanism to Nordicism in Germany. His work was carried forward enthusiastically by Ludwig Woltmann. This eulogy of the Teutonic or Nordic type was introduced into America on the same level by Alfred P. Schultz, an open admirer of Gobineau, Chamberlain, and Woltmann, who published his "Race or Mongrel" in 1908. Madison Grant's "The Passing of the Great Race," which first appeared in 1916, was based upon the assumptions of the above works, but adopted a far more specific physical conception of the Nordic race, abandoning the rather loose and mystical attitude of Chamberlain. Grant's views have been adopted, debased, and disseminated in such works as Gould's "America: A Family Problem" and Burr's "America's Race Heritage," until now Mr. H. J. Eckenrode has offered a "serious" interpretation of the American Civil War which is based primarily upon the assumption of Nordicism.

While this racial obsession was taking its most

vigorous form, scientists were patiently assembling the data which were to reveal with pitiless thoroughness the fundamental inaccuracy of all the assumptions which underlay the racial interpretation. An American student, W. Z. Ripley, built upon the researches of European scholars a comprehensive work on the races of Europe, which demolished the theory that there ever was any thing as an Aryan race. The term Aryan was shown to be applicable, if at all, only to some linguistic traits common to certain peoples of Europe and Asia. Above all, Ripley, Sergi and others demonstrated beyond any possible doubt that the Teutonic peoples certainly could not have been of Asiatic derivation and could not have been the original bearers of the Aryan languages and culture. If there is any such thing as a definite Aryan language and typical Aryan institutions, it is the consensus of the best anthropological opinion that they must have been brought into Europe by the round-headed Alpine or Eur-Asiatic race. In other words, the Nordics could not have been Aryans. The term "Indo-Germanic," used as descriptive of a unified race or culture, is thus a scientific absurdity in spite of the fact that it crops out in so recent an historical work as the third volume of "The Cambridge Medieval History." Indeed, it is still in common usage among many conventional historians, particularly Teutonic and English historians. It may be regarded as roughly accurate to use the term Indo-European as broadly descriptive of the Alpine race. It certainly cannot be used in any historical or scientific sense as referring to either the Mediterranean or the Nordic groups, and, hence, not as descriptive of all the leading races or cultures of ancient India and modern Europe.

When one turns to examine, in the light of the most rudimentary and self-evident facts of human history, the thesis that all the striking cultures and civilizations of the past have been a product of the Nordics, the whole structure of racialism immediately falls to the ground. The fallacies in a Nordic interpretation of the great culture of antiquity were demonstrated at length in the convincing article of Professor J. J. Smertenko in the *Current History Magazine* for April, 1924 (*). We here shall content ourselves with passing in review the chief historic civilizations and indicating the essentially non-Nordic basis which underlies almost every one of them.

All the leading civilizations of Oriental antiquity were, for practical purposes, one hundred per cent non-Nordic. The European heritage that came from Egypt and Western Asia, which has recently been so forcibly and clearly described by Professor Breasted, was absolutely devoid of any Nordic foundations. Further, we must revise the ordinary notion that the arena of human civilization has been limited to the area between the Tigris and the Thames. In most respects, aside from science and material culture, the civilizations of China and India may well be held to be more advanced and mature than those of the Occident. That they are of non-Nordic derivation would scarcely need to be pointed out even to Dr. Stoddard and Mr. Grant. The high civilization of the ancient Aegean was likewise a Mediterranean culture without any Nordic admixture whatever. To pass on to classical times, there was only the merest sprinkling of Nordics in the racial composition of ancient Greece and Italy, as Peake, Sergi, and Guiffrida-Ruggeri have amply demonstrated. Certainly, the Nordic element in classical culture, if present at all, was sufficiently slight to be almost entirely negligible.

The highest culture of the Middle Ages was not to be found in Western Europe but in the Eastern or Greek Empire and among the Moslems of North-

* See *Clarion* April 15 and May 1, 1924 for reproduction from "Current History" of Prof. Smertenko's article. (Continued on page 7)

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