

# The Canadian Journal.

TORONTO, OCTOBER, 1855.

## Hints for the Formation of a Canadian Collection of Ancient Crania.

The value which attaches to ancient skulls as indices of the characteristics of extinct races, is being more and more generally appreciated with the increasing results of extended observation. Camper, the originator of the ideal facial angle, was the first of modern scientific craniologists who aimed at establishing a system of classifying races by means of cranial conformation; and with him must be noted Daubenton, the contemporary and fellow-labourer of Buffon, who first drew attention to some of the most remarkable elements of comparison, in the characteristics of the base of the skull, both in comparative anatomy, as between the ape and man, and between the known races of men, as the Negro and European. These were followed by Blumenbach, to whom we owe the accepted application of some of the most familiar ethnological terms, such as Mongolian, Ethiopian, and, above all, *Caucasian*. Of these the last was undoubtedly founded on error, and, as now commonly employed, has a falser and more misleading import than any it was designed to convey by its originator. Hunter, Cuvier, and other naturalists, more or less incidentally noticed the same elements of comparison, and Dr. Prichard, with a rare combination of learning and powers of observation, began so early as 1808, by the publication of his *De Hominum Varietibus*, a series of works which have exercised the most important influence on the science of Ethnology.

While the latter of these works were in progress, a distinguished American physiologist, Dr. Samuel George Morton of Philadelphia, devoted himself to craniological investigation with a special view to the elucidation of the many obscure points relative to the ancient and existing native races of the new world. The first task he proposed to himself was the examination and comparison of the crania of the Indian tribes of North and South America. In following out his investigation he enlisted many zealous coadjutors in his service, and obtained skulls from ancient Mexican and Peruvian sepulchres, and from the grave mounds of the Southern States and of Central America. The first fruits of this was the publication, in 1839, of his *Crania Americana*, a work of the utmost value in this department of physical ethnology. Dr. Morton next proceeded to extend his labours into the most ancient areas of human colonisation, and with the aid of Mr. G. R. Gliddon, the United States Consul at Cairo, in Egypt, he obtained an important collection of skulls from the venerable catacombs of the Nile valley. The result of this was the publication of another work, the *Crania Egyptiaca*, in 1844, which met with the highest commendations from the Archaeologists and Ethnologists of Europe. Dr. Morton's death took place in 1851, while engaged in the prosecution of researches calculated still further to elucidate the science to which he had already made such valuable contributions. The extensive collection of crania which he had made, including those which furnished the data for the two great works named above, has since been purchased from his widow and added to the Cabinet of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

Vol. III., No. 15, October, 1855.

European Ethnologists have not failed to appreciate the importance of such observations, and valuable collections of ancient crania are now to be met with in Paris, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Edinburgh, and other European capitals. Especial attention has more recently been directed to the subject in Britain, and a work is now projected by Joseph Barnard Davis, Esq., and Dr. John Thurnam, after the model of Dr. Morton's *Crania Americana*, specially devoted to the illustration of the Ethnology of Great Britain and Ireland by means of "delimitations of the skulls of the aboriginal inhabitants of the British Islands, and of the races immediately succeeding them."

The following extract from the prospectus of this work, which is to bear the title of *Crania Britannica*, will suffice to show the aim of its authors, and the nature of the truths they hope to elucidate:—

"Amid an attention to the Natural History of Man, such as has never before been excited, embracing the inhabitants of every region and remote island of the globe, it seems an anomaly, that the people who first roamed the wilds and forests of our native country should have hitherto attracted so little regard. There have been many controversies to decide the exact position held by the ancient Britons in the scale of civilization. Antiquaries have appealed to the numerous relics of their arts, and history adduces evidences of their prowess, their patriotic valour, and of their heroic resistance of even Roman conquest. Their remaining works have been traced out and deciphered with the most patient investigation. But it is remarkable, that their personal remains—their bones,—entombed in Barrows over so many districts of these islands, have, until recently, not been objects of attraction even to collectors,—unlike the geologist, who has gathered up and treasured every osteological fragment of the races of animals coming within his domain. Hitherto no publication has been devoted to the chief vestige of the organization of the primitive Briton and his successors, that most important and instructive of all—his Cranium. In the skulls themselves, we have the very "heart of heart" of all their remains, which the gnawing "tooth of time and rasure of oblivion" have spared. These present an exact measure of their differing cerebral organization, of their intellect and feelings; and may be said to be impressed with a vivid outline of their very features and expressions.

It is believed that a sufficient number of these precious relics have now been exhumed from Barrows and other Tombs, in which the living hands of their brethren (observing the dictates of eternal love, or the rites of an all-pervading superstition, based in inextinguishable aspirations) deposited them, to enable us not merely to reproduce the most lively and forcible traits of the primeval Celtic hunter or warrior, and his Roman conqueror, succeeded by Saxon or Angle chieftains and settlers, and, later still, by the Vikings of Scandinavia; but also to indicate the peculiarities which marked the different tribes and races who have peopled the diversified regions of the British Islands; and as we thus picture our varied ancestry, to deduce, at the same time, their position in the scale of civilization by the tests of accurate representation and admeasurement.

These primitive remains are of great interest—of real national value,—and deserve the most careful examination and study, that they may be delineated with the utmost precision—with artistic skill worthy of the subject; and, being thus perpetuated, they will be rescued from the grasp of accidental destruction, and the further inroads of fretting age.

In some countries of Europe, collections of Crania, such as are above alluded to, have thrown much light on the history and relations of the early races inhabiting them. The results obtained from researches of this kind in the Scandinavian kingdoms, have been presented to the world in the writings of Eschricht, Retzius, and Nilsson. In America, the great master of the science, the late Professor Morton, founded his classical works on the Aborigines of the Western World and the ancient Egyptians, upon skulls obtained from the mounds and burial-places of the former, and the Catacombs of the land of the Pharaohs. In our own country, as Dr. Prichard, our best ethnological authority, repeatedly laments of the kind, except on the most inadequate scale, has yet been attempted. Few countries, however, present greater facilities for an inquiry of this description."

The authors accordingly propose to issue this work by subscription, in six parts of an imperial quarto size, each contain-