

**THE EUROPEAN AND ASIATIC RACES:
OBSERVATIONS ON THE PAPER READ BY JOHN
CRAWFURD, ESQ., F.R.S., BEFORE
THE ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY, ON FEBRUARY
14TH, 1866, READ BEFORE THE ETHNOLOGICAL
SOCIETY, MARCH 27TH, 1866**

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DADABHAI NAOROJI

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Professor Max Müller
with Dada bhai Naoroji's
THE *Compliments*

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OBSERVATIONS

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THE

EUROPEAN AND ASIATIC RACES.

I FEEL very thankful to Mr. Crawford and the Council for allowing me to make a few observations upon Mr. Crawford's paper, "on the European and Asiatic Races."

Mr. Crawford tells us, in illustration of the mental inferiority of the Asiatics, that in the seminaries at eighteen the native is left far behind by the European, and never after recovers his lost ground. What are the facts? Only a few mails ago, *The Friend of India* tells us, that at the Calcutta University there were then above 1200 candidates for entrance; that 447 underwent the first examination, and that 120 had applied to compete for the B.A. degree. The *Friend* remarks, "These examinations are assuming a Chinese magnitude, and present a spectacle at once curious and gratifying." The result of my own experience as a teacher and professor for ten years in the Elphinstone Institution, and of my observations for ten years more, is entirely contrary to Mr. Crawford's statement. Gambier, Perry, Lewin, Sims, Warden, and others, have given similar opinions in their evidence before Parliament. The mistake made by Mr. Crawford is one of those which foreign travellers and writers are very apt to fall into from superficial observation and imperfect information.

When English seminaries were first opened in India, boys were principally sent there with the object of acquiring a sufficient knowledge of the English language to enable them to get a situation in government offices, or to talk and write English. The consequence was, that for some time these seminaries did not produce any scholars, the pupils generally leaving on attaining their main object. With the imperfect

education with which they usually left school, and falling again in the society of their own equally or more ignorant countrymen, they were not able to continue their studies. Those Englishmen, however, who watched their progress, but did not understand the cause, wondered at such a result, and concluded that the native youth was incapable of progress after eighteen. There is another circumstance which unfortunately aggravated the mischief; the custom of early betrothal and marriage among the natives. The pupils, therefore, were often fathers before they were eighteen or twenty, and the necessity of supporting a family soon drove them from school to service.

For those who take a real interest in the natives of India, I cannot do better than refer them to that mass of interesting evidence given before Parliamentary Committees by interested and disinterested persons, and I have no doubt that any impartial and candid inquirer will find that the natives of India are not below the average of the head and heart of any other nation in the world.

This evidence was given in 1853 and 1858; but since that time the progress in education and several other matters has been so marked, though not very great, that even this evidence has become obsolete in some particulars. No careful observer will now make the statement that the Hindu is not capable of keeping up his studies after leaving college, much less that he falls back at eighteen and never regains his lost ground. The very fact that the Hindus were even capable of producing a vast and varied literature in all departments of human knowledge, shows beyond all doubt that the capacity to study all life is not wanting. The fertile soil is there, but neglected. Let it have its proper cultivation, and it will again show the same fruit.

Lastly, as Sir C. Trevelyan very justly remarks, what is said about the natives takes place in some degree in all countries, even in England, and as a remedy, he says,—“The main thing required is to open to them a proper field of mental and moral activity in after life . . . and we should encourage a wholesome mental activity in the pursuits of

literature, science, and the fine arts . . . all the avenues of employment in the service of the state should be opened to them.* They have very considerable administrative qualities, great patience, great industry, and great acuteness and intelligence."†

I do not know whether the remarks made by Mr. Crawford on Asiatic literature and the dearth of great names are based upon his own personal knowledge of all these literatures, or on the authority of others who possess such knowledge, or on the assumption that, because Mr. Crawford does not know them, therefore they do not exist. Mr. Crawford himself admits that there have been some conquerors, lawgivers, and founders of religious sects. I suppose such names as Christ, Mahomed, Zoroaster, Manu, Confucius, Cyrus, Akbar, Fardooei, Hafiz, Sady, Calidas, Panini, Abool Fazil, and a host of others, are such as any nation may be proud of. The Royal Asiatic Society has a descriptive catalogue of 163 manuscripts in their library of 100 distinct Persian and Arabic works on the single subject of history. Sir W. Jones thinks‡ Persia has produced more writers of every kind, and chiefly poets, than all Europe put together. He mentions a manuscript at Oxford of the lives of 135 of the finest Persian poets.¶

Mr. Crawford speaks disparagingly of the *Shanaméh*, as consisting "of a series of wild romances of imaginary heroes, and of such slender merit that no orientalist has ever ventured on presenting it in a European translation." I hope Mr. Crawford has read it, or has authority for what he says. In my humble opinion, from what little I know of it, it is a work of great poetic merit.§ Sir W. Jones, after giving the palm of superiority to Homer, asserts a very great resemblance between the works of these extraordinary men; and admits that both drew their images from nature herself,

* Lords' Committee, 1853, ques. 6644. † *Ib.* 6605. ‡ Vol. x. p. 349.

§ I have given the opinions of others as closely as possible in their own words.

¶ Dr. Julius Mohl informs me that he has already published four volumes of the text and translation; the fifth is nearly ready for publication, and the sixth is printing.

and both possessed, in an eminent degree, that rich and creative invention which is the very soul of poetry.*

He considers the characters in it as various and striking; the figures bold and animated, and the diction everywhere sonorous, yet noble; polished, yet full of fire.† Sir J. Malcolm thinks that the most fastidious European reader will meet with numerous passages of exquisite beauty in the noble epic poem of Firdoosi; that some of the finest scenes are described with simplicity and elegance of diction, and that to those whose taste is offended with hyperbole, the tender part of his work will have most beauty.‡ Sir W. Jones considers that the Persian language is rich, melodious, and elegant; that numbers of admirable works have been written in it, by historians, philosophers, and poets, who found it capable of expressing, with equal advantage, the most beautiful and the most elevated sentiments.¶ With reference to the ridiculous bombast of the Persian style, he remarks, that though there are bad writers, as in every country, the authors who are esteemed in Persia are neither slavish in their sentiments, nor ridiculous in their expressions.

Upon Mr. Crawford's remarks as to the absence of any literature or history among the Persians before the Arabian conquest, let us see what Sir John Malcolm says. He says, the Arabs, in their irritation at the obstinate resistance of the Persians for their independent religion, destroyed their cities, temples, etc., etc. And the books, in which were written whatever the learned of the nation knew, either of general science, or of their own history and religion, were, with their possessions, devoted to destruction. He refers, as a parallel, to the fate of Greek and Roman manuscripts, to show how few of the works of a conquered and despised nation like Persia, would be saved amid the wreck to which that kingdom was doomed.

He further says,—“We know from sacred history, that the deeds of the kings of Persia were written in a book styled the chronicles of that kingdom; and we are told by

* Vol. x. p. 335. † Ibid. 354. ‡ Vol. ii. p. 539. ¶ Vol. v. p. 165.

a Grecian author, who was at the court of Artaxerxes Mnemon, that he had access to volumes which were preserved in the royal archives."*

I need not take up your time with more extracts on the merits of other poets. Mr. Fraser, after naming Nizami, Omar Keyormi, Oorfi, and Rudki, says he might cite a hundred others as high examples of genius. Lastly, we must bear in mind, that a large amount of Asiatic and European literature may have been lost in that deplorable act of destruction of the Alexandrian Library by Omar.

In Arabic literature, to the *Arabian Nights*, at least, I hope Mr. Crawford accords some merit; for according to his test of merit the work is translated in European languages,

* Mr. Ed. B. Eastwick, in reply to my inquiries as to his opinion upon the extracts I have given from Sir W. Jones and Sir John Malcolm on Persian literature, etc., says:—

"I thoroughly agree in the opinions expressed of Firdausi, and of the Persian Poets, by Sir W. Jones and Sir J. Malcolm. The narratives of events in the *Shanaméh* are not so unnatural, hyperbolic, or absurd as those in the *Iliad*, and the 'curiosa felicitas verborum' of the Persian poet is little, if at all, inferior to that of Homer. Mr. C. cannot be aware that M. Mohl has translated the *Shanaméh* into French, and that Atkinson has rendered some portions into English. If Arabic and Persian were taught in our schools, as Greek and Latin are, we should have as many and as careful translations of the *Shanaméh* as of the *Iliad*. It is not the slender merit of the poet, but our ignorance of Persian, that has made the dearth of translations. As yet we have only dipped into Persian poetry. No European can pretend to have explored that ocean of literature."

I am sorry that my very slight knowledge of French prevents me from studying, for the present, the annual reports of Dr. Julius Mohl; but I give below, an extract from his letter to me, which I think gives the Eastern literature its proper place in the history of man.

"Oriental literature can only take its place in the universal literature of mankind, when intelligent historians show its value for history in its largest sense—history of the development of the human race, its ideas, its manners, etc.; and show, too, how large has been the part of the East, and how great in some respects its influence. This is gradually being done, in proportion as translations and researches on special subjects put the materials in the hands of thinking people. It is, above all, the history of religion, of legislation, of philosophy, and of poetry, which will show the importance of Oriental literature; but it is slow work, and cannot be otherwise, by the nature of the case. Greek and Latin literature will always prevail in Europe; our minds have been moulded upon them, and they are nearest to us; but this does not extinguish the claim of the East to take its place. I have said this over and over, in my annual reports to the Asiatic Society."