

ANTHROPOLOG Y

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Anthropology by R. R. Marett

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R. R. MARETT

**ANTHROPOLOG
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ANTHROPOLOGY

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ANTHROPOLOGY

CHAPTER I

SCOPE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

IN this chapter I propose to say something, firstly, about the ideal scope of anthropology; secondly, about its ideal limitations; and, thirdly and lastly, about its actual relations to existing studies. In other words, I shall examine the extent of its claim, and then go on to examine how that claim, under modern conditions of science and education, is to be made good.

Firstly, then, what is the ideal scope of anthropology? Taken at its fullest and best, what ought it to comprise?

Anthropology is the whole history of man as fired and pervaded by the idea of evolution. Man in evolution—that is the subject in its full reach. Anthropology studies man as he occurs at all known times. It studies him as he occurs in all known parts of the world. It studies him body and soul together—as a

bodily organism, subject to conditions operating in time and space, which bodily organism is in intimate relation with a soul-life, also subject to those same conditions. Having an eye to such conditions from first to last, it seeks to plot out the general series of the changes, bodily and mental together, undergone by man in the course of his history. Its business is simply to describe. But, without exceeding the limits of its scope, it can and must proceed from the particular to the general; aiming at nothing less than a descriptive formula that shall sum up the whole series of changes in which the evolution of man consists.

That will do, perhaps, as a short account of the ideal scope of anthropology. Being short, it is bound to be rather formal and colourless. To put some body into it, however, it is necessary to breathe but a single word. That word is: Darwin.

Anthropology is the child of Darwin. Darwinism makes it possible. Reject the Darwinian point of view, and you must reject anthropology also. What, then, is Darwinism? Not a cut-and-dried doctrine. Not a dogma. Darwinism is a working hypothesis. You suppose something to be true, and work away to see whether, in the light of that supposed truth, certain facts fit together

better than they do on any other supposition. What is the truth that Darwinism supposes? Simply that all the forms of life in the world are related together; and that the relations manifested in time and space between the different lives are sufficiently uniform to be described under a general formula, or law of evolution.

This means that man must, for certain purposes of science, toe the line with the rest of living things. And at first, naturally enough, man did not like it. He was too lordly. For a long time, therefore, he pretended to be fighting for the Bible, when he was really fighting for his own dignity. This was rather hard on the Bible, which has nothing to do with the Aristotelian theory of the fixity of species; though it might seem possible to read back something of the kind into the primitive creation-stories preserved in Genesis. Now-a-days, however, we have mostly got over the first shock to our family pride. We are all Darwinians in a passive kind of way. But we need to darwinize actively. In the sciences that have to do with plants, and with the rest of the animals besides man, naturalists have been so active in their darwinizing that the pre-Darwinian stuff is once for all laid by on the shelf. When man, however, engages on the subject

of his noble self, the tendency still is to say: We accept Darwinism so long as it is not allowed to count, so long as we may go on believing the same old stuff in the same old way.

How do we anthropologists propose to combat this tendency? By working away at our subject, and persuading people to have a look at our results. Once people take up anthropology, they may be trusted not to drop it again. It is like learning to sleep with your window open. What could be more stupefying than to shut yourself up in a closet and swallow your own gas? But is it any less stupefying to shut yourself up within the last few thousand years of the history of your own corner of the world, and suck in the stale atmosphere of its own self-generated prejudices? Or, to vary the metaphor, anthropology is like travel. Every one starts by thinking that there is nothing so perfect as his own parish. But let a man go aboard ship to visit foreign parts, and, when he returns home, he will cause that parish to wake up.

With Darwin, then, we anthropologists say: Let any and every portion of human history be studied in the light of the whole history of mankind, and against the background of the history of living things in general. It is the Darwinian outlook that