

**CIVILISATION: ITS
CAUSE AND CURE,
AND OTHER ESSAYS**

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Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure, and Other Essays by Edward Carpenter

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EDWARD CARPENTER

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CIVILISATION
ITS CAUSE AND CURE
AND OTHER ESSAYS *metaphor*

BY
EDWARD CARPENTER

THIRD



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into the property of the man; it brought with it private ownership of land, and so created a class of landless aliens, and a whole system of rent, mortgage, interest, &c.; it introduced slavery, serfdom and wage-labor, which are only various forms of the dominance of one class over another; and to rivet these authorities it created the State and the policeman. Every race that we know, that has become what we call civilised, has passed thro' these changes; and though the details may vary and have varied a little, the main order of change has been practically the same in all cases. We are justified therefore in calling Civilisation a historical stage, whose commencement dates roughly from the division of society into classes founded on property, and the adoption of class-government. Lewis Morgan in his *Ancient Society* adds the invention of writing and the consequent adoption of written History and written Law; Engels in his *Ursprung der Familie, des Privat-eigenthums und des Staats* points out the importance of the appearance of the Merchant, even in his most primitive form, as a mark of the civilisation-period; while the French writers of the last century made a good point in inventing the term *nations policées* (policemanised nations) as a substitute for civilised nations; for perhaps there is no better or more universal mark of the period we are considering, and of its social degradation, than the appearance of the crawling phenomenon in question. [Imagine the rage of any decent North American Indians if they had been told they required *policemen* to keep them in order!]

If we take this historical definition of Civilisation, we shall see that our English Civilisation began hardly more than a thousand years ago, and even so the remains of the more primitive society lasted long after that. In the case of Rome—if we reckon from the later times of the early kings down to the fall of Rome—we have again about a thousand

years. The Jewish civilisation from David and Solomon downwards lasted—with breaks—somewhat over a thousand years; the Greek civilisation less; the Egyptian considerably more; but the important points to see are, first, that the process has been quite similar in character in these various (and numerous other) cases,¹ quite as similar in fact as the course of the same disease in various persons; and secondly that in no case, as said before, has any nation come *through* and passed beyond this stage; but that in most cases it has succumbed soon after the main symptoms had been developed.

But it will be said, It may be true that civilisation regarded as a stage of human history presents some features of disease; but is there any reason for supposing that disease in some form or other was any less present in the previous stage—that of Barbarism? To which I reply, I think there is good reason.

Without committing ourselves to the unlikely theory that the "noble savage" was an ideal human being physically or in any other respect, and while certain that in many points he was decidedly inferior to the civilised man, I think we must allow him the superiority in some directions; and one of these was his comparative freedom from disease. Lewis Morgan, who grew up among the Iroquois Indians, and who probably knew the North American natives as well as any white man has ever done, says (in his *Ancient Society*, p. 45), "Barbarism ends with the production of grand Barbarians." And though there are no native races on the earth to-day who are actually in the latest and most advanced stage of Barbarism²; yet if we take the most advanced tribes that we know of—such as the said Iroquois Indians of twenty or thirty years ago, some of the Kaffir tribes round Lake Nyassa in Africa, now (and possibly for a few years more) comparatively untouched by civilisation,

¹ For proof I must refer the reader to Engels, or to his own studies of history.

² Say like the Homeric Greeks, or the Spartans of the Lycurgus period.

or the tribes along the river Uaupes, 30 or 40 years back, of Wallace's *Travels on the Amazon*—all tribes in what Morgan would call the *middle* stage of Barbarism—we undoubtedly in each case discover a fine and (which is our point here) *healthy* people. Captain Cook in his first Voyage says of the natives of Otaheite, "We saw no critical disease during our stay upon the island, and but few instances of sickness, which were accidental fits of the colic;" and, later on, of the New Zealanders, "They enjoy perfect and uninterrupted health. In all our visits to their towns, where young and old, men and women, crowded about us . . . we never saw a single person who appeared to have any bodily complaint, nor among the numbers we have seen naked did we once perceive the slightest eruption upon the skin, or any marks that an eruption had left behind." These are pretty strong words. Of course diseases exist among such peoples, even where they have never been in contact with civilisation, but I think we may say that among the higher types of savages they are rarer, and nothing like so various and so prevalent as they are in our modern life; while the power of recovery from *wounds* (which are of course the most frequent form of disablement) is generally admitted to be something astonishing. Speaking of the Kaffirs, J. G. Wood says, "Their state of health enables them to survive injuries which would be almost instantly fatal to any civilised European." Mr. Frank Oates in his *Diary*¹ mentions the case of a man who was condemned to death by the king. He was hacked down with axes, and left for dead. "What must have been intended for the *coup de grâce* was a cut in the back of the head, which had chipped a large piece out of the skull, and must have been meant to cut the spinal cord where it joins the brain. It had however been made a little higher than this, but had left such a wound as I should have

¹ *Matabele Land and the Victoria Falls*, p. 209.

proof-reading testimony