

HELPS FOR STUDENTS OF HISTORY, No. 48

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EDITED BY C. JOHNSON, M.A., H. W. V. TEMPERLEY, M.A., AND  
J. P. WHITNEY, D.D., D.C.L.

# HISTORY AND ETHNOLOGY

BY

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W. H. R. RIVERS

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# HISTORY AND ETHNOLOGY\*

It is the aim of this essay to show the importance of ethnology, and especially of recent developments of that science, to history. During the last ten years there has been in progress, rudely hindered but not stopped by the war, a movement which has brought the two disciplines into much closer relationship than would have been possible under the conditions which guided the study of ethnology twenty or thirty years ago. At this more remote period anthropology—I use the term anthropology advisedly—was wholly under the dominance of a crude evolutionary standpoint. The aim of the anthropologist was to work out a scheme of human progress according to which language, social organisation, religion, and material arts had developed through the action of certain principles or laws. It was assumed that the manifold peoples of the earth represented stages in this process of evolution, and it was supposed that by the comparative study of the culture of these different peoples it would be possible to formulate the laws by which the process of evolution had been directed and governed. It was

\* This essay originally appeared in *History* for July, 1920, and has been reproduced by kind permission of the Editor. It embodies a few subsequent corrections and additions by the Author.

assumed that the time-order of different elements of culture had been everywhere the same; that if matrilineal institutions preceded patrilineal in Europe and Asia, this must also have been the case in Oceania and America; that if cremation is later than inhumation in India, it has also been later everywhere else. This assumption was fortified by attempts to show that there were reasons, usually psychological in nature, according to which there was something in the universal constitution of the human mind, or in some condition of the environment, or inherent in the constitution of human society, which made it necessary that patrilineal institutions should have grown out of matrilineal, and that inhumation should be earlier than cremation. Moreover, it was assumed as an essential part of the general framework of the science that, after the original dispersal of mankind, or possibly owing to the independent evolution of different main varieties of Man, large portions of the earth had been cut off from intercourse with others, so that the process of evolution had taken place in them independently. When similarities, even in minute points of detail, were found in these regions, supposed to have been wholly isolated from one another, it was held that they were due to the uniformity in the constitution of the human mind which, working on similar lines, had brought forth similar products, whether in social organisation, religion, or material culture.

The adherents of the recent movement to which I have referred regard the whole of this construction with its main supports of mental uniformity

and orderly sequence as built upon the sand. It is claimed that there has been no such isolation of one part of the earth from another as has been assumed by the advocates of independent evolution, but that the means of navigation have been capable, for far longer periods than has been supposed, of carrying Man to any part of the earth. The widespread similarities of culture are, it is held, due in the main, if not wholly, to the spread of customs and institutions from some centre in which local conditions especially favoured their development.

#### THE HISTORICAL SCHOOL OF ETHNOLOGY.

If there has been such spread of culture, it is evident that the process of development must have been far more complicated than is supposed by the advocates of the older evolutionary view. There is reason to believe, indeed, that the process has been exceedingly complex: that when customs are carried from their original home to other parts of the world, few of them survive unchanged, but suffer profound modification, some in the direction of progress, some in the direction of degeneration, and some in a direction which can hardly be described in terms either of progress or decay. We of this movement believe that many customs which were once supposed to be the products of a simple process of evolution among an isolated people have in fact behind them a long and tortuous history. It is held that the first task of the ethnologist is to unravel this history, and in consequence the name we have chosen for our school



and for our methods is that of "historical." We speak of the movement as belonging to the historical school of ethnology, and of our method as the historical method in place of the older school and method, which are often styled evolutionary. This latter term is not satisfactory, for it is far from necessary that a follower of the historical method should be an opponent of evolution. The German historical school are such opponents of evolution, but this is very far from the position of English ethnologists. Our quarrel with the older school is that it regarded as simple what is very complex, and tried to reach by a short cut a goal which will only be attained when we have learnt the mutual interrelations of a vast number of separate paths along which Man and his culture have travelled. Put briefly, we believe that it is necessary to determine what has happened before we proceed to the task of trying to discover how it has happened and to formulate the laws which have determined the course which the social activity of Man has followed. The relations between "the what" and "the how" are often complex, and speculations about "the how" may often be useful in deciding "what" has happened, but the adherents of the new movement style their method historical because the discovery of what has happened in the past to the various peoples of the earth is their primary aim and a necessary preliminary to the further task of discovering the laws, and especially the psychological laws, by which the historical process has been directed.

I propose in this paper to illustrate the kind of

process by which the ethnologist is trying to determine what has happened in the past to the rude peoples he studies and to raise the question whether he is justified in his presumption that his method is worthy of being regarded as a method of history.

The first point to notice is that, as a rule, the ethnologist has to discover the past history of peoples who have no written documents of any kind, and whose oral traditions are so blended with features obviously mythical in character that it needs a special discipline to distinguish the degree of their historicity, or, indeed, in many cases to decide whether they have any historical value at all. It is already being found that, where native traditions seem to record historical events, the conclusions drawn from them are in agreement with those reached through other lines of evidence; but it is better as a method of investigation to ignore tradition at first and base preliminary conclusions on evidence of other kinds. The problem, therefore, with which the ethnologist is confronted is whether it is possible to discover the past history of a people who have no written documents of any sort and whose oral traditions are of such a kind that at present it is safest to ignore them.

#### THE METHOD OF ETHNOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.

I shall now sketch briefly the general lines upon which I believe the problem can be solved. The chief instrument is one which I have elsewhere\*

\* Rep. Brit. Assoc., Portsmouth (1911), p. 490, or *Nature* (1911), vol. lxxxvii., p. 856.

called the method of ethnological analysis, and the second volume of the book which I have, perhaps presumptuously, called *The History of Melanesian Society*\* is an attempt to apply this method of analysis. In this book I have attempted to analyse the highly complex mass of customs and institutions which make up the present social culture of the Melanesian people and to distinguish the various strands out of which it has been formed. This culture may be likened to a richly patterned texture starting with an indigenous element comparable with the warp of the social loom. To this have been added at different times wefts of various kinds, each furnished by an immigrant culture. The first weft formed with the indigenous warp a texture in which each of the elements largely lost its individuality and came to form part of a pattern in which it is not possible to detect the elements by other than a special process of analysis. Later immigrant influences added new wefts to the texture, increasing the complexity of the pattern and adding to the difficulty of analysis.

#### ANALYSIS OF MELANESIAN CULTURES.

In my study of Melanesian culture I found reason to believe that the first introduced weft had formed with the indigenous warp the special kind of social structure known as the dual organisation. In this form of society the community is divided into two moieties standing in such a relation to one another that a man of one moiety is compelled by social custom to marry a woman of the other,

the children of the union belonging to the mother's moiety. To this relatively simple social texture there was added later another and more complex web which gave to Melanesia the secret organisations which form so characteristic a feature of its society. The use of monuments of stone, the cult of animals, and the desiccation of the dead in connection with these organisations further led me to the view that this later web had given to the Melanesian texture the megalithic art, the totemism, and the preservation of the dead which are present, though often in a form not at once obvious, in so many parts of Melanesia. The process of analysis next led me to detect a web which in the more northerly parts of Melanesia had brought the special kind of warfare known as head-hunting, ~~together~~ with a developed skull-cult, the regulation of marriage by kinship, pile-dwellings, plank-built canoes, and other special arts and crafts. Still later had come another web which introduced the practice of cremation associated with a home of the dead in the sky and a form of totemism in which the totems are birds.

Finding it necessary to have names for the various hypothetical peoples whom I thus supposed to have contributed to the complexity of the Melanesian texture, I was led to choose as the marks or symbols of two of them the substances by which mental activity is stimulated. In the southern parts of Melanesia the people drink kava,\* while in the north the place of kava-drinking is taken by the practice of chewing betel-

\* An infusion of the root of a pepper (*Piper methysticum*).

mixture.\* The use of kava is intimately associated with the secret societies, and I was therefore led to regard this substance as the mark of the founders of these societies, and chose "the kava-people" as their designation. I found reason to believe that in the north kava had once been used, but had been displaced by betel. Associating this practice with the introducers of head-hunting, I chose "the betel-people" as a name for this element of the Melanesian population. The process of ethnological analysis having led me to distinguish these two main wefts in the Melanesian texture, it became my task to distinguish, in the highly variegated pattern presented by Melanesian culture, the elements which belonged to these two influences, the culture of the kava-people taking up by far the greater part of my attention.

#### ETHNOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ILLUSTRATED BY THE BRITISH ISLES.

I shall not attempt to illustrate the principles which underlie this process of analysis by means of the strange and unfamiliar cultures of Melanesia. I propose to illustrate them by imagining the experience of a Melanesian who sets out for Europe to test the principles by which the history of his own people has been formulated. On reaching our continent he will discover the presence of writing and printing, but, recognising that these arts are strange to him, he will decide to ignore them. Moreover, investigation will show that the oral

\* A mixture of areca-nut, the leaves of the betel pepper (*Piper betle*) or of *Piper nethusticum*, and lime.



traditions of Europe have been largely influenced, when not wholly determined, by these arts, and he will thereupon decide to ignore everything that he hears about past history and trust wholly to the objective evidence provided by the study of language, social organisation, religious belief and ritual, and the material sides of life. I shall imagine a Melanesian trying to discover the past history of ourselves on exactly the same lines and by exactly the same methods, as those which I have employed to determine the history of his people, putting wholly on one side those instruments of research which are provided by literary documents, whether manuscripts, books, coins, inscriptions, or of any other kind.

#### PRINCIPLES OF ETHNOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.

Before I enter upon this task it will be well to mention certain principles which guided my work in Melanesia, and have also been used in ethnological analysis elsewhere, especially in the work of W. J. Perry in Indonesia.\* The first of these principles is that of common distribution. When certain elements of culture are found in association with one another in several localities, we regard this as a ground for assigning the associated customs, institutions, and material objects to one culture, and if the associated elements have no necessary connection with one another, as, for instance, is the case with megalithic architecture and sun-cult, we assume that this association, which is meaningless in its present area of dis-

\* *The Megalithic Culture of Indonesia* Manchester, 1918.

tribution, came into existence elsewhere, and reached its present home by transmission.

A second principle is that of organic connection. When two elements of culture are found to be so closely associated with one another that they form constituent parts of one organisation, it is assumed that they belong to the same culture. Thus, if megalithic monuments and sun-cult are found to occur together as elements in the ritual of a secret society, this is regarded as evidence that they belong to one culture, and if the formulæ of the ritual of the society are in a language different from that of ordinary life, we have a case in which the principle of organic connection points, not only to transmission, but also to the original home of the language as the region from which the transmission has taken place.

A third principle is only a special case of the second, but it is so important that it deserves special mention. I have called this principle that of "class-association." In many parts of the world there is reason to believe that certain social classes or sections of the community represent, and are descended from, settlers from outside. In Polynesia, Melanesia, and Indonesia there is reason to believe that the ruling classes are the descendants of immigrants, while the general mass of the population represent the inhabitants of the country before these settlers came. If an element of culture is found to be especially associated with one or other class, it is, according to the principle I am now considering, assigned to the people whose culture is represented by the class in ques-

tion. Thus, when I find that the chiefs of Polynesia practise desiccation or other form of preservation of the dead, while the commoners inter their dead in the sitting position, I infer that these forms of disposal of the dead belong to two different peoples. In this case I infer that the desiccation of the chiefs is the later, and interment in the sitting position the earlier, practice. Mr. Perry has found this principle also to hold good in Indonesia, where the association of the cultural use of stone and the sun-cult with the chiefs has been held greatly to strengthen the argument based on common distribution that these two elements of culture were introduced by one and the same people.

Each of these three principles standing alone ~~may be~~ subject to exceptions, but when all three lead in the same direction, it is possible to assume, with a high degree of confidence, that associated elements of culture were introduced by one and the same people.

Let me now assume that my Melanesian, inspired by these principles, sets to work in Europe. He will spend much time collecting, by means of the phonetic system he had used in Melanesia, specimens of the languages of all the nations he visits, making at the same time a general survey of their religions, their social order, their arts and crafts, but always ignoring anything which brings him into too close contact with ideas derived from written or printed documents. He will soon discover that he has undertaken a task far more difficult than that which had been presented by

the culture of his own and neighbouring peoples. The main cause of this difficulty is the far greater uniformity of belief and custom in Europe than in the archipelago where his own methods had been devised. This greater uniformity is largely due to the fact that he is now dealing with a continent, with greater facilities for the spread of culture and for the smaller movements which have occurred, even in Melanesia, as incidents of the intervals between the main migrations. He therefore looks around for some region where it may be possible for him to apply his principles with greater prospect of success, and for this purpose he chooses two largish islands with several small outliers situated at the western extremity of Europe, trusting that the preliminary survey he has carried out upon the Continent will help him in his task of applying the method of ethnological analysis to the British Isles.

Before he sets to work in earnest he will survey the geographical relations of the region he has chosen. He will note that there are only a limited number of directions by which foreign influence is likely to have come. Though it is possible that migrants may have reached Britain across the Atlantic, he will probably conclude that any influence of this kind has been recent and of no great importance. He will look to the North Sea and the English Channel as the two chief avenues of approach. He will bear in mind, however, the possibility that mariners coasting the western shores of Europe may have reached Ireland and the southern shores of England, or, continuing to

hug the coast on reaching Cornwall or Wales, may have passed north as far as the Hebrides or the Orkney and Shetland Islands.

On making a preliminary survey he will find a most disappointing uniformity in the social organisation upon which the ethnological analysis of his own country has been largely based, and he will therefore decide to turn his attention in the first place to language.

### THE ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE.

The first rough survey will show the wide presence of one language spoken with a high degree of uniformity among the ruling classes and with great dialectical variation among the ruled, especially among those who follow the occupation of agriculture. In the western and northern parts of the islands he will find another group of languages widely different from any he had met on the Continent, except in Brittany, though with certain points of similarity to other of the continental languages. He finds these aberrant forms of speech in the mountainous districts of Scotland, in Ireland, and in Wales, while the place-names of Cornwall show that people speaking a language of this family must have had a vast influence in this outlying corner of Great Britain. It is just possible that he may be so fortunate as to meet some old man who when a boy spoke to Dolly Pentreath before the last speaker of the Cornish language was interred in a graveyard at Penzance.

He will note that these languages, which the more educated of the people call Celtic, fall into



two distinct families. He will be especially interested in their evidence on the interchange of "p" and "q" with which he is already familiar as one of the most useful linguistic distinctions of Melanesia.\* His familiarity with this criterion will at once lead him to assign these two branches of the Celtic tongue to different sources, which he will speak of as the "p" people and the "q" people. The geographical position of these languages in districts most remote from the main direction of migration will lead him to the view that the "p" and "q" peoples represent early inhabitants who have only been able to preserve their language in the mountainous regions of the western and northern parts of Great Britain and in the remote Ireland. This distribution will lead him to formulate the working hypothesis that the Celtic languages belong to an early period of British history, and represent the language either of early immigrants or of the aboriginal inhabitants. The existence of two distinct branches of the family will incline him to the former of these alternatives.

On turning his attention to the more widely diffused language, he will find that it has a complex character and can be analysed into two chief components, one resembling the language of France and more remotely those of Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Rumania, while the other element bears the closest affinity to the languages of Holland,

\* R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesian Languages*, Oxford, 1885.  
Cf. W. H. R. Rivers, *The History of Melanesian Society*, vol. ii., p. 470.

Scandinavia, and Germany. On applying the principle of class association, he will find that the speech of the ruling classes especially shows this complex character, while the dialects of the subject agricultural population are largely free from the features which have apparently been derived from France, their vocabulary consisting chiefly of words of the kind he will assume to have come across the North Sea. In the eastern districts of Scotland and in the Orkney and Shetland Islands he will find an especially close relation to Scandinavia, but will be puzzled by the presence in all parts of Scotland of terms for certain objects, such as "carafe," agreeing so exactly with words of France that he will conclude they are derived from some French influence of a kind different from, and probably later than, that which gave its French characters to the dominant language of England. Applying his class criterion in the same way as in Melanesia, he will assume that of the two elements into which the English language can be analysed that allied to French, being especially prominent in the language of the ruling classes, is the later, and the other element the earlier.

#### THE THREE MAIN ELEMENTS IN BRITISH CULTURE.

He will thus reach a provisional scheme in which Great Britain and Ireland had been reached by three main immigrant waves, the earliest of which had itself a double character. He will find it convenient to have names for the carriers of the three languages. In Melanesia he has become

accustomed to use names, already mentioned, taken from the substances by which the people stimulate their mental activity. When speaking of the hypothetical peoples who have entered into the composition of his own race, he is accustomed to speak of the kava-people and the betel-people. It will therefore be natural to him to look to similar substances as the source of names for the constituent elements in the population of Britain. He will find one drink widely diffused and used by all classes, but the Celtic origin of the word by which it is universally known and the association of its two varieties with Scotland and Ireland will lead him to connect it with the earliest stratum of the population. He will avoid all the sources of confusion from which we suffer so badly when we talk of the Celts by adopting the term "whisky-people" for the earliest group of settlers to which his analysis has led him. In seeking names for the two later immigrant peoples he will note that, though the use of beer is widespread, it is the chief, and often the only, drink of the lower, and especially of the agricultural, classes, while the use of wine is definitely confined to the ruling classes. He will therefore be led to use the terms "beer-people" and "wine-people" for the elements of the population which we are accustomed to call Anglo-Saxon and Norman. He will decide, at any rate provisionally, to use the terms "whisky-people," "beer-people," and "wine-people" for the three main elements to which he has been led by his philological analysis.

## TERMS OF RELATIONSHIP.

I believe that my Melanesian ethnologist, through the study of the elements of culture associated with the ruled and ruling classes, would be able to discover in large measure the nature of the relations between the three peoples. I must content myself with an example from a subject which takes the foremost place among the instruments of ethnological analysis in Melanesia. On studying the British terms of relationship, our dark-skinned ethnologist would find that they fall definitely into two groups. Certain terms, such as father, mother, brother, and sister, evidently belong to the beer-people, while the words uncle, aunt, and cousin are as evidently derived from the language of the later wine-people. He will be at first puzzled by the terms for relatives separated by two generations which consist of words of the beer-people, modified by the prefix *grand-*, seemingly derived from the wine-people. These terms belong to the descriptive class, which always forms a difficult problem, and my Melanesian philologist will for the present put them on one side. Confining his attention to the other terms, he will conclude that the relationships of uncle, aunt, and cousin are denoted by words belonging to the wine-people because this people produced some modification in the social order which led to the need for new terms for these relationships. As his prejudice against printed documents forbids him to have recourse to the Anglo-Saxon language, he will be driven to help of other kinds. He will

remember having been greatly impressed by a feature of the nomenclature of relationship in Germany, a country where the beer-people are predominant. He had found in general use two words for uncle, "Oheim" and "Onkel," the latter of which is evidently the French word with very slight disguise. There were also two words for aunt, "Tante" and "Base," though the latter word is often applied to other relatives. Here, again, one word is evidently French in origin, and in correspondence with his experience in the British Isles he had found that these words allied to French were especially prominent in the language of the ruling and more cultured classes. He had also found, when talking to some of the elder people of Germany, that "Base" was especially used for the father's sister, who was thus distinguished in nomenclature from the mother's sister, for whom there was a different term—"Mihme." Similarly, he had found, though more rarely, that some old people used the word "Oheim" especially for the mother's brother, and called the father's brother "Vetter," a word used by the majority of the population for the cousin.\* Among these old people of Germany the Melanesian philologist had thus found the distinction in nomenclature between the father's brother and the mother's brother, and between the father's sister and the mother's sister, which is so fundamental a feature of his own system of kinship. Since the older German words are evidently related

\* I am indebted to Professor Breu<sup>l</sup> for valuable information concerning the use of these terms.



to the language of the beer-people of Britain, he will infer that at one time this people distinguished the brother and sister of the father from the brother and sister of the mother. He will assume that the existing language of Great Britain denotes the uncle and aunt by terms derived from the speech of the wine-people because the older distinction became meaningless as the result of changes in the social order brought about by the influence of these settlers. If, owing to social changes coming about under the influence of the wine-people, the older distinction became meaningless, it would be natural that new terms for relatives, formerly distinguished but now classed together, should be taken from the language of the immigrant people by whose influence the change had been made. In Melanesia the distinction of the brother and sister of the father from the brother and sister of the mother is closely connected with the clan-organisation, and my Melanesian ethnologist cannot but regard these features of our nomenclature of relationship as evidence of a clan-organisation as part of the social system of the beer-people which disappeared under the influence of the wine-immigrants. He will find support for this early existence of a clan system in the presence of an organisation, though of a very aberrant kind, which goes by this name in Scotland, and he will detect some traces of a similar organisation in Ireland under the name of "sept." Moreover, he will note the rare occurrence in England of a word "sib," probably related to the "sept" of the Irish, which is used in a manner very suggestive

of the wide extension of relationship which is so characteristic of the clan-organisation.

This brief illustration by means of certain features of our own language is exactly on the same lines as those which I have used in my analysis of Melanesian culture. You will have noted that the processes inferred by the Melanesian ethnologist, such as the time-order assigned to the three chief constituent elements in the population, are as we know them to have been from our documents, and when our ethnologist overcomes his horror of literary sources he will find that the words of the Anglo-Saxon language denoting kinship exactly correspond with his hypothesis. The documents of this language will show that those who spoke it distinguished the brother and sister of the father from the brother and sister of the mother, just as he had been led to infer from comparison with the linguistic variations of Germany. He will find even that the names which, following the fashion of Melanesian ethnology, he has chosen for the three hypothetical peoples correspond with the truth, whisky, beer, and wine being the characteristic beverages of the people we are accustomed to call Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Norman.

#### RELIGION.

It would hardly be fair to give only this comparatively easy and straightforward example of the process of ethnological analysis. I should like briefly to relate a more difficult example, one in which the Melanesian ethnologist may be in great

danger of going astray. When he turns his attention to religion he will find that the Roman Catholic cult is especially strong in those parts of Ireland where the old language is spoken, and that this form of religion occurs widely in the mountainous districts of Scotland, where another variant of the ancient language is spoken. He may be led to connect the Roman Catholic religion with the "q" branch of the early inhabitants. He will be puzzled to find that in Wales the Roman Catholic religion is not only absent, but that the religious beliefs of the people are in the liveliest opposition to it, while in England Roman Catholicism occurs among the ruling classes rather than among the ruled. He will find that some of the most powerful of the ruling families of England practise the religion which has close ties with the religion of Italy. On the other hand, the strong Roman Catholicism of Brittany will again suggest the connection of this form of religion with the early inhabitants, but in this case with the "p" branch of this people. He will be still more puzzled by finding that one section of the dominant Church of England, which is especially associated with the ruling classes, practises a ritual and holds beliefs hardly to be distinguished from those of Roman Catholicism, thus apparently confirming the evidence already collected which seemed to connect this form of religion with the wine-people. All these anomalies of distribution will prevent him from adopting the conclusion, to which he was at first inclined, that the Roman Catholic religion is connected with the earlier inhabitants of the

islands, and he will turn to the principle of organic connection in order to clear up the difficulties exposed by the study of distribution. He will find that a language which seems to be an archaic form of the speech of Italy is used in the verbal ritual of the Roman Catholic Church of Great Britain and Ireland and the comparative study of ecclesiastical architecture will also correct his first tendency to assign so early a date to this form of religion. His Melanesian experience will have led him to attach immense importance to the conservatism of religious ritual, and the use of what he would call an Italic language as the medium of Roman Catholic ritual will lead him to connect this form of religion with the wine-people, a conclusion supported by the use of wine in the central mystery of the religion. Moreover, on inquiry, he will find that the verbal ritual of the Church of England is in many respects identical with that of Roman Catholicism, except that English is used as the medium in place of the archaic Italian. Inquiry will show that the very puzzling resemblance in the manual ritual, and especially in the vestments, of one section of the dominant church is the result of a movement which has taken place within the memory of living inhabitants. He will have no hesitation in correcting his earlier impression, and conclude that the Roman Catholic religion belongs to the latest, and not to the earliest, of the three main migrations into Great Britain.

## THE NATURE OF HISTORY.

I must be content with these examples of the method of ethnological analysis, by means of which I believe that it is possible to formulate the past history of a people who have no literary documents. I may now consider briefly ~~how~~ such a view of "history" differs from the discipline which ordinarily bears that name. I may refer first to its generalised, impersonal, and even, in many cases, its abstract character as compared with the concreteness of the history which is based on literary documents. Such a history as that of Melanesia hardly contains a personal name and hardly an account of transactions ~~taking~~ place between persons to which any historical value can be attached. Recent investigation has shown the historicity of persons of Egypt and Crete who were once supposed to be wholly mythical, and it is possible that the persons of the rude legends of Melanesia once really existed, and that some day we may be able to assign to them transactions which are inferred through the method of ethnological analysis. This is unlikely, however, and it is possible that, except in the case of quite recent events, we shall always have to be content with a history devoid of transactions between persons to whom we can refer by name.

## CHRONOLOGY.

Another difference between ethnology and history is in the nature of their chronology. It will already have become apparent that the method of ethno-



logical analysis is largely concerned with what I may call relative chronology as distinguished from absolute or numerical chronology. One of the chief aims of the investigator in the examples I have given has been to place events in chronological order, but in this study he is satisfied if he succeeds in reaching conclusions which enable him to say that one influence or one form of custom or institution preceded or succeeded another in order of time. Taken alone, without the aid of literary remains, the method of ethnological analysis is helpless before the task of formulating a numerical chronology. It is unable to say whether an influence reached Melanesia, or whether an institution arose as the result of that influence, a thousand years before or a thousand years after the central point of our own chronological system. It is another matter, however, when we bring the results reached by the unaided method of ethnological analysis into relation with those due to the study of literary documents.

#### DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD.

I will give an example from Melanesia. The distribution of the practice of cremation in this region and the nature of the customs with which it is associated lead me to place it among the latest elements of culture which reached that region before our own arrival. If we can assign an approximate date to this introduction, we shall be provided with a later limit for all the movements earlier than that which brought the practice of

cremation. It is fairly certain that all the main influences which have reached Melanesia have come from Indonesia, or have passed through this region, to which we must therefore look for light concerning chronology. The Indonesian evidence points to cremation having been brought from India, almost certainly by the migration which we know from literary sources to have taken place about the fifth and sixth centuries of our era. If this be accepted we can place the introduction of cremation into Melanesia as later than the sixth century A.D. It is therefore probable that interment in the sitting position and mummification of the dead, which the process of ethnological analysis assigns to earlier immigrant influence, took place before this date. One consideration however, introduces an element of doubt. Literary evidence tells us with great probability when cremation reached Indonesia, but it cannot tell us when it set out upon its further journey to Melanesia. We have evidence that movements of culture were still in progress when we first became acquainted with Melanesia, and are indeed continuing their progress up to the present time. It is possible—though, for reasons I cannot consider now, it is unlikely—that the practice of cremation may not have passed into Melanesia until centuries after it had become a settled feature of Indonesian culture. It is further possible that there may have been a similar delay in the transmission of some of the earlier cultures. We cannot conclude that every element of culture which reached Indonesia before

cremation passed on to Melanesia before the introduction of this method of disposing of the dead into Indonesia.

### THE INEXACTNESS OF PREDOCUMENTARY HISTORY.

I have dealt at length with the feature of chronology because it furnishes a good example of the inexactness which must probably always be a feature of the history which is capable of formulation without the aid of literary records. This form of history must always be on broad lines and will fail to deal with the personal relations which give to the study of history so much of its interest and charm. It may be noted, however, that the general tendency of recent movements in history has been in this direction. Every year more and more attention is being paid to the history of institutions and ideas, while the personal relations and details of the transactions between individuals and nations are coming to be of less interest in themselves, and are regarded as material by which broader and more general issues can be reached. If ethnological analysis of the kind I have attempted to describe is deemed worthy of being admitted as an instrument of history, and its conclusions worthy of a place among its data, it will only serve to accentuate a movement which is already evident in the recent progress of the subject. I have supposed that a relative absence of definiteness must always be a feature of the history of peoples who have no written records, but it must be remembered that the whole movement is at present

very young, and that the method of ethnological analysis of rude culture, as I have described it, is not yet twelve years old, and that even this brief life has been rudely chequered by the losses and accidents of war. It may be that I have been unduly depreciatory, and that the new movement, going hand in hand with archæology and with the older methods of history, may be found capable of far greater exactness than I have supposed. It is certainly too early to estimate how great may be its contribution to our knowledge of the past.

#### MAITLAND AND ETHNOLOGY.

It is interesting to note how closely the view here put forward concerning the nature of ethnological research agree with those of the late Professor Maitland, especially as expressed in his paper on "The Body Politic."\* In that essay Maitland stated his belief that "by and by anthropology will have the choice between being history and being nothing."† Moreover, he illustrates his theme by the same examples as those chosen by myself, and objects, just as I have done, to the assumption that there has been a universal order of development from mother-right to father-right. The school of ethnologists to which I belong, whose attitude I have tried to illustrate, have made the choice which Maitland predicted.

\* *Collected Papers*, Cambridge (1911), vol. iii., p. 285.

† *Op. cit.*, p. 295.

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