

ZEST IN LIFE.¹

If I do not mistake, I think, I am the oldest member present here to-day, as one belonging to any Anthropological Society or to the Anthropological Section of any Society. My Anthropological Society of Bombay was founded on 7th April 1886 by the late Mr. Tyrrel Lieth, Bar-at-Law, practising in the High Court of Bombay, who was spoken of by Dr. Dymmock, one of the subsequent Presidents, as "a distinguished scholar of versatile talents, a true philosopher, a worthy disciple of the great anthropologist, Aristotle, who was the first to conceive the idea of a gradually ascending scheme of organic life."

The Indian Science Congress, had at first, a separate section for Anthropology, but it was dropped, and it was our Anthropological Society of Bombay, which suggested, by its letter of 16th May 1918, addressed to the then authorities of the Indian Science Congress, that Anthropology may have a special recognition, and, so, have a special section to itself. I am glad to find that the suggestion was adopted in 1921 and this is the third Science Congress after its adoption. It is quite appropriate that, in a Science Congress, Anthropology, spoken of as "the Queen of Sciences," should have its proper place.

It gives me very great pleasure to stand before you, not only as your nominated president, but also as a representative of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, the first, and, up to now, the only Anthropological Society in India. I joined

¹ This paper formed the subject of my Presidential Address, delivered, as the President of the Section of Anthropology in the Tenth Indian Science Congress, at Lucknow, in January 1924. (Vide Journal, Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol. XIII, No. 8, pp. 804-816.)

the Society as a member shortly after its foundation and have served the Society as its Honorary Secretary for a long period of 23 years, during one of which years, the year 1914, I was elected its President. As one so closely associated with the Anthropological Society of Bombay, I beg to present to you the greetings of my Society and to thank you for calling me to the Presidential chair of the Anthropological Section of this 10th Indian Science Congress. I have accepted this position as an honour, not only to myself, but to my Society, which I have served long and of which I have been one of its oldest members. The Society has, during its existence of 36 years, published, in all, 12 volumes of 8 numbers each. With two more numbers of the running 13th volume, it has published in all 98 numbers. It is with pardonable pride that I note, that out of these 98 numbers, 69 have been published during my Secretaryship and Editorship and that I have read about 75 papers before it.

I have noticed with pleasure, pleasure not unmixed with some regret, what Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy, the occupant in 1921 of the chair which I occupy to-day, has said about the work of our Society and of my personal work¹. In spite of our having few "enthusiastic" workers, as referred to by him, our Society has done some valuable work, and I cannot do better than refer to the literary journals like the Athenæum and the Academy which have appreciated our work (*vide* my Presidential Address before the Anthropological Society of Bombay, delivered on 25th February 1915).

My subject this evening is: "The Zest in life given by the study of cultural Anthropology." The motto suggested by the founder of our Society was: "Surtout de Zèle," *i.e.*, "especially, zeal." That, in which you show some zeal and take a zealous part, is sure

¹ Proceedings, Asiatic Society of Bengal (New Series), Vol. XVII, 1921, No. 4. Proceedings of the Eight Indian Science Congress.

to give you zest or pleasure. So, if you will show some zeal in Anthropological matters, that zeal will, in turn, give you some zest in, and add to the pleasure of, your life.

The principal elements in the study of Anthropology which give us pleasure or zest in life are the feelings of Toleration and Sympathy. We are prevented from being intolerant, dogmatic or bigoted. Anthropology teaches us that, under the surface of various beliefs and customs of various people, modern or ancient, cultured or uncultured, in the East or in the West, we find that "Human nature is the same." Again, we learn, that "There is nothing new under the Sun." Your modern up-to-date cultured man has, in some of his manners and customs and in his rules and regulations of the Church, State and Society, much that is a relic of that past, which you call uncultured, and much, in a disguised form, that is common with what you observe, among the uncultured tribes to-day. We are often told, that the East is East and West is West. Speaking from an anthropological point of view that is not strictly true. It would rather be more correct to say that "West was East and East was West." We speak of the Tyranny of Custom, but Fashion, which brings about changes, is not less tyrannous. What is now seen in the 'East' was once seen in the 'West' and what is now seen in the 'West' was once seen in the 'East.' For example, the West, at present, speaks with some intolerance of the customs of the East. Take, for instance the Indian Customs of Suttee, prohibition of Widow Marriage, and, prohibition of Intermarriages. But, we see from Tacitus, that these were prevalent, in one form or another, among the ancient Germans. Again an Englishman, perhaps, sees with great dislike some of the funeral customs and manners of the Indians, but, if he will look into the question with an unprejudiced mind, he will find, that some funeral customs and beliefs of the present India were at one time prevalent in his mediæval England. In one of my papers

The Elements giving us pleasure in Anthropological studies.

before this section, this year, the paper entitled, "The Social Life of a Christian of mediæval England and the Social Life of a Parsi of modern India," I have tried to show this.

We are often tempted to laugh at the superstitious beliefs of some uncultured people of our own country. But, when we go to the bottom of those beliefs and customs, we find that in the best of the drawing-rooms of modern society, we find a kind of reflex of these in a disguised form. All such thoughts make us tolerant and sympathetic, and such tolerance and sympathy add to the pleasure of our life, not only in the midst of cultured people, but also in our wanderings and roving in the midst of the uncultured.

The field of such anthropological studies of interest, which give us pleasure, is vast. So, for my subject to-day, I will take a few typical subjects to show, how the study of cultural Anthropology gives us, at times, both zest and pleasure in life. I will speak on the following typical subjects :—

The Field of such Anthropological subjects of Interest.

1. Superstitions.
2. Omens from the sight and flight of Birds.
3. The idea of a kind of Resurrection lurking under the various methods of the Disposal of the Dead.

We find that some kinds of superstitions pervade all classes of Society, the cultured and the uncultured, the learned and the unlearned, the lower and the higher, in the East and in the West. We find that even people in the higher or cultured classes of society in Europe are not free from what we call superstitions. There are a number of superstitions which are common to Europe and India. For example, take, as typical instances, at first, superstitions connected with sneezing and with the taking of omens from birds.

While travelling in some of the countries of Europe, in 1889, I found, that in several countries, Superstitions connected with sneezing. among the ordinary classes, the act of sneezing by a person was accompanied by a kind of blessing from another person, with whom he was talking or who was standing close by. In Sweden, where I had gone to attend the Oriental Congress of that year, when one sneezed, another person close by, uttered "Gud hjelp" (*i.e.* may God help you). Similarly, in Germany, they said, "Gesundheit" (*i.e.* health). In France, they said, "À vous souhaits" (*i.e.* good wishes to you). The Turks said, "Maschalla" (*i.e.* may God be with you). The Greeks said, "Kalli Ejia" (*i.e.* good health). The Arabs are reported to say "Yarahamak Allâh" (يرحمك الله *i.e.* God be merciful with you). All these words remind us of a similar custom on our side. Among us, Parsis, when one sneezes, it is common to hear a Parsi lady close by saying "Jivshê or Jirê (જીવશે, or જીરે) *i.e.* may you live long. Sometimes the good wishes are expressed in rhythmical lines. For example, if a boy, Jamshedji by name, sneezes, his mother would say "મહારાજા જમશેદજી જીવશે, દરજી વાગા સીવશે" *i.e.* my Jamshedji will live long and the tailor will prepare suits of clothes for him.

It gave me much pleasure in my travels in Europe in 1889, to inquire into the matter of this superstition, and to be interested in its observance. It is said, that at one time, Englishmen also said something of the kind, to wish good health to the person sneezing, but now, it is considered rather indecorous to observe a person sneezing, because it reminded people of a bad event, like an epidemic, referred to below. In a hotel at Vienna, where I stayed, the porter, with whom I was talking at the door of the hotel, bowed before me when I sneezed. On inquiry, I was told, that he bowed out of courtesy and wished me good health. Now, what is the cause of this superstition, common to the West and to the East ?

The reason assigned is this: In olden times, an epidemic, somewhat like our modern influenza, spread from one part of the world to another. Thousands died by that dire disease. Sneezing was a sure precursor of the complaint. So, when an epidemic of that kind prevailed, when a person began to sneeze, his friends and relatives close by, got anxious about him, taking it that he was attacked by the disease. So, they prayed for him. They wished him good health and uttered some words of prayer for that purpose. This was the origin of the custom of wishing good to a man when he sneezed. The custom began with the times of a great epidemic. Then, it extended to, and continued in, ordinary sneezing. The good wishes or blessings were not confined to the wishing of good health alone, but were, later on, extended to further good wishes in other directions. For example, once, I heard my hostess of the *pension* where I stayed in Paris, a good old lady, accosting her son when he sneezed, by saying "Dix mille livres de rentes" (*i.e.* may your annual income be 10,000 livres). We see a similar thing in the above-mentioned words of a Parsi lady, who extended her good wishes of health to a further good wish that the tailor may continue to prepare suits of clothes for the person sneezing.

Sneezing portends both good or evil in India. It is a bad omen when a man is on the point of leaving his house for some business. In order to avert the evil consequence, the person waits for a minute or two, or turns back a little, or takes off his shoes and puts them on again, in order to show that he had given up the idea of the business for some time and resumed it later on. This view of taking a sneeze to be a bad omen seems to have been connected with the above view of the connection of sneezing with a prevalent epidemic.

Among some people, sneezing at ordinary times, other than those of epidemics, is considered to be good. For example, it is said, of some Moguls, that when they catch cold and sneeze after,

a long period, they are pleased with the attack, taking it, that cold or sneezing does away with some other physical complaints. So, when they catch cold and begin sneezing they take it as a good omen for future health and send presents of sweets to their friends, as if, that were a good or auspicious occasion. This view of taking a sneeze, as a good omen seems to be very old, as old as the Classical times. Dryden alludes to it, when he says :

“ To these Cupid sneezed aloud,
And every lucky omen sent before,
To meet the landing on the Spartan shore.”

Milton refers to the same belief in his *Paradise Lost*, when he sings :

“ I heard the rack
As earth and sky would mingle ; but
These flaws, though mortals fear them,
As dangerous to the pillar'd frame of Heaven
Are to the main, as wholesome as a sneeze,
To men's universe, and soon are gone.”

All this explains, why sneezing has been taken as an evil omen. It is said that, the custom of the clapping of hands just at a particular important juncture in a ritual, for example in marriage, had its origin in the anxiety to avoid an evil omen. If at the most particular juncture of a good auspicious work, some one present sneezes, it portends all evil. So, to avoid any chance of a sneeze being heard at the particular juncture, people clapped their hands for some time to avoid a sneeze, if any, being heard or noticed. I have spoken at some length, on the subject of sneezing to show how anthropological inquiries give us pleasure and zest in life. Go wherever you like, from one end of the world to the other, you will find, that there are certain views which you call superstitions, that are common to the whole world, having generally the same origin.

Like sneezing, there are some other involuntary motions in the different parts of the body, which are believed to point to different consequences, both in India and in Europe. The itching of the nose, the tingling of the ear, the burning in the cheeks, the involuntary biting of one's tongue between his teeth, the movement of the eyelids, are such instances of involuntary motions of the different parts of the body presaging good or bad omens.

Sir James Frazer's "Psyche's Task, a Discourse concerning the influence of superstitions on the growth of Institutions" suggests to us many thoughts arising even from superstitions. Cultured people speak deridingly of superstitions, but in action, they themselves are at times superstitious. Civilization and Advancement generally rest on Respect for (a) Government, (b) Private property, (c) Marriage and (d) Human life. As pointed out by Frazer, among many uncivilized tribes, this respect for the four principal elements of Civilization rests upon their superstitious beliefs.

Uncivilized people believe in the existence of some supernatural power in their Chiefs. This superstitious belief makes them respectful towards the Government of their Chiefs. They honour their chiefs and keep themselves at a respectable distance from them. The English belief of the last century, that scrofula could be cured by a touch of the king, rose from such a belief. The scrofula was therefore called "King's disease," and, even Johnson is said to have believed, that he was cured by such a touch. The old ancient Scotch belief, that the arrival of the Chief of the Macleods in Dunnegal always led to a plentiful catch of the herring, rested on such a belief of some supernatural power in the Chief. The Divine Power of the kings, of which we hear both in the West and the East—more in the East at present—is a result of the old belief. It is said of a woman in an uncultured society that she ate unwittingly,

some of the apples touched by the Chief of her Tribe. The idea of sacredness was attached to these apples, thus tabooed by the hand of her Chief. She died of anxiety when she learnt that she ate unwittingly the tabooed apples.

From this point of view, Chiefs of some uncultured tribes do not blow towards fire, because by doing so, they transfer some of their sacredness to the fire itself. The fire, having obtained thereby some sanctity, transferred it to the food that may be cooked over it. If somebody ate the food, thus tabooed by the sanctity transferred to it by the sacred tabooed fire, he was expected to die. Again, if one inadvertantly touches with his hand the body of his Chief or King, and, if, with that hand so sanctified or tabooed, he eats any food, he is expected to die.

In civilized countries, you want a number of statutes or Laws and Rules and Regulations to enforce respect for private property. You go to courts of justice for seeking redress in cases of encroachment upon your rights of possession. Among the uncivilized tribes of Africa and elsewhere, their superstitions stand for Laws. They associate a kind of curse with misappropriation of property. So, the mere dread of the curse acted as a check against misappropriation. Thus, we find that the threat of a curse by King Darius against one who meddled with his great Behistun Inscriptions and practised vandalism was as great as that of Lord Curzon's Monument Act in India.

Civilized people have various Matrimonial Acts* for the preservation of the sanctity of the marriage tie. But several uncivilized tribes of various countries preserved the sanctity of marriage by their belief in a kind of sin associated with the act of adultery, a sin drawing all kinds of evils and miseries. So, they wanted no Matrimonial Acts or Penal Codes to preserve the sanctity of marriage among themselves.

(b) Respect for Private Property.

(c) Respect for Marriage.

We, who call ourselves civilized, have a number of Penal Codes to prevent and punish murders.

(d) ^{Respect for} _{Human Life.} But a belief among some uncultured people, that the ghost of a murdered man was sure to avenge the murder of that man, acted as strongly as, or perhaps more strongly than, the Penal Codes.

Thus, we see that in this wide world, even superstitions have their proper field of work, acting against a kind of lawlessness. We must be tolerant even towards superstitions. Our culture need not lead us to the practice of superstitions but must make us tolerant of them. The thoughts entertained in "maiden meditation and fancy free" in the field of such superstitions, at times, add to the pleasure of life.

At times, it is found difficult to distinguish between religion and superstition. At times, it is a kind of fashion to take all religious-minded men to be superstitious. But it should not be so. The question depends upon how far the sense of the Divine affects a particular man. In some cases, the sense of the Divine oppresses a man with the thought that God is strict with him or is displeased with him. To do away with that displeasure associated with some idea of oppression, man resorts to some unnecessary practices of propitiation, etc. This sense of the Divine leads one to various superstitions. The best way for a cultured man is that of reciprocal love. God loves us; so, let us love Him; or putting it in another form: Let us love God for His own sake and He is sure to love us.

The custom of taking omens from the flight of birds presents another instance of a superstition common to almost all parts of the world.

2. The custom of taking omens from birds. I have referred to this subject at some length in my paper on "The Owl in Folklore," before this section, this year. The observation of

taking an omen, good or bad from the sight and flight of birds, gives us at times much pleasure. I remember an occasion about 40 years ago, when, while going on a picnic on the outskirts of Surat with a large party, I was startled with the shouts here and there, of "kākaryô koomâr, kākaryô koomâr." All eyes turned suddenly in different directions. Our cart-drivers and other members of our party, ran in different directions. On inquiry, I learnt, that it was the sight of a rare bird, known as kākaryô koomâr that had fluttered and agitated the whole party, especially the ladies. The sight of this bird which is very rare, is held to be very auspicious. Hence, when one of our party saw the bird, and uttered the shout, the others in the party got desirous to see the bird and to be fortunate for having a presage of a good result. An old lady, my aunt, who had a son, long suffering from a malady, was very anxious to let his son see that bird, so that the auspicious sight of this rare bird, may lead to his recovery. Here was the case of a kind of pleasure, added to my general pleasure of an outing on a picnic.

Last year, after my attendance at the second Oriental Conference at Calcutta in January, I had the pleasure of paying a short flying visit to Burma, Cochin-China, China, and Japan.

3. The Custom of preserving the Bones of the Dead.

The ordinary pleasure of a long holiday in travelling in distant countries and enjoying their sights and scenes, was much added to, by moving about with a pencil and note-book in my hand, to take down notes from anthropological and other points of view. Among various points of anthropological interest, the one which drew my special attention and the one which I want to draw your special attention to, in this paper, is that of the custom for the disposal of the dead. Various people have a variety of customs and beliefs associated with the three chief events in a man's life, viz.: Birth, Marriage, and Death. Among these, the customs connected with the disposal of the body draw our special attention.

Almost all people believe in a future life, and in connection with that belief, attach some importance, to the manner of the disposal of the body. In my travels in Europe and India and in the Further East, I took special care, where possible, to visit burning grounds and burial grounds. At the bottom of all the funeral rites and customs connected with the disposal of the body, we find a notion, that something—however small—of the body must be preserved for short or long time, to help the soul. This view, generally connected with the view of Resurrection, has led the Christians, the Mahomedans and others to burial, the ancient Persians to the custom of having Astodans or Ossuaries, and the Egyptians to the custom of mummifying, and having subterranean tombs and Pyramids for the mummies. I find that the custom of preserving bones or some part of the body for some future Resurrection in some form or another, is common to the whole of Asia. Among the Parsis in India and Persia and among the Tibetans, there prevails the custom of the exposure of the body to the Sun and to flesh-devouring birds and animals, like vultures. I had an opportunity of learning, though not of personally observing, at Darjeeling, much of the custom of the exposure. In fact, I found that, what I heard and learnt in Darjeeling and in the adjoining *gumpas* or monasteries of the Tibetans, threw some side-light upon our Parsi custom of the disposal of the dead. From all that I saw and heard and learnt, I find, that the custom of preserving bones in one form or another has prevailed, in most of the countries of Central Asia and of China and Japan.

From these few observations, in connection with some typical instances, we find, that the study of

Conclusion. Anthropology, especially, cultural Anthropology, leads us, not only to add to our general stock of human knowledge, but also to pleasure. Of course, all true students of different sciences and of various branches of learning, derive, as they ought to derive, particular pleasure in

their lines of study. But the science of Anthropology, very properly spoken of as the "Queen of Sciences," is one, that gives us a kind of continuous pleasure and zest in life, not only in our rooms of study and not only when we are in the company of books, but always, when we are at home or abroad, when we are in the midst of cultured people of cities or towns or when we are in the midst of the uncultured people of villages or solitary habitations. It is said, that to those who are inclined to hear sermons, even "stones preach sermons." So, in the case of Anthropology, the preaching material is everywhere. Its teaching will not only make you wise, but will make you a little happier than otherwise. It will most assuredly add to the pleasure of your life, and give you greater zest in life.