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# Invisible Collegial Discussion Among the Social Evolutionists: J. F. McLennan on the Redefinition of Civilization and Progress

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John Ferguson McLennan

papers, dating from 1880-1972. Smaller additions are expected in the future. Processing the papers will take at least a year; as yet there is not even a preliminary inventory. As a result, they will not be open for research for some time to come.

### III. MICROFILM EDITION OF THE J. P. HARRINGTON PAPERS

Kraus Microform (Route 100, Millwood, New York) announces the publication of more than 750,000 pages of materials collected by the ethnologist John Peabody Harrington over his fifty year career. Housed in the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, the Harrington papers will be issued over a three-year period on more than 350 reels of microfilm organized in geographical units.

### FOOTNOTES TO THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

#### INVISIBLE COLLEGIAL DISCUSSION AMONG THE SOCIAL EVOLUTIONISTS: J. F. MCLENNAN ON THE REDEFINITION OF CIVILIZATION AND PROGRESS

Some of the most cherished historical/theoretical categories of anthropology are to a large extent retrospectively constituted, with little appreciation of how the historical actors whom they associate terminologically may actually have interacted with one another--the extent to which they were in fact linked by invisible collegial relations, or the ways they may have exchanged ideas outside the medium of the printed word. Even so provocative a work as Burrow's Evolution and Society leaves us with no real sense of how E. B. Tylor, John Lubbock and J. F. McLennan (who are considered together in a chapter on the growth of anthropology) actually related to each other personally and intellectually. From this point of view, there is considerable interest in the short sequence of letters from McLennan to Lubbock written in the fall of 1867 (and briefly referred to in Peter Riviere's introduction to the reprinted edition of McLennan's Primitive Marriage).

The intellectual network which these letters evoke has both a hierarchical and a center/periphery structure. From what we know of his class background, national origins, and career pattern, it is not surprising to find McLennan in the role of outsider and petitioner. One is less prepared to find Lubbock (a figure of only secondary retrospective rank in the history of social anthropology) at the focal point. While Tylor, like Lubbock, might also be regarded as one of the "intellectual aristocracy" that emerged in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, he spent most of his time in Somerset, and had neither the scientific nor the political connections which Lubbock could command.

Lubbock's contemporary status among biological scientists--signalized here by McLennan's attempt through him to include Huxley in the proposed cooperative project--suggests (contrary to Burrow) the overriding importance of the Darwinian context to McLennan's evolutionism, an inference supported also by McLennan's somewhat surprised dissatisfaction with his pre-evolutionary work on the Hill Tribes of India. The role of

Aufrecht (a German-born comparative linguist) is rather more problematic; perhaps he was to be the Scottish equivalent of Friedrich Max Müller.

From the point of view of intellectual content, the most suggestive aspect of the sequence is McLennan's proposed redefinition of the idea of civilization in social rather than cultural terms, as well as his attempt (stimulated by Lubbock) to achieve a more systematic treatment of the idea of progress. These were of course two of the points where evolutionary theory was most at the mercy of unexamined ethnocentric assumption, and while it seems unlikely that McLennan (a man who had no qualms accepting Victorian marriage norms as the basis for cross-cultural comparison) would have provided criteria that we would accept today, his concern does suggest a certain sensitivity at the methodological soft spot of Victorian evolutionism.

The letters, which form Add. 49640 of the papers of John Lubbock (Lord Avebury), are reproduced by permission of the British Library. Readers interested in the political linkages of this intellectual network may wish to consult the letter of January 6, 1870 in Add. 49641 (unreproduced here for reasons of space), in which McLennan asked Lubbock to use any influence he might have with Gladstone to secure him a position as Queen's Remembrancer. To clarify McLennan's "tentative scheme" we have, however, reprinted a later version of the chart which he suggests inspired it. (G.W.S.)

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South Park  
Reigate 12 Sept. 67

Dear Sir,

Some months ago, when I was very busy pushing a book thro' the press, I received . . . your book on Prehistoric Man which I had previously read with much interest & profit. I called at Messrs Williams & Norgate in Edinbr. . . . but I could not learn by whose direction it had been sent. Pardon me presuming to think it may have been sent by you. . . .

The inquiries in which you are engaged are to me most interesting & I am longing for the time when I can myself resume studies . . . in a cognate branch of early human history. Circumstances, however, have of late been against my making progress. I have now had the materials for a paper on "Exogamy in Ancient Greece" by me for two years. . . . I am able, however, at odd times to read what appears bearing on early history & I have been watching with special interest for all that issues from your own pen and that of Mr. Tylor. If you print your late address to the British Association -- of which I have seen merely the imperfect abstract in the "Scotsman"--I shall deem it a great favour if you let me have a copy. . . . In return I shall be most happy when I get back to Edinburgh to forward to you some papers of mine. . . .

I am, Dear Sir, Yrs. truly,

J. F. M'Lennan

South Park  
Reigate 11 Oct. 67

Dear Sir John,

Your note of the 9th addressed to me at Edinburgh has just found me here. . . . The paper which I think I could prepare without much trouble is "A Note on the Disposal of the Dead"--but this is a mere impression as I have not at present with me any of my note-books bearing on these subjects. I shall be in Edinburgh on Tuesday . . . & let you know. The suggestion for the proposed note lies in an article "Hill Tribes in India" which I wrote for the North British Review in 1862 or spring of 1863. I trust I may find the materials up to my recollection of them which is that they give a singular proof or at least indication of development in regard to customs usually sacred and unchanging.

Having got-out-of-hand the work which occupied me here I have been employed for the last three days on the paper which I shd be most anxious to bring out through yr society [the Ethnological Society of London], viz: "A Tentative View of Human Progress". I have been thinking over it at intervals for a year back, & possibly it may take me another year to adjust it. Indeed my impression is that the final adjustment must be the work of several persons, in other words that it ought to be a joint work altogether. When I have got far enough on with it to submit it to you, perhaps you will be good enough to consider whether between yourself & Huxley in the South and Professor Aufrecht (an excellent philologist) & myself in Edinburgh, a tentative scheme might not be adjusted which might serve for some years to come as a guide for enquiry in regard to the history of the race--at the same time that it would mark for the time the results of such enquiry as has been made. It wd. be too long a story to explain to you the conception I have formed of the way in which the view should be presented. I can only say that I am aiming at the formation of a table with a classification of stages of progress depending on the grouping [sic]--the table exhibiting all the stages of progress in the Arts & Sciences etc. that have been found concurring with each phase of the development of social organization. The post I find is just going out.

Believe me very sincerely yours,

J. F. M'Lennan

22 Hill St.  
Edinbr 15 Oct 67

My dear Sir John,

. . . My fit of work on the tentative scheme is interrupted as I find law-work waiting for me. But I trust soon to be able to resume it, when I shall submit my views to you. It seems to me that to solve the difficulty you point out a new or sharper definition of Civilization must be hit upon. The word, which has its root in civis, wd appear to denote grouping before anything else. I mean that is the leading idea among the several ideas which it connotes. The relations of these ideas to one another & the precise definition which, for scientific use, shd be given to the word, may, however, not clearly appear till considerable progress has been made in tabulating the states of progress in the different ~~fields~~ directions. This is why any attempt we could now make must be strictly regarded as tentative merely.

I send you Major (now Col.) M'Culloch's report on the Hill Tribes round Munniepore; also "Kinship in Ancient Greece" --a short paper on the form of capture which I wrote last spring for a light literary periodical. The latter paper will show you the progress made in collecting examples of the form up to its date.

The good Williams I find is Thomas Williams "Fiji & Fijians 1858". The bad I think is "20 Years of a Missionary Life in Polynesia."

We are on a visit for a few days at a house a little out of town & I can find no paper here but this sheet. I shall look up the materials for the Note on Burials today.

Excuse this letter as want of sleep has left me very stupid.

Yrs very sincerely

J. F. M'Lennan

22 Hill Street  
Edin<sup>br</sup> 28 Oct. 1967

Dear Sir John

I find I cannot send you the Note on the disposal of the dead. We are in what is called here "Sacrament Week"; our libraries have been closed since Wednesday last. . . . This it is that has thrown me out, as I have not reexamined my references. The Note relates to the modes of disposing of the dead which are transitional between Exposure and Inhumation. I hope to furnish the paper some-time hereafter.

I am also laying aside my "tentative scheme," of which I now suspect the suggestion was derived from yr table at p. 447. This I had forgotten till I met it again on rereading your book, which I have just lately done. My topheading, corresponding to the column on the left of yr table, is 2 yards long in manuscript-- the entries ranging from Marriage, property & succession, etc, etc., to the Arts of Subsistence, Defense & Amusement, and being classed & subclassed so as to appear in the order of their probable development. This heading, on revising it sometime after this, I shall have printed & sent out for opinions.

Putting business etc. aside I am now settling to a paper on "Exogamy in Ancient Greece" which I fancy will occupy me for the winter. I sent you a copy of the "Kinship". Shd you read it I wd like much to know what you think of the argument.

I was shocked on reading "Hill Tribes in India" to find it abominably poor & bad. It was a first draft, was printed from the draft & published without proof being sent to me; and I never saw it since it appeared till the other day. I beg you not to read it or mention it to any one.

I trust you are all well. With my best compliments to Lady Lubbock & your brothers believe me yours very truly

J. F. M'Lennan

[Chart from Lubbock's Prehistoric Times, 2nd ed., p. 541]

	EASTERN ISLANDERS.	PUGIANS.	BUSHMEN.	HOTTENTOTS.	ANDAMANERS.	AUSTRALIANS.		ESQUIMAUX.		NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS.		NEW ZEALANDERS.	FEROEANS.	SOCIETY ISLANDERS.	FIJIANS.
						North-East.	West.	Southern.	Northern.	West.	East.				
Bows and Arrows	...	Weak	Weak	Weak	Good	...	...	Good	...	Good	Good	...	Good	Weak	Weak
Slings	...	Yes	...	...	..	...	...	Yes	...	Yes	Yes	...	Yes	Yes	?
Throwing Sticks	...	...	...	...	...	Yes	Yes	Yes	?	...	...	...	...	...	...
Boomerangs	...	...	...	...	...	Yes	Yes	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Bolas	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Yes	?	...	...	...	...	...	...
Pottery	...	...	...	Yes	...	...	...	...	...	...	Yes	...	Yes	...	...
Canoes	Bad	Bad	...	...	Good	...	Bad	Good	...	Bad	Middling	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good
Agriculture	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Maize	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fortifications	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	..	...	...	Many	Yes	...	Yes
Fish-hooks	...	Stone	...	Iron	?	...	Neat	Bone	...	Yes	Yes	Bone and shell	Bone and shell	Bone and shell	Shell
Nets	...	...	...	Yes	Good	...	Neat	Small	For bird catching	Yes	Yes	Large	Yes	Large	Yes
Dogs	...	For hunting.	For hunting.	For hunting.	...	For hunting.	For hunting.	For draught	For draught	For wool & hunting	For hunting.	For food	For food	For food	...
Hogs (Domestic)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Some	Many	...