

MYSTICAL RACE THEORIES

BY RENÉ GILLOUIN

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IMPERIALISM is a part of the very nature of man, and the idea of a chosen people is, as we all know, of ancient date. It is the central idea of the Bible and doubtless explains the prodigious vitality of the Hebrew nation. But it has been reserved for our day to see these two powerful theories converge and unite — to see them become the keystone of a complete system of individual and social life, or, to use a German term, of a *Kultur*. It is in Germany, in fact, that we have witnessed the most striking manifestation of this theory. But the Anglo-Saxons are also touched by it and there is hardly a modern people which has not felt its contagion. The day after he entered Fiume, Gabriel d'Annunzio began an address to his compatriots as follows: 'Brothers, you already know what we have done under the inspiration and with the protection of our God.' A god who thus manifests his favor for the purely national enterprise of d'Annunzio evidently has nothing but his name in common with the God of Christianity. We may fairly say that the French are less infected with this theory than other peoples because, as Renan wrote to Gobineau nearly seventy years ago, the idea of race is nearly extinct among us, having been superseded by the idea of nationality. In fact, France seemed not only immune to this mysticism, but unable to understand it, to admit that it existed, to comprehend its seriousness and power. However, the World War, incarnating as it did pan-Germanism, at length opened our eyes, and several

monographs and articles, learned and popular, have recently been published, to show the fanaticism which takes possession of a nation which honestly believes that a god is its ally.

The nineteenth century which witnessed the birth and development of the science of ethnography and of the anthropological notion of race, was true to type in trying simultaneously to apply these new theories practically and to vest them with mystical meaning. From this source we get those philosophical concepts of history which crystallize around the word Aryanism, and would make the Aryans or Indo-Europeans, the presumptive descendants of the Aryans of Upper Hindustan, civilizers *par excellence*, a people favored of the gods, to whom is due all the progress of mankind.

But two mutually contradictory Aryanisms have flourished across the Rhine. One follows the teaching of Rousseau and the other the doctrines of Hegel; one is South German in its inspiration, the other Prussian; one is the æsthetic and pensive Aryanism of Schopenhauer and Wagner; the other is the political and conquering Aryanism of the Hegelians of 1840, of Gobineau, and of Nietzsche after he liberated himself from the earlier Wagnerian influence. The first of these two theories possessed the following typical features: a southern warmth of sentiment, a romantic Mediterranean atmosphere, a disposition to assign a tropical origin to the higher races, sympathy for Buddhism, and in general for an artistic, æsthetic,

ecstatic interpretation of man's place in nature and in history. The second theory assumes that the north is the source of civilization, and adopts as its canons a pure white race, an Anglo-Saxon mentality, freedom of will, realism, imperialism. These two Aryanisms are practically contemporary in origin, and for a brief period the former seemed likely to prevail. It would be interesting to speculate what might have happened to Germany and Europe had it won the day. But the reverse occurred. The northern, organizing Aryanism supplanted its rival — not only supplanted it but borrowed, absorbed and assimilated its spiritual elements, and turned them into tools for its own ambitions and temporal conquests.

Therefore, Germanism dates back for a considerable period. Leibnitz laid its foundation; Klopstock, Lessing, Herder, and Goethe himself, labored upon its superstructure; the Napoleonic wars gave it its final impulse. It was elaborated by Hegel and his successors. Gervinus taught that the Germanic race was the heir of Hellenism; that it had given the modern world the only literature comparable with that of classical antiquity; and that all that was valuable in Christianity was due to the acceptance of that dogma by the northern races during the Middle Ages. However, this Germanism had not yet become pan-Germanism, — a mysticism of world-wide pretensions. Indeed, it bade fair for a time to remain in the realm of dreams, a sort of solace for the inability of the Germans to forge out a great national destiny. Then Prussia stepped in and gave these theories a very different turn. That country set about clothing these unrealities with the forms of reality. But the Prussian system was itself affected by this new spirit. Imperialism and mysticism reinforced each other until their mutual stimulation produced the dizzy mad-

ness from which Europe has nearly perished.

By a singular irony of fate, a Frenchman, Count Gobineau, was the most active spiritual agent in this fusion. It was from his writings that the teachers of Germanism received the suggestions which resulted in their attempted scientific identification of the Germans with the Aryans. His *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* gave them a hint which they seized upon with boundless satisfaction and elaborated into their conception of the Aryan as the conqueror and organizer, the man of initiative and reflection; who combined practical ability with idealism, and courage with perseverance; who was brave — even brutal — but never cruel; who was proud and domineering, but not vain; who united with an instinctive love of order and reason the practice of true liberty. Gobineau's *Essai* also suggested the thought of investing the Germans with their rôle of a chosen people. Let us remark here, as a curious fact, that Gobineau himself had worked out his doctrine from an entirely subjective standpoint, consoling himself for his own obscurity by glorifying and magnifying his putative ancestors. He praised and exalted the Aryan-German type only in the past. It never occurred to him to bestow upon the Germans of his own day race-precedence over his own nation, and he was explicit in denying them the true German spirit. A radical pessimist regarding the future, he set out to prove that the Aryan-German blood — the only truly noble blood, the only blood set apart by destiny to bestow social order and to sway empires — had been so contaminated by intermixture with the yellow and black races, that mankind was headed toward certain, speedy, and absolute decline. In fact, his fundamental idea was the same as that which inspired Rousseau — that the world was

hopelessly degenerate. In the beginning there had been a group of human beings wonderfully gifted by nature. Rousseau conceived these as primitive man: Gobineau as the Aryan-Germans — 'a group to which I belong by a perhaps unique play of chance, and of which I preserve the qualities.' But Gobineau and Rousseau had the same fate. Their solitary cries awakened an unexpected echo in great groups of people who accepted their theories as applying to themselves. These disciples, however, reversed things so that what the original authors had placed in the past, they placed in the future. The new champions made these theories a rallying-cry for combat and conquest. A sharp-sighted Princess of Wittgenstein, the well-known friend of Liszt, saw intuitively what might happen. She wrote to Gobineau that the day would come when people would borrow many things from him and apply them in a way of which he little dreamed. In fact Gobineau's theories sprang up everywhere beyond the Rhine. Public men began to use his theories to support German political pretensions, and the prophecy of the Princess was speedily realized. This evangel of race, this conviction that the German people stands for the noble element in the universe, the element destined to rule over other peoples, to bestow upon them the blessings of organization and culture, to raise them with God's aid to a true level of civilization, this was the faith and the law of the whole German nation on the eve of the war. The fearful shock of defeat, the crushing evidence of the hatred and contempt of all the world, have perhaps modified the form of this obsession; but they have not changed its nature or weakened its fanaticism.

... Whenever the idea of race has been examined in France, as it has been on numerous occasions, the conclusion has been that after two thousand years

of invasion and migration and intermingling, no such thing remains in Europe as race in the physiological and anthropological sense. This conclusion may be exact, but it counts for nothing against the subtle refinements of Germanic racial mysticism. For instance, a man like Houston Stewart Chamberlain, that Englishman who has adopted Germany for his fatherland and become more pan-German than the Junkers themselves, is explicit in his contention that races cannot be distinguished at the present day by physical traits, but only by psychological traits. According to him, the German is not to be identified by the color of his hair, or the contour of his skull, or the shape of his features; but by his intellectual and moral predispositions, by the 'initial slant of his thought,' by his *Weltanschauung*, — his conception of the world. Every man is supposed to carry within himself the germ of his race which, with proper cultivation, will indicate to him with infallible precision the quality of his blood, just as his moral conscience informs him as to the merits of his acts. This interior voice of the pure scion of his race is invariably harmonious and comforting. It continues through life to be an unfailing resource of moral well-being. This race genius, like the *daimon* of Socrates, watches constantly over the individual's destiny, steadies his footsteps when he stumbles, warns him of the perils which beset his course, inspires him to lofty deeds which he would never dare venture of his own initiative. It is hardly necessary to point out how arbitrary such a conception is, how easily it eludes objective criticism on account of its purely subjective and personal nature, or what a powerful source of inspiration and fanaticism it can become. Nor is it difficult to see how this assumed 'ethnic conscience' may be made to serve a programme of intellectual, moral and

religious world-conquest. It is so elastic in its assumptions that it can easily transcend ordinary national frontiers, or any other matter-of-fact limits of time and space. It annexes complacently Dante, Shakespeare, Descartes, Voltaire, Homer, Moses, Vedantism, Brahmanism, Jesus Christ and St. Paul. It groups all these great figures and great movements around a narrow Germanic tradition which it conceives as the soul-essence and vital unifying principle of the whole. By this process of confusing but brilliant syncretism, these race-champions have built a sort of immense Pantheon, where they celebrate every cult and worship every deity. They

teach us that each separate chapel however opens into a great central nave of German genius, responds to the choir of German music, soars to the lofty visions of German philosophy, and bends the knee in worship of a German Christ. Intoxicated with this insidious delusion of moral conquest, the victims of this theory become the easy tools of political, military, and material conquest. Though defeated in the field of battle and of politics, the spiritual part of the German race-myth still remains to be vanquished. That is a task which will require weapons different from those which we of the lesser breeds have hitherto employed.

DO CATS THINK?

BY W. H. HUDSON

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TO-DAY when standing at my window I noticed a pied wagtail running about in the road below in search of the small crumbs the starlings, sparrows, and others had left, when a big cat came over the road on its way home to the house next door. When within about four yards of the wagtail he stopped short, his body stiffened, and, with eyes fixed on the bird, he crouched down on the ground, and continued in that position, motionless as a piece of stone except that the tip of his tail curved and uncurved and moved from side to side. The predatory instinct was alight and fiercely burning in him.

Then came the advance — the slow crawling movement which is scarcely perceptible to a creature directly in

front. The crawling movement continued until he was within about six feet of his prey, the wagtail meanwhile going on with his busy search for crumbs and appearing to take no notice of the cat — knowing, I suppose, that a stroke of his wings at any moment would place him out of danger, and that the exact moment had not yet come. Then the cat, when so near his bird, so intent on it, all at once stood up, un-stiffened, and, turning, walked away deliberately to his own garden-gate and went in!

Now a cat cannot see a bird within easy distance on the ground without the desire for a bird, the most compelling impulse he knows, being roused in him; and that first stillness and fixed at-