

## AN ESSAY ON THE HUMAN COLOR.

[Concluded from page 499.]

No writer has produced a more labored comparison between the white man and the man of color, than Mr. Jefferson, in his "Notes on Virginia." Mr. Jefferson does not profess to absolutely believe in the inferiority of the man of color, but proposes many queries and arguments by way of stimulating further inquiry upon the subject. "The first difference," he observes, "which strikes us, is that of color. Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the true skin and the scarfskin, or in the scarfskin itself; whether it proceeds from the color of the blood, the color of the bile, or from some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of color, preferable to that eternal monotony which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black, which covers all the emotions of the other race?"

It is surprising that so philosophical a man as Mr. Jefferson did not perceive that he was arguing in a circle, and trying to convince himself and his readers by a romantic eulogy upon the color of the whites, instead of presenting an accurate comparison of the differences between the two colors. The Chinese and the Africans are as fully aware of the difference in color as we are, and can retort all the questions which Mr. Jefferson has put, with full as much consciousness of the superiority of their own color. They can say, that "whether *this whiteness* resides in the reticular membrane between the true skin and the scarfskin, or in the scarfskin itself, the difference is as fixed in nature and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known." The mere circumstance of our making the color of the black man a theme of philosophical speculation, confers upon us no right to make our own color the standard of beauty. The color of the white man is as monotonous to the eyes of black men, as the black man's color is to us. They are not familiarized to these "fine mixtures of red and white," as we are. The color presents to them "*one eternal monotony.*" Besides, it is not a fact that "the fine mixtures of red and white, by the greater or less suffusions of color, are the expressions of every passion." Every physiologist knows that the expression of the passions almost entirely depends upon the contraction and relaxation of the muscles, independent of any change of color. Indeed, were there no other expression of the passions than the greater or less suffusions of color, the countenance of the white man would be very much of a blank. It would only become red or pale; it would give us the expression of a fever or of faintness, and nothing more. It is even doubtful whether the change of color to which the whites are exposed under the influence of the passions, does not contribute as much to deformity as to beauty. The paleness of fear is certainly not beautiful; nor is the redness of anger. The leaden hue of despair is a positive deformity. Black peo-

ple are also subject to a change of color, though in a much smaller degree. For want of a familiarity with the color, it is not always visible to us, when it is very perceptible to them. Among the clear Africans, there is a great difference in the color of different individuals; some are only brown, while others are of a shining black. I have noticed as great a difference between the color of two Africans, as there is between a common white man and the lightest colored of the Africans. I have heard them exclaim that such a person was too black to look well, precisely as we do of those of our color who possess a very dark complexion.

Our ideas of beauty depend so much upon what we are accustomed to see, and upon the intellectual laws of association, that were every nation to produce a standard of their own, we should, in proportion to the relative number of each color, at least, have three black beauties to two white ones. It may sound strange to the ears of many to hear a black skin pronounced beautiful, but the assertion has been made by a distinguished English traveller. I quote from a popular work, called *Geographical View of the World*. "Of that part of Ethiopia or Nubia which separates Sennaar from the second cataract of the Nile, little was known until the year 1821, when Mr. Waddington and Mr. Hanbury visited these regions. The most remote district visited by them was Dar Shegy'a, through which the Nile flows from north to south for nearly two degrees. It is subdivided into three States, often at war with each other, but ever ready to unite against a common foe. *The people are black, a clear, glossy jet black,*" says Mr. Waddington, "*which appeared to my then unprejudiced eye to be the finest color that could be selected for a human being.*"

In a word, it appears to me that the whole sum and substance of the argument of the whites, is this, that with them their own color is the most fashionable, and of course will continue to be the most beautiful until the fashion changes. Whatever nation possesses the superiority in the arts, in arms, in knowledge and in wealth, will from the force of admiration, emulation, and the universal love of splendor and glory among mankind, be pronounced the most beautiful, be the color what it may. Egypt was once this nation. It was the place where the scholars of Greece and Rome went to complete their education. The monuments of its ancient renown still continue to astonish us. The ancient Egyptians were black, and their hair short and curling. "The Colchians," says Herodotus, "certainly appear to be of Egyptian extraction, which, indeed, before I had conversed with any one on the subject, I had always believed. I interrogated the inhabitants of both countries; the result was that the Colchians seemed to have better remembrance of the Egyptians, than the Egyptians of the Colchians. The Egyptians were of the opinion that the Colchians were descended of a part of the troops of Sesostris. To this I myself was also inclined, because they were black and have hair short and curling; which latter circumstance may not however be insisted on as evidence, because it is common to many other nations." Says Mr. Volney, in remarking upon this passage, "That is, the ancient Egyptians were real negroes, and of the same species with

all the natives of Africa, and though, as might be expected, after mixing so many ages with the Greeks and Romans, they have lost the intensity of their first color, they still retain strong marks of their original conformation."

"Besides those of color, figure and hair," continues Mr. Jefferson, "there are other physical distinctions proving a difference of race. They have less hair on their face and body. They secrete less by the kidneys and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very disagreeable odor. This greater degree of transpiration renders them more tolerant of heat and less so of cold than the whites."

Women have no beards, and much less hair on the surface of the body generally than men, and yet it was never suspected that women, on account of this distinction, were a distinct race. The physical distinction in the organization of man and woman, is much greater than any distinction which exists between the different colors of men. It is the greatest distinction by far of any which exists among mankind, but was never conjectured to be a proof of a difference of race. It is a strong proof, on the contrary, that great physical distinctions may exist without destroying or materially affecting the identity of the human race. The identity of the human race appears to depend upon a sameness of structure in the external senses, and the organization of the brain and nervous system in general. Neither the hair, the figure, the bones of the skull, or the color, appear to hold any near relation to the mind. The hair possesses no sensibility, and whether there be much of it or little, whether it be long or short, straight or curly, or even whether there be none of it at all, as in many bald people, seems to be no essential matter as it respects the strength or weakness of the intellectual powers. Neither does the mind reside in the bones of the skull. All the bones of the African race are thicker and bulkier than the bones of the whites. The skull bone is an index of the general thickness of the other bones of their systems. This fact has never been attended to by anatomists and physiologists. In all children, these bones are extremely thin at a time when the mind has scarcely begun to develop itself. In the adult, the bones have become thick, and the mind strong. This fact militates strongly against the opinion that a thick skull bone is proof of inferiority of mind. Many of the lower animals have extremely thin skull bones, while yet they betray but little proof of intelligence. The bones of the heel have a still more remote relation to the capacity or the incapacity of the mind, than those of the skull. In both these respects the African has the advantage of the white man. The brain is better defended, and the strength of the foot is increased. The foot of the African is better adapted to the support of the superincumbent weight of the body.

The assertion of Mr. Jefferson that the blacks secrete less by the kidneys and more by the glands of the skin, is not a physiological fact. I have never met with the observation in the course of twenty years' medical reading, or noticed such a fact in the course of seventeen years' practice in a city where one twelfth of the inhabitants are black; or of its having been noticed by any other practitioner of medicine. Laboring

people perspire more than others, and consequently secrete less by the kidneys. The blacks being mostly laborers, must have originated this idea in the mind of Mr. Jefferson.

The common opinion which Mr. Jefferson endorses as a physiological fact, that black people can bear heat better and cold not so well as the whites, is also an error. It is well known that the same degree of health and strength which enables a man to bear one extreme well, will also enable him to bear the other equally well. This fact is well known among sailors and travellers who experience the extreme changes of different climates. Those who stand the heat with impunity, will also stand the cold the longest without freezing. The same man who can labor in the open field, uncovered, in the hottest days in summer, will be the ablest to withstand the severest cold of winter. The blacks, although they go thinner clothed than the whites in winter, do not oftener freeze. The idea must have originated in the conjecture that such must be the fact, because they came from a warm climate, or from an analogy to those vegetables and animals which can only flourish in the warm latitudes. No such observation has ever been made of the Indians or the Asiatic nations, although many of both live in the northern latitudes. Query—how black must a man be before Mr. Jefferson's remarks apply to him?

The greater transpiration of the skin, Mr. Jefferson says, gives to them "a very strong disagreeable odor." But this odor arises from a secretion by the axillary glands situated under the arm. It is a little different from the odor of the same secretion in white people, but I have heard the blacks say it was not stronger or more disagreeable than the same odor in white people. Where they observe an equal degree of cleanliness, they betray no more of it than the whites do. Every individual emits a peculiar odor from the axillary and other glands of the body, inasmuch that blind people can identify their acquaintances by the sense of smelling. This, to be sure, is a physical distinction, but not of sufficient magnitude to furnish a proof of a difference of race. Poverty and its concomitant, if not consequent personal uncleanness, has thus subjected the blacks to a dislike on the part of the whites.

Great physical distinctions in color, size, hair, and features, exist among the whites, without corresponding differences in the degree of personal beauty, or intellectual endowments. I have already noticed the distinction between the sexes, which is the greatest which can be supposed to exist between two individuals of the same species, and which furnishes us with no proof of "a difference of race." A brunette complexion of the darkest hue, accompanied with black eyes, and black and curly hair, not only often occurs among us, but is pronounced perfectly beautiful. In the settlement of these questions the opinions of the blacks should not be entirely disregarded. They, especially the Chinese and American Indians, must be supposed to have some little sense of the true and the beautiful as well as we, and some judgment of their own capacities in comparison with ours. They never feel, they never see, and they never manifest, either in word or deed, any inferiority to the whites. In war and in peace, they meet the white man only as an equal, nor dream they of any superiority.

The hair of the African is finer than that of the European. The curliness of the African hair is owing to its fineness. In some individuals of an equally deep color, it grows much longer than in others. Being curly and matted together, it easily wears off, and is, in this way, kept much shorter than where pains are taken to braid it and to keep it clean and straight. There is as great a diversity in its length in different individuals, as in the length of the hair of white people. The broad, flat features, and the thick, heavy muscles and bones of the blacks, deviate no more from the true standard of beautiful proportion, than the long, sharp, peaked features, and the thin, slender, light muscles and bones of the whites. Perfect symmetry lies between the two extremes.

Providence, R. I., May 31, 1844.

D. B. SLACK.

#### DR. BEDFORD'S NOTE IN CHAILLY'S MIDWIFERY.—REPLY TO "ARGUS."

To the Editor of the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.

SIR,—A writer in No. 23 of the Journal, over the signature of Argus, has perpetrated a piece of hypercriticism upon one of Dr. Bedford's notes in the late edition of Chailly's Midwifery, which seems to call for a brief animadversion. It seems that he is indebted to Dr. Huston's Medical Examiner for his knowledge of the subject, not having taken the trouble to examine the work from which it is extracted, such was his haste to become a censor morum, and of course ignorant of the appositeness of the note to the text which it illustrates.

This Argus appears to think it impossible, or at least incredible, that any person having "the title of *physician*" could betray such ignorance as that ascribed to one such in Dr. Bedford's note; and even admitting that such a case really occurred, he "protests against the utter *impolicy*, *impropriety*, *inexpediency* and *unprofessional bearing*" of exposing it.

Now your correspondent must be indeed *green*, if he can have any doubts that multitudes having "the title of *physician*" can be found, who are every day disgracing the profession, and outraging humanity by as flagrant blunders as that detailed by Dr. Bedford as occurring under his observation. Every experienced practitioner could relate a hundred equally culpable examples which he has detected, and those which escape detection are doubtless innumerable. So much for the "*policy*, *propriety*, *expediency*, and *professional bearing*" of impeaching the veracity of a reputable member of the fraternity, in a respectable medical journal, on so slender a pretext.

But the other criticism of Argus is still more exceptionable, for he insists that "it is undignified and uncalled for" to publish the fact that under "the title of *physician*" such gross ignorance may be found. He would conceal such facts, and permit quackery to go unrebuked when sheltered by a diploma, however mischievous to the health and lives of the community. But the profession and the public think otherwise, for the exposure of such blunderers serves to put people on their guard