

The PROPOSED IMPERIAL INSTITUTE—
GEOGRAPHY and ANTHROPOLOGY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—I understand that the main purpose of the proposed Imperial Institute is to enable inquirers at home to obtain as exact and vivid a knowledge as possible about any particular place in the Colonies or in India. It has already been proposed that information should be made accessible concerning agriculture, mines, manufactures, and commerce; but I have not as yet read a single word on the topics which are usually of most interest to persons intending to choose a new home, or to their English friends—namely, the sort of people they will have to live among, and the kind of country in which they will have to live. These are precisely the topics of two popular branches of science, anthropology and geography, using these words in their liberal sense; and I should be glad of an opportunity of briefly showing how easily and effectively they might be dealt with.

If I myself had a dear friend about to go to some place in the Colonies or India, I should greatly prize the existence of an institute where I could readily obtain all the geographical and anthropological information that was procurable about that place. I can imagine a library and map room devoted to the purpose whose contents were well catalogued and kept up to the most recent date, from which all old material that had no distinct historical value was periodically weeded out, and which was presided over by a zealous, intelligent, and well-informed librarian. What I should expect to find in the library would be—

1. Maps and plans, especially the local ones published in the colonies, kept in drawers and portfolios easy of access.
2. Local illustrations in large number and variety, also in drawers and portfolios. Some few of the more important of these, correct up to date, might be suspended, like the pictures of the great colonial cities in the vestibule of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition.
3. Illustrations of everyday life of the people, their dwellings—places of public resort, conveyances, cattle stations, diggings, and so forth—everything, in short, that is sure to impress itself on the eye of a traveller and to contribute to his notion of the general aspect of the place. Now that photography is so widely practised by amateurs as well as by professionals, there is no reason why the Colonies and India should not be well and profusely illustrated in that way, regard being paid to effectiveness of representation rather than to artistic merit. I wish to lay much stress on the value of this part of the proposed collection.
4. The shelves of the library would contain geographical works and be especially complete in such local ones as are with difficulty procurable in England. Among these are official publications of the colony that have distinct geographical bearings.

A very valuable addition under this and the four following heads would consist of cuttings from local newspapers, pasted and bound, and their subjects catalogued. Few books give so vivid an insight into the ways of a country as is often to be obtained from newspaper paragraphs. I look to these, as I do to photographs, as of very considerable importance to any collection of the kind now in view.

5. Vital statistics in the widest sense concerning emigrants from Great Britain, consisting of whatever may be compiled in the colonies or elsewhere relating to their diseases and death rates, severally of the old and young, and of various classes. Here, as I have just said, newspaper cuttings would be of great interest and value.
6. Similarly as regards the children of emigrants born in the colony, also their physical and mental peculiarities so far as any may have been observed.
7. Similarly as regards persons of foreign race living in the same country, and those of mixed races.
8. The customs and traditional opinions, social and religious, of persons of foreign or mixed race, and all that helps to explain to an Englishman the character and strength of their prejudices and ways of thought, and how he may succeed in living amicably with them, and in treating them intelligently and sympathetically.
9. A small and well-selected exhibition of the implements used in past times in ceremonies, war, journeyings, decoration, &c.; as much and no more of these than is necessary to explain the present condition of the people by their past history.

There is one and only one detail of primary importance on which it is necessary here to speak—namely, whether what I have described should be collected by each colony for its sole use in its own court, or whether there should be a single central collection. There are good reasons for having to a great extent both sorts of collection. The Agents for the individual colonies would think primarily of pushing their several interests, and their minds would be chiefly occupied with industrial questions and be set upon attracting immigrants. Geography and anthropology would therefore receive but a secondary amount of attention, and might be greatly neglected. The Agents, feeling it their duty to press the merits of their colonies, would naturally give prominence to favourable *data* and keep the unfavourable ones in the background, both out of sight and mind, though more direct information is to be had through the several courts from persons acquainted with the country than could be given by the librarian of any one library common to all the colonies. On the other hand, a librarian charged with the primary duty of attending to geography and anthropology would keep his collections in their true proportions and have them well catalogued on a uniform principle. He would learn what colonies could supply without much difficulty, and he would stimulate those who were sluggish in their geographical and anthropological contributions by pointing out what more advanced colonies were actually doing. Again, a central library would consolidate much scattered work, because a great deal of general information published primarily in respect to one colony is applicable to its neighbours. Such books would stand on the same shelves in a central library, but would be dispersed among those of the various courts. There is, therefore, as it seems to me, good reason to promote a central library, as well as more diffuse and probably much less well-ordered collections in the several courts.

I shall abstain from doing more than alluding to what I am really the most interested in—namely, the scientific value of the collections I have in view. They might not immediately bear fruit, but capable anthropological inquirers would devote themselves from time to time to questions that interested them, and answers could be gathered from these collections only. The history of science shows that we cannot foretell when such inquiries will lead to a useful result, and still less what the character of that result will be, but it testifies to the certainty of broad generalizations being made from time to time from such a grand store of material which would largely influence the actions of men. We may at least rest assured that these collections would give us a far more exact knowledge than we now have of the variety and qualities of the human stock, consisting of ourselves and our fellow-subjects who inhabit the possessions of the British Empire.

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