



Hugh's News

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The Friends of Hugh Miller

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Editorial note: Special edition of Hugh's News highlighting extensive new research on Miller and Race

By Lara Reid, Editor

I am certain that members will appreciate it has been a challenging time here at FOHM HQ since our secretary and founder, Martin Gostwick, passed away suddenly in July 2021. I'm sure members will forgive the rather 'unusual' scenario in which we find ourselves in producing *Hugh's News*, in that we are following issue 49 (our memorial issue to Martin) with another special edition for issue 50. It is vital to us as an organisation that we give prime importance to the issue of Miller and Race, which was first brought to members' attention last year in the winter 2020 issue of *Hugh's News* (issue 46), with an article by Martin Gostwick.

As many of you will be aware, this initial article has been followed up with an extensive, detailed and enlightening study by Professor Ralph O'Connor of the University of Aberdeen, which the Friends committee commissioned and have fully endorsed. The second part of Prof O'Connor's research is presented here, and the committee should like to extend their sincerest thanks to Prof O'Connor for the considerable time and efforts he has put into this matter. Please note, Prof O'Connor has made minor revisions to the first article he wrote (*Hugh's News* issue 48), primarily to bring his phrasing and terminology more into line with the National Trust for Scotland's guidance on historical race issues. The revised first essay can be found in *Hugh's News* issue 48 on our website, and printed copies of both HN48 and HN50 are available on request from the editor (editor@thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk).

I believe Prof O'Connor's introduction for this second essay covers many details of the background to this work, so I will not repeat these here. I should like to acknowledge that Martin had accepted certain errors in his original article, and had planned to make changes to his piece – with his death, sadly, we will never know what he would have made of Prof O'Connor's conclusions. We are certain that he would have welcomed this study with his usual warmth, interest, and enthusiasm. Certainly, there is much here that will be of great interest not just to Friends members, but to the wider public as well. This is a matter of great importance, and we welcome the intelligent debate that has been sparked by examining Miller's writings and his views on race in great detail. Prof O'Connor welcomes feedback or comments on his research, and is contactable via his details overleaf.

***Festive greetings for Christmas and
the New Year to all our Members***

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A brief update from the Friends of Hugh Miller committee: We held our AGM online on Thursday 30th September 2021, which was well-attended. The Opening Ceremony for Eliza's Path and memorial service to Martin was highly successful on Sunday 12th September 2021. We will present full details of our revised committee's roles and the Eliza's Path Opening and FOHM memorial to Martin in the next issue of Hugh's News. The third Trewin lecture, held online on 23rd September 2021 was a terrific success – we were all thoroughly engaged and entertained by Prof Michael J. Benton's lecture on dinosaur colours. The lecture has been recorded and will be made available on our website for interested parties.

I appreciate that some members will be awaiting publication of articles that were submitted to Martin for *Hugh's News* in the spring and early summer of 2021. I should like to apologise for the delay in bringing these pieces to publication – perhaps particularly the new creative writing pieces that Martin had intended to include. I have these files and others lined up for a 'return to normal' in early 2022: issue 51 will also bring with it some exciting updates on our future plans for the Friends of Hugh Miller.

With this hopeful note, all that remains is for me to extend our warmest wishes to all members for a peaceful and healthy festive season, and here's to 2022 and all that it brings.



Above: The entrance to Eliza's Path
Below, L to R: Frieda Gostwick, Bob Davidson, Stephanie Kulesza, Sue Rider-Busby at the socially-distanced Opening Ceremony .



HUGH MILLER: RACIST OR ANTI-RACIST? Part 2: scientific racism and the scale of civilization

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Introduction

In my previous essay, I showed that Hugh Miller's writings of the 1840s present a consistently anti-racist outlook on human variety, and that he repeatedly rejected the concept of racial inferiority that underpinned American slavery and the Highland Clearances. Neither Miller's abolitionism nor his opposition to the Clearances softened in the 1850s. As I have shown, his abolitionism became more radical.

Abolitionists were, however, not immune to universal mid-nineteenth-century European and American prejudices about traditional or extra-modern societies. This aspect of abolitionism can come as a shock to readers accustomed to a heroes-and-villains narrative of its history. In some cases these prejudices included outright racism. Several abolitionists believed, like many supporters of slavery, that Black people had inherently inferior mental capacities to white Europeans and should not expect social equality with them. Some naturalists supported these views with dubious data about skull geometry. This scientific racism was rapidly becoming part of mainstream ethnology and anthropology when Miller was editor of the *Witness*, and Miller deplored how it was being used in the United States to support slavery. Miller was not an ethnologist: his views were substantially borrowed from others. He nevertheless used his position as a public intellectual to combat the new scientific racism.

The parallels between Miller and the most famous anti-racist campaigner of his generation, the formerly enslaved African-American Frederick Douglass (c. 1817-1895), continue here. Douglass (Fig. 1) also lectured on ethnology in order to attack scientific racism.¹ Both men adopted several core aspects of the ethnology of the Bristol evangelical abolitionist and anatomist, James Cowles Prichard (1786-1848), as seen in his work from the 1830s and 1840s. Prichard (Fig. 2) was a pre-eminent ethnological authority in the 1830s, but by the 1850s his star was waning as scientific racism gained ground. Miller and Douglass remained firmly in the old guard, and Prichard was Miller's major ethnological source. All ethnologists in the 1850s divided humans into physically distinct 'races'. But Prichard's school also held that racial differences were, morally and intellectually speaking, superficial. They believed that all humans, whatever their colour or state of civilization, shared the same nature, range of mental capacities, and potential for achievement.² This was an anti-racist position, despite being often accompanied by Eurocentric prejudices about other peoples' appearances and lifeways.



Fig. 1: Frederick Douglass in 1855. Engraving by J. C. Buttre, frontispiece to Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*.



Fig. 2: Ethnologist James Cowles Prichard. Undated, unsigned engraving.

I have already shown how Miller promoted this anti-racist view in the 1840s, for instance in his reflections on the Parsi girl Buchubai Hormazdji. In the 1850s, too, Miller challenged the view that races' capacities were fixed and unequal, condemned the growing assumption that different races were different species, and reinforced the evangelical view that all humans were descended from the same created pair – but also that Christianity was better than Zoroastrianism. Like most conservative naturalists and scholars of his time, he saw humanity's origins as Asiatic, not European, located in the Caucasus region or in Central Asia.³

1 Frederick Douglass, *The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered* (Rochester: n.p., 1854).

2 On Prichard's place in nineteenth-century ethnology, see Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960* (London, 1982), pp. 10-19, 31-44; John P. Jackson Jr. and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, 2006), pp. 35-9; and especially Franziska A. Augstein, 'James C. Prichard's Views of Mankind: An Anthropologist between the Enlightenment and the Victorian Age', unpublished PhD dissertation (University College London, 1996), <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1317637/> (accessed 10 November 2021). This last study has been revised as H. F. Augstein, *James Cowles Prichard's Anthropology: Remaking the Science of Man in Early Nineteenth Century Britain* (Amsterdam, 1999).

3 This was one area where Miller departed from Prichard's view. For background, see H. F. Augstein, 'From the Land of the Bible to the Caucasus and Beyond: The Shifting Ideas of the Geographical Origin of Humankind', in *Race, Science, and Medicine, 1700-1960*, ed. by Bernard Harris and Waltraud Ernst (London, 1999), pp. 58-79.

It is the accompanying prejudices that make Victorian anti-racist ethnology so difficult for today's readers. These are especially glaring in chapter 6 of Miller's last completed book *The Testimony of the Rocks* (1857). It and chapter 5 were based on a lecture given to the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution on 5 December 1851 (not in 1855 as has often been claimed).⁴ Here Miller repeats disparaging stereotypes about various peoples that we call 'traditional' or 'extra-modern', but Victorians called 'uncivilized', 'savage' or (for evolutionists) 'primitive'. In what the historian John Hedley Brooke has called 'one of Miller's least endearing arguments', Miller follows the most liberal scientific authorities of his day in depicting Australian Aborigines, the Yaghan of Tierra del Fuego, unspecified 'negro tribes', the Sámi of northern Scandinavia and other peoples as physically deficient compared to the various 'Caucasian' peoples (a term that included Jewish, Arabian, Indian, Romany and Central Asian as well as most European peoples).⁵ As the late Martin Gostwick pointed out, these descriptions make disturbing reading today.⁶ The tone is one of pity rather than (as so often in Victorian ethnology) moralizing condemnation or scorn; but this does not make Miller's assessment any more palatable for us.

Miller argued that these peoples' physiques had deteriorated, not through innate racial differences, but through what he called 'degradation' – in our terms, deprivation – caused by adverse environmental and social conditions repeating down the generations.⁷ His view, shared by Douglass, was a variant on the common ethnological assumption that people living in socio-politically simpler societies were more exposed to violence and hardship. This, in consequence, impaired the growth of sympathies beyond one's immediate kin or band, as well as 'high' culture and certain perceived refinements of physical appearance. By contrast, in this view, the development and maintenance of complex socio-political structures ('civilization') had protected many members of the Caucasian races from such deprivation, so that as a rule they were physically in better shape, closer to the originally created human form.⁸

In this view, differences in civility and achievement were caused, not by innate racial differences, but by unequal external conditions and induced habits repeating over the generations. This was the closest that Miller came to accepting a theory of evolution, accepting variation within the bounds of a single species as was conventional in early nineteenth-century thinking on heredity.⁹ Citing various 'perished tribes' across the colonial world, Miller predicted that several of these peoples were so deprived that they stood little chance of surviving as distinct races when competing for territory with Caucasian colonists.¹⁰

Gostwick was right to point out that many of Miller's views in this passage are unacceptable today, just as we would not accept Miller's views today on a number of other social, political, scientific and religious issues. He was a man of his time. Being a man of his time does not, in itself, let Miller off the hook. But I will argue here that Miller's views on ethnology were not racist, but anti-racist. Seen in the context of the debates in which he was intervening, even his most offensive remarks were pitted *against* the racism that was becoming so widespread around mid-century. If we compare Miller with other eminent Victorians of abolitionist convictions – Dickens, Trollope, Huxley, even Darwin – it is Miller who comes out displaying the more consistent belief in the intellectual and moral equality of all peoples, regardless of their state of civilization.

Rather than marking Miller on an ethical score-sheet, this essay attempts to explain why he wrote what he did, especially in *Testimony*. This is no simple business, as I discovered earlier this year when I completed a first draft and found that I had accidentally written a book. Mid-Victorian racial attitudes were diverse, complex and riddled with inconsistencies both apparent and real. They were seriously held in their own time, though, and must be understood if Miller's position in this *mêlée* can become intelligible to us. Hence the need for the full story. For now, this essay offers a summary view.

It was Martin Gostwick who first invited me to submit this two-part study to *Hugh's News*. With characteristic

4 This dating, based on newspaper reports of Miller's lectures from 1851 and 1852, is documented in my longer study mentioned below.

5 Hugh Miller, *The Testimony of the Rocks; or, Geology in Its Bearings on the Two Theologies, Natural and Revealed* (Edinburgh, 1857), pp. 253-4; John Hedley Brooke, 'Like Minds: The God of Hugh Miller', in *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Nineteenth-Century Science*, ed. by Michael Shortland (Oxford, 1996), pp. 171-86 (p. 177).

6 Martin Gostwick, 'Degraded Races, Hopelessly Lost', *Hugh's News*, 46 (November 2020), 11-14.

7 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 255-8.

8 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 250-2. Compare James Cowles Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, 3rd ed., 5 vols (London, 1836-47); Mary Somerville, *Physical Geography*, 2 vols (London, 1848), vol. 2, p. 259.

9 This baseline of hereditarian thinking must not be confused with Lamarck's hypothesis that such variation could generate new *species*. See Bill Jenkins, 'Phrenology, Heredity and Progress in George Combe's *Constitution of Man*', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 48 (2015), 455-73.

10 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 252, 254-5.

intellectual generosity, he warmly encouraged me to develop views directly at odds with his own.¹¹ This study began as a dialogue with Martin; his input, among others', has helped me to adjust my own position. In July 2021, in the last message I received from Martin before his death, he told me that he looked forward to receiving the final text, and that he expected to revise some of his own views in response. But in this, as in so much else, the thread was cut short too soon. I dedicate this essay to Martin's memory.

Racism, ethnocentrism and paternalism

This essay follows the still-dominant academic and generalist understanding of what 'racism' is. In this view, the belief that people should be grouped into 'races' (as seen in government census forms) is not in itself racist, although the word is sometimes unhelpfully used in that sense. Most academics and social commentators define racism as the assumption that certain races are *inferior* to others, along with race-based hatred of or discrimination against people (conscious, unconscious or systemic). Assuming that core aspects of one's own culture and value-system are better than another's is not necessarily racist: this is ethnocentrism. But it is racist to assume that someone's skin colour or biological descent might prevent them (permanently or in the long term) from attaining the same position in the scale of civilization that members of one's own race can attain.¹² For a racist, a person's racial identity is assumed to impose natural or divinely ordained limits on their intellectual, moral or cultural capacities.¹³ To quote the preeminent recent historian of racism, George Fredrickson:

It is when differences that might otherwise be considered ethnocultural are regarded as innate, indelible, and unchangeable that a racist attitude or ideology can be said to exist. It finds its clearest expression when the kind of ethnic differences that are firmly rooted in language, customs, and kinship are overridden in the name of an imagined collectivity based on pigmentation, as in white supremacy, or on a linguistically based myth of remote descent from a superior race, as in Aryanism. Racism ... directly sustains or proposes to establish a racial order, a permanent group hierarchy that is believed to reflect the laws of nature or the decrees of God.¹⁴

I have underlined the key phrases (emphasis on 'racial order' is original). The last sentence is particularly appropriate to this study, deeply interested as Miller was in 'the laws of nature' and 'the decrees of God'.

Dictionary definitions of racism all agree that a racist consciously or unconsciously treats racial differences as determining important aspects of human intellectual capacities, social status and/or rights. The *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* defines racism as 'belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race or races over others, usually with the implication of a right to be dominant', as well as 'discriminatory treatment based on such a belief' and 'hatred, rivalry or bad feeling between races'.¹⁵ Merriam-Webster and the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* offer similar definitions.¹⁶

Miller rejected the idea of a fixed racial hierarchy. I have already shown how, in his campaign against the Highland Clearances, he defended the Gaelic 'Celts' against lairds' accusations of racially innate laziness, viewed the intellects of Indian Brahmins as equal to that of Scottish Enlightenment luminaries, and asserted that young Buchubai was every bit as bright as her Scottish contemporaries. A few more examples will further document his anti-racist views.

In 1840, Miller commented that peer pressure, in areas where religious observance was undervalued, turned many a civilized Scottish emigrant into 'a vigorous half-savage'. For Miller, this 'half-savage spirit' was most visible in American lynch mobs and 'their intense and surely irrational hatred of the black race'.¹⁷ Elsewhere he singles out racial segregation in American churches. He mentions an eminent Christian convert in the New Testament (Acts 8), the Black African eunuch who was treasurer to the Queen of 'Ethiopia':

11 Besides Martin, I also wish to thank David Alston, Diarmid Finnegan, Piers Hemy, Sidney Johnston, Clémence O'Connor, Jennifer Neville, Alix Powers-Jones, Larissa Reid, James A. Secord and especially Michael A. Taylor for their valuable feedback and assistance, and the staff of the Sir Duncan Rice Library, University of Aberdeen, for their support. I am grateful to the Friends of Hugh Miller Committee for their patience and encouragement during the drafting of this pair of articles. Any mistakes or overstatements are my responsibility and I would be grateful to be informed of these.

12 Jackson and Weidman, *Race*, p. xiv. To grasp this distinction means abandoning the idea that 'ethnicity' is just a politically correct term for 'race'. An ethnicity can be adopted; a race cannot.

13 I refer here to racist *views* specifically, because that is the subject of this investigation.

14 George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 2015), pp. 5-6.

15 *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary*, online edition, s.v. 'racism', <https://chambers.co.uk/> (accessed 6 September 2021).

16 Merriam-Webster, online edition, s.v. 'racism', <https://www.merriam-webster.com/> (accessed 6 September 2021); Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 2016), s.v. 'racism'.

17 [Hugh Miller], 'Presbyterians in the Colonies', *Witness*, 4 April 1840, p. 3.

Were the Ethiop[i]an eunuch to approach the communion table in one of the Voluntary Churches of the southern or middle States, all regard for the Christian would be sunk in an unnatural and surely most illiberal detestation of the Ethiopian, and his very presence would be denounced as an insult.¹⁸

For Miller in both articles, anti-Black racism was a sign of moral degradation.

A more complex example is provided by Miller's account of one of his few personal encounters with a non-white individual: the Native American (Ojibwa) chief and Methodist missionary, Kahkewaquonaby (1802-1856), otherwise known as the Reverend Peter Jones. In 1845 Miller attended a talk given by Kahkewaquonaby requesting his audiences' support for his intention to introduce schools for practical arts into his part of Canada, introducing the benefits of settled life to his people. Kahkewaquonaby, a practised diplomat and public speaker, knew how to turn British fascination with the exotic to his own purposes. In the calotype by Hill and Adamson taken around this time (Fig. 3) – the earliest surviving photograph of a Native American – he appears in full feather; his Ojibwa name means Holy Feathers.



Fig. 3: Kahkewaquonaby (Rev. Peter Jones) during his 1845 visit to Scotland. Calotype by Hill and Adamson (National Galleries Scotland).

removed. Quite the reverse: his identification of styles of reasoning different from those of his own culture, but no less intellectually valid, actually pulls away from ethnocentrism. In a strikingly modern way, he is identifying two different, equally valid pathways to truth.

Miller's article about Kahkewaquonaby exemplifies his attitude towards peoples that he saw as existing in less civilized conditions. He did not see them as inferior. But he agreed with Kahkewaquonaby that nomadic ways were less conducive to human flourishing than a settled Victorian work ethic would be:

To Miller, fascinated by 'the various forms which the human intellect has taken ... amongst the different races of mankind', Kahkewaquonaby's 'Indian cast of ... mind' was no less interesting than his projects. Eurocentric prejudices about rational, articulate Westerners versus instinctive, intuitive non-Westerners are visible in Miller's account;¹⁹ but so, too, is a refusal to see that dichotomy in terms of superior versus inferior. The intuitive approach proves more than equal to the rationalizing approach:

he quietly reaches, by the intuitions of the soul, what we, strong-lunged, tough-sinewed Europeans, scorn to reach in any other way than by elaborate and exhaustive ratiocination. He follows nature's path, contentedly and confidently, through forest and prairie; we must bore, and blast, and tunnel, pile up arches and bridges like so many Titans, before we can get a road worthy of our travelling. Yet, after all, our Indian friend is apparently quite our equal in the general result of his notions and principles; and in his mind they take, if a less articulate, yet perhaps a more sublime and winning form than in ours, being with him the utterance of his spontaneous inner emotions, not, as with us too often, a sort of opaque slimy residuum, as if obtained by mere processes of chemical analysis.²⁰

For Miller, racial differences do not affect the fundamental intellectual equality of all human beings once external obstacles, such as false religions, are removed.

18 [Hugh Miller], 'The Christian Reformer', *Witness*, 7 October 1840, p. 2.

19 See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

20 [Hugh Miller], 'Kahkewaquonaby, the North American Indian Missionary', *Witness*, 26 July 1845, p. 3, emphasis original.

Their wandering, unsettled habits,— their aversion, and even super-induced unfitness, for regular industry,— have been at once the greatest barrier to their improvement, and, in darker times, rendered them an easy and helpless prey for the aggressions and cruelties of the 'White Man'.

For Kahkewaquonaby, the very survival of his people was at stake:

as Mr Jones emphatically proclaims, ... the only means to raise them up from degradation as a people, and as a race to preserve them from extinction, is not merely to instruct them in letters, but further, to train them in the occupations and habits of settled industry.²¹

Written six years before Miller's *Testimony* lecture, this passage illustrates what Miller (and some members of the deprived peoples listed in *Testimony*) believed 'degradation' involved. Miller and Kahkewaquonaby clearly saw 'degradation' as a temporary state. There is no sense here of a lower state being innate to the racial group discussed. But if such peoples did not adopt modern ways, Kahkewaquonaby believed that they were at risk of extinction 'as a race'.

Miller reinforced Kahkewaquonaby's argument both here and in his discussion of racial extinction and missionary aid in *Testimony*. His account in *Testimony* comes across as more fatalistic, because there his purpose is to illustrate the evil consequences of deprivation rather than (as here) to promote a means of ameliorating it in one specific region. The frame of reference is the same; it is possible that Miller's discussion in *Testimony* was shaped by what Kahkewaquonaby had said so stirringly in 1845, as much as by the European ethnologists whose work Miller had only read. For Kahkewaquonaby, the risk of extinction was exacerbated by the disruptive and sometimes deadly effect of incoming white settlers, another point to which Miller would return in *Testimony*. Miller was no apologist for colonial abuses, presenting Kahkewaquonaby's scheme as a chance for his countryfolk to make some amends:

Britain,— Europe,— owe an old and heavy debt to the poor Indian, and there never seemed a fitter or more delightful opportunity than this to pay off some portion of it.²²

Miller, then, did not believe that there were inherently superior and inferior races. Nor did he believe that civilization was restricted to the 'Caucasian' race alone, as his discussions of China in *Testimony* show.²³ But, like all anti-racist commentators of his time, he did believe that civilization was a superior *state* to extra-modern life-ways: that settlement and land-cultivation were superior practices to nomadism, that civilization had significant health and social benefits, and that their absence was reflected in the physiques of the most deprived. Miller, like Kahkewaquonaby and Western missionaries such as David Livingstone, advocated the paternalistic goal of helping other peoples to become more civilized, especially through missionary endeavours.

Similar remarks reappear in an African context in a *Witness* article about Livingstone's travels published on the day of Miller's death in 1856 and probably written by Miller himself. Enslavement and exploitation by Europeans are here blamed for 'degrad[ing] the character' of Africa's inhabitants, and 'commerce and Christianity' are presented as a means of making 'some amends' to them 'for the long ages of oppression and wrong which have passed over them', so that the 'true negro family may take their place among the community of nations'. The article specifies that the Black Africans of the continent's interior, unlike 'the Africa we had pictured to ourselves', had 'singularly sound and vigorous constitutions' and were 'exceedingly civil and kind'. They had escaped the deprivation and oppression that Miller (like Livingstone and Douglass) believed had produced the stereotypical 'negro' physique described in *Testimony*, whose proofs he was correcting the day before the Livingstone article was printed. Far from being 'hopelessly lost' and separate from Caucasians, this 'true negro family' was about to rejoin the civilized world and the wider human family. Miller emphasizes this point by alluding to the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:32) when the father asks his elder son to welcome his long-lost brother:

When that time comes, well may fair Europe, taking her dark sister by the hand, bid her welcome in the words, 'This my sister was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.'²⁴

Tellingly, Miller alters the openly paternalistic 'thy brother' (which would position the speaker as the father) to the more egalitarian 'my sister'. All this looks impossibly naïve in light of the 'Scramble for Africa' that followed in Livingstone's wake, but that hindsight was not available in 1856.

21 [Miller], 'Kahkewaquonaby', emphasis original.

22 [Miller], 'Kahkewaquonaby'.

23 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 222-3 and 235-7 discussed below.

24 [Hugh Miller], 'Dr Livingstone', *Witness*, 24 December 1856, p. 2.

Miller believed that Christian conversion, the first step in the 'restoration' of any individual, could be almost immediate in its effect on individuals, however low a place they currently occupied in the scale of civilization, as illustrated by Kahkewaquonaby and by Buchubai's father in India: one leap from wildness to civility. Not for him the view held by some white American abolitionists, for example, that enslaved Black people had been so degraded by slavery that they were unfit for democratic citizenship and should be shipped off to one of the new free states in Africa.²⁵ Such a timidly gradualist view, for Miller, was uncomfortably close to the slaveholder who hypocritically asserted that those whom he had brutalized through slavery must remain enslaved, being no longer fit for freedom. Even if a man were 'in reality unfit for it', in Miller's view he must be freed nonetheless: 'set him free, and, as happened to the king of Babylon of old, the beast's heart will leave him, and the heart of the man return.'²⁶

The same view recurs in a brief *Witness* discussion of the Khoikhoi in southern Africa, one of the peoples listed as most deprived in *Testimony*. Khoikhoi communities were visited by George Schmidt's Moravian mission in the mid-eighteenth century. As Miller tells the story, within a few years conversion had transformed 'the dull incurious Hottentot', who had 'not yet learned to think', into a community – at least in the areas reached by Schmidt – of 'civilized men, trained by religion both to live and to think aright'.²⁷ These various accounts express Miller's consistently held view that barriers to individual improvement were temporary and caused by custom, not race.

Whatever we think of the assumptions underpinning Victorian missionary work, then, these assumptions were not inherently racist. Here again Fredrickson's distinctions are helpful. A religious 'bigot' condemns a belief rather than a person:

I would not therefore consider the sincere missionary, who may despise the beliefs and habits of the object of his or her ministrations, to be a racist. If a heathen can be redeemed through baptism ... we are in the presence of an attitude that often creates conflict and misery, but not one that should be labeled racist. It might be useful to have another term, such as 'culturalism', to describe an inability or unwillingness to tolerate cultural differences, but if assimilation were genuinely on offer, I would withhold the 'R' word.²⁸

The anti-racist assumption that all races were equally capable of cultivation had roots in religious revivalism (especially Evangelicalism) and Enlightenment assumptions about universal human nature. But it was not held by all of Miller's contemporaries. In scientific circles it was starting to look old-fashioned. As I will show, by holding to old-fashioned philosophical and theological assumptions Miller escaped the racism that was taking over Western ethnology in his time, although he did not fully escape the paternalism and ethnocentrism that were even more deeply ingrained in his culture.

The racial 'glass ceiling' for Miller's contemporaries

To explore Miller's attitude towards race, we need to know what the available hypotheses of racial origins were in Miller's day. He cannot be expected to have written with the benefit of today's awareness of the validity of extra-modern lifeways, post-1960s cultural and aesthetic relativism, or today's scepticism about the scientific validity of 'race' as a concept. What counts is what he did with the evidence available to him.

Miller was writing amid a profound change in the way Western science viewed race, pivoting around 1850.²⁹ In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most naturalists and philosophers saw racial differences as superficial compared with the unchanging essence of human nature. Many believed, with the later Prichard and his predecessor Blumenbach, that the same mental capacities were present in all races, but that physical diversity could be produced over time by adverse social and environmental factors (climate, diet, laws and customs).³⁰ Temperate and civilized regions were thought to produce the most beautiful human physiques, exemplified by Classical Greek statuary and the inhabitants of Georgia. However, these naturalists did not invoke any inbuilt mental disparity. For them, the highest intellectual attainment (judged by a white Western yardstick, of course) was possible for members of any race who received appropriate cultivation. Blumenbach became the first known individual to collect a library of books by Black authors, to support claims that they were Caucasians' intellectual

25 David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York, 2014), pp. 144-92.

26 [Hugh Miller], 'Moderatism Popular, – Where, and Why', *Witness*, 6 June 1840, p. 2.

27 [Hugh Miller], 'Dr Burns' Report', *Witness*, 18 September 1844, p. 2. The phrase 'not yet learned to think' is from [Hugh Miller], 'Dr Duff versus Mr Scott', *Witness*, 2 October 1844, p. 2.

28 Fredrickson, *Racism*, pp. 6-7.

29 Stepan, *Idea of Race*; Jackson and Weidman, *Race*.

30 Prichard's views only gradually became aligned with Blumenbach's (Augstein, 'James C. Prichard's Views', pp. 244-82).

equals.³¹ This view of race repudiated the idea of a racial hierarchy.³²

By mid-century, however, doubts had been sown for many in the scientific community by several factors, including a succession of failed social experiments in attempting to impose British forms of civility on Aboriginal Australians (who did not see why they should give up their nomadic ways), desperate defences of slavery in North America and France, and white anxieties about living alongside Black populations emancipated from slavery.³³ Old Enlightenment assumptions of human equality, easily affirmed in the abstract, proved no match for the prejudices that many white people felt towards those of another race when faced with the prospect of mixing with them.

In this context, racial differences often took on disproportionate significance. As the anatomist Robert Knox put it in 1850, 'Race is everything'.³⁴ By mid-century many intellectuals dismissed Enlightenment convictions about the universality of human capabilities as wishy-washy liberal thinking. It became desirable to find, or concoct, scientific support for the idea that racial differences were insurmountable and biologically innate, imposing hard limits on mental capacity and thus on an individual's place in the social order. This is what I call the racial glass ceiling. In place of the older hierarchy of states of civilization, where only limitations of opportunity or the harsh reality of population replacement prevented members of any race from rising or falling (as in Prichard's and Miller's view), came the racist view of a fixed hierarchy of races in which some races were seen as inherently inferior to others.

There were various ways of envisaging the racial glass ceiling, all of which Miller rejected. According to one biblically based view, Black people were descendants of either Adam's son Cain or Ham's son Canaan, divinely cursed in the book of Genesis. Canaan's descendants are condemned to perpetual servitude; other commentators added dark skin as a sign of divinely authorized inferiority. This idea was frequently used to defend Black slavery.³⁵ It was not widely held by most naturalists, but the Bible still dominated discussions of human origins among the educated public, and Miller took Genesis seriously. But with his abolitionist convictions and his Enlightenment aversion for multiplying miracles (as seen in his other interpretations of Genesis),³⁶ he rejected the divine curse hypothesis. Instead, he suggested in 1850 that the differences between 'negroid' and 'Caucasian' varieties of human (such as skin colour) could have arisen naturally within the traditional 6000-year timescale of human history, if Adam and Eve had themselves been of 'mingled negroid and Caucasian' appearance. This idea was prompted by depictions of Egyptians in a recent historical painting.³⁷

Still, this was mere speculation. By 1851, when he delivered his *Testimony* lecture, his study of Prichard had furnished him with historical evidence for similarly dramatic physical changes occurring naturally within only two centuries (in Ireland), enabling him to revert to the traditional view that the first humans resembled the Caucasian human form, the 'Caucasian hypothesis'. The new evidence (discussed below) showed that the differences between Black and Caucasian physiques (a) posed no challenge to the biblical timescale of human history, and (b) did not need explaining away via a divine curse or speculation about 'mingled' human origins.³⁸

Miller's change of mind reflects the prejudiced standards of human beauty then universally held by educated Europeans, but it would be a mistake to see it as evidence that Miller's once-liberal views hardened in a racist direction later in life.³⁹ His *Testimony* lecture was delivered in 1851, the same period as his most radical protests against slavery and scientific racism: this is not a late aberration. The Caucasian hypothesis was consistent with longstanding Judaeo-Christian and Muslim assumptions that humanity had originated in Central Asia and that Paradise had been in the Near East, where some of the rivers named in the Genesis creation-account had their sources. Enlightenment philological and geographical scholarship had reinforced these assumptions. The Cau-

31 Richard Newman, 'Collectors of African American Books', in *Africana*, 2nd ed., ed. by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 5 vols (Oxford, 2005), vol. 3, pp. 149-51, at p. 150.

32 On this point, see Nicolaas A. Rupke, 'The Origins of Scientific Racism and Huxley's Rule', in *Johann Friedrich Blumenbach: Race and Natural History, 1750-1850*, ed. by Nicolaas A. Rupke (London, 2019), pp. 233-47.

33 Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, pp. 125-35; Kay Anderson and Colin Perrin, 'How Race Became Everything: Australia and Polygenism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31 (2008), 962-90; Davis, *Problem of Slavery*.

34 Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (Philadelphia, 1850), p. 7.

35 Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 33-5 and 39-40; Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors*, pp. 181-2.

36 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 267-422.

37 [Hugh Miller], 'Unity of the Human Races', *Witness*, 13 July 1850, reprinted in his *Essays*, ed. Peter Bayne, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh, 1869), pp. 387-97, at p. 396. Prichard had proposed a fully Black origin for humankind, but by the late 1830s (in editions of his work read by Miller) he had retreated from this claim to some extent.

38 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 252, 256-7. This explains the 'curious shift' mentioned by Brooke, 'Like Minds', p. 177.

39 Martin Gostwick, pers. comm. 2021.

casian hypothesis was not inherently racist: as Hannah Augstein has pointed out, it lent itself to both racist and anti-racist interpretations of Europeans' place in nature.⁴⁰ Nor was the hypothesis of an intermediate racial profile for Adam and Eve inherently liberal: at least one naturalist favoured it while still seeing Black people as inferior and fit for slavery.⁴¹

A more scientifically flavoured version of the racial glass ceiling informed early evolutionary thinking, especially the hypothesis of species transmutation or 'development'. In this view, humans had evolved from monkeys or apes, and the Caucasian type of human had moved further than so-called 'primitive' races along this line of biological improvement. The best-known version of this hypothesis at mid-century was the anonymous *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), written by the Edinburgh journalist Robert Chambers. Inspired by German Romantic anatomy, Chambers saw non-Caucasian races as arrested stages of development towards a human ideal. In a Caucasian embryo, the brain 'passes through the characters in which it appears, in the Negro, Malay, American, and Mongolian nations, and finally is Caucasian':

The leading characters ... of the various races of mankind, are simply representations of particular stages in the development of the highest or Caucasian type. *The Negro exhibits permanently the imperfect brain, projecting lower jaw, and slender bent limbs, of a Caucasian child, some considerable time before the period of its birth. The aboriginal American represents the same child nearer birth. The Mongolian is an arrested infant newly born*⁴²

In Chambers's view, no normal members of those races could expect to rise to the heights of Caucasian civilization: 'all nations are not alike in mental organization', so some would always remain behind others even if development continued among them all.⁴³

This focus on the brain reflects Chambers's interest in phrenology, a science of the mind that drew scorn from Miller but won much admiration in this period. For phrenologists, differently shaped human heads indicated different kinds of mental development. Here the key figure was another Edinburgh polymath, George Combe. Phrenology could be used in egalitarian vein to argue that appropriate mental cultivation could produce different skull configurations. But in the 1830s Combe supported a permanent racial hierarchy, stating that in the 'Negro' and the 'native American', 'the brain is inferior in size, particularly in the moral and intellectual regions, to that of the Anglo-Saxon race, and hence the foundation of the natural superiority of the latter over both'.⁴⁴ Combe's focus on skull shape and average brain size as an index of innate racial inequality was adopted with gusto in antebellum America, most influentially in Samuel Morton's *Crania Americana* (1839), backed up via a phrenological appendix by Combe.

Morton's work became a standard reference-point in European and American ethnology.⁴⁵ And after Miller's death, the general idea that 'primitive' races had inferior mental capacities and were closer to humanity's animal origins would become far too useful as an argument for human evolution to be wholeheartedly abandoned even by passionate abolitionists like Darwin. His younger friends John Lubbock and Thomas Huxley, abolitionists but not egalitarians, fully endorsed the racial glass ceiling. Lubbock declared in 1865 that 'savages' were 'inferior morally as well as in other respects, to the more civilised races'.⁴⁶ That same year, Huxley welcomed the abolition of American slavery but reiterated the new racist mantra:

*no rational man ... believes that the average negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the average white man it is simply incredible that, when ... our prognathous relative has a fair field and no favour, as well as no oppressor, he will be able to complete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed rival*⁴⁷

40 Augstein, 'From the Land of the Bible', pp. 72-4.

41 John Bachman, *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race Examined on the Principles of Science* (Charleston, 1850), p. 209.

42 [Robert Chambers], *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation and Other Evolutionary Writings*, ed. by James A. Secord (Chicago, 1994), p. 307 (emphasis original).

43 [Chambers], *Vestiges*, p. 320. As James A. Secord has pointed out to me (pers. comm. October 2021), Chambers's views on the origins of racial difference changed over time, but his views as quoted here remain constant in 1840s editions of *Vestiges* (up to the publication of Miller's response, *Foot-Prints of the Creator*, in 1849).

44 George Combe, *Notes on the United States of North America during a Phrenological Visit in 1838-9-40*, 2 vols (Philadelphia, 1841), vol. 1, p. 260.

45 On Morton and his influence, see Gould, *Mismeasure of Man*; Desmond and Moore, *Darwin's Sacred Cause*, pp. 161-6.

46 John Lubbock, *Pre-Historic Times, as Illustrated by Ancient Remains, and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages* (London, 1865), p. 465.

47 Thomas Henry Huxley, 'Emancipation – Black and White' [1865], in his *Lay Sermons, Addresses, and Reviews*, new ed. (London, 1880), p. 20. On Huxley's position, see Rupke, 'Origins'.

Progress was possible, but not beyond a certain point. This is a long way from the colour-blind self-help doctrine preached by Miller and Douglass.

The major alternative model for the racial glass ceiling in Miller's day was polygenism or pluralism. Polygenists held that, in the distant past, God had formed several distinct human races with unequal intellectual capacities, designing some for a lower station in society than white Europeans. Early exponents included the Scottish Enlightenment luminary Henry Home, Lord Kames (attacked by Miller in an 1842 editorial, using Robert Candlish's Genesis commentary to reassert monogenism).⁴⁸ Its most eminent advocate around mid-century was the Swiss naturalist Louis Agassiz (1807-1873). From 1846 onwards, enjoying a reputation as America's greatest naturalist (at Harvard), Agassiz unfolded a panorama of life created over millions of years in separate 'centres of creation' in a progressive sequence, culminating in humans. Agassiz held that different human races, too, had been separately created in geographically distinct 'centres' to occupy divinely allotted positions on a fixed hierarchy. He saw intellect as unevenly distributed among 'the inferior races' and 'harmoniously combined in the white race', 'man in his highest development'. Because these disparities were 'introduced into the human race by the Creator himself', it would be 'mock-philanthropy and mock-philosophy to assume that all races have the same abilities ... and ... are entitled to the same position in human society'. Philanthropic efforts at civilizing the inherently uncivilized were pointless.⁴⁹ For Agassiz, racial inequality was ordained by God, so racial discrimination was natural and right.⁵⁰

Despite his professed abolitionism, Agassiz's ideas clearly appealed to slaveholders and segregationists. In the 1850s he collaborated with apologists for slavery such as the ethnologist Josiah Nott to disseminate his message of God-given racial inequality, lecturing on 'the colored races' to slaveholder audiences in Nott's home town Mobile, Alabama.⁵¹ One result of Agassiz's collaboration with Nott and another white-supremacist ethnologist, George Gliddon, was a pair of weighty tomes designed to supplant Prichard's work in surveying human variety around the world. Their bestselling *Types of Mankind* (1854) and *Indigenous Races of the Earth* (1857) gained scientific kudos by including textual and pictorial contributions by Agassiz, pushing these books into the forefront of ethnological debate. Agassiz's ethnographic essay in *Types of Mankind*, accompanied by a 'Tableau' depicting different races, endorsed the book's claim that differences between some human races were greater than those between different species of ape. The highest race was represented by a profile of Cuvier: widely seen as Cuvier's heir, Agassiz could hardly include his own head. His 'Tableau' was adapted in *Indigenous Races* (Fig. 4), depicting 54 typical heads (this time naming Cuvier) alongside Agassiz's biogeographical data, claiming to prove 'the existence of superior and inferior races'.⁵²

Nott and Gliddon's descriptions of races' mental abilities filled in the details implicit in Agassiz's assertion that God had created the races unequal. For example, in Nott's view God had intended that some races 'are born to rule, and others to be ruled', and that the Caucasian races 'have in all ages been the rulers'.⁵³ Nott followed the long-established opinion that the 'Caucasian' race was 'the true Adamic type', but in a very different sense from Miller. For Miller, as I will show in more detail below, all humans were descended from Adam and had the same innate capacities, although some had since fallen into deprivation. Among those groups it was always possible to recover individuals, and if circumstances enabled it, whole races too. For Nott, only the Caucasian races ('the last, and most perfect work of the Almighty') were descended from Adam. The others had not fallen but were inherently 'inferior', created before Adam with lower capacities in successive 'regular gradations'. Therefore, attempting 'to elevate the intellectual condition of the dark, to that of the fair races' was 'warring against the immutable laws of Nature'.⁵⁴

So distinct were these races, according to Nott and Gliddon, that mixed-race intermarriage was another crime against nature, risking deterioration for 'the superior race' by 'intermixture with the inferior' and risking human extinction if unchecked.⁵⁵ Horror of racial mixing would intensify among polygenists and evolutionists later in the century and would buttress Jim Crow legislation in the United States. It was totally alien to the monogenist ethnology of Prichard and his followers, including Miller. Miller, like Prichard, saw mixed-race marriage as biologically

48 [Hugh Miller], 'Dr Candlish's Work on Genesis', *Witness*, 10 December 1842, p. 2, mentioned in Brooke, 'Like Minds', p. 177.

49 [Louis] Agassiz, 'The Diversity of Origin of the Human Races', *Christian Examiner*, 49 (1850), 110-45, pp. 144, 134, 142 and 144-5..

50 Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 2nd ed. (London, 1997), pp. 71-82.

51 J. C. Nott and Geo. R. Gliddon, *Indigenous Races of the Earth; or, New Chapters of Ethnological Enquiry* (Philadelphia, 1857), pp. 638-40.

52 Agassiz, in J.C. Nott and Geo R. Gliddon, *Types of Mankind: or, Ethnological Researches* (Philadelphia, 1854), pp. lxiv-lxxvi.

53 Nott, in Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, p. 79. See also Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors*, pp. 176-80.

54 Josiah C. Nott, *Two Lectures on the Connection between the Biblical and Physical History of Man* (New York, 1849), pp. 21-2, 17.

55 Nott, in Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, pp. 372-410, at p. 407 (see also p. 80).

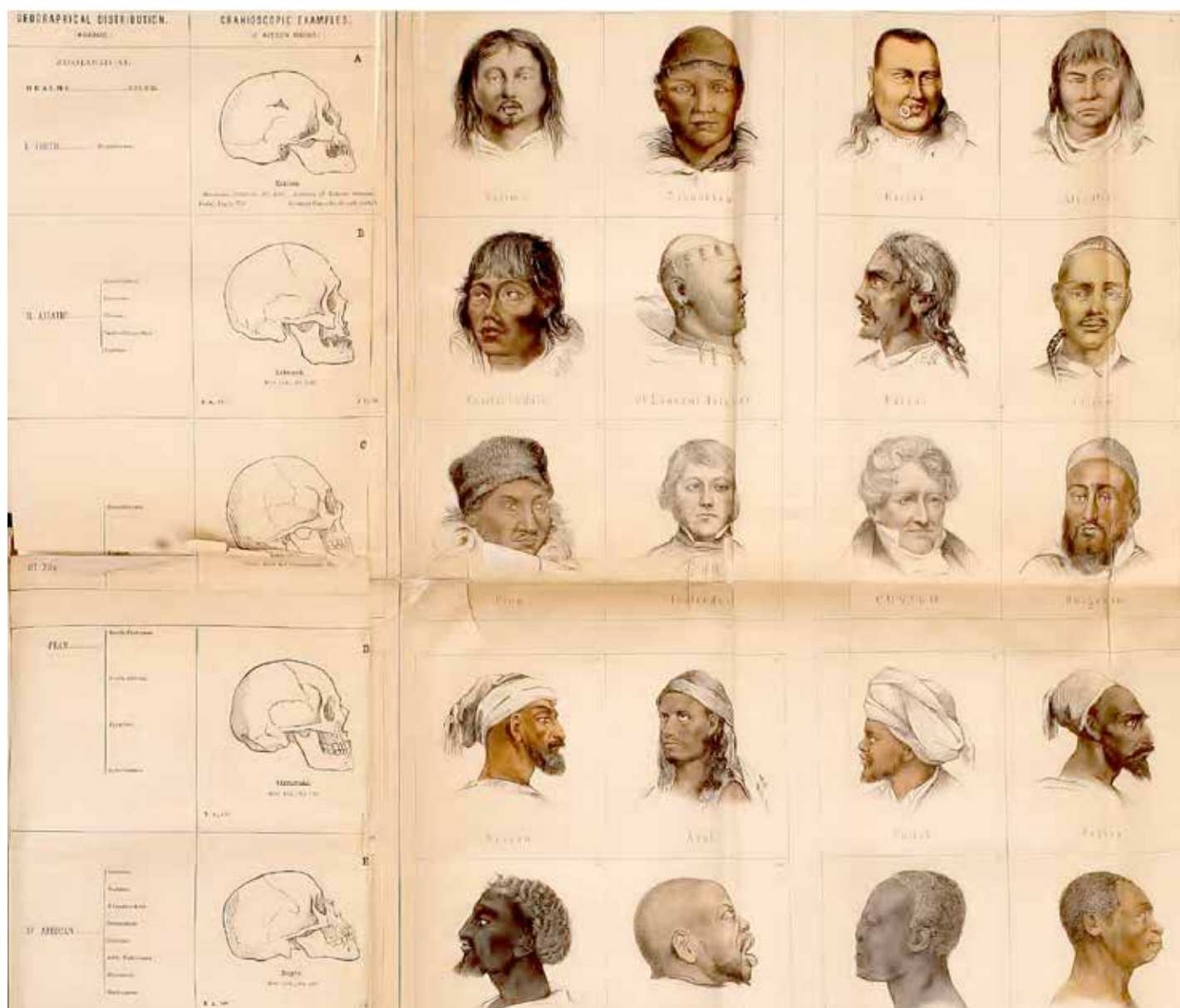


Fig. 4: Detail of frontispiece from Nott and Gliddon, *Indigenous Races* (1857), showing 'Cuvier' (Agassiz's mentor) as representative of white Europeans, surrounded by anonymous individuals of other races.

and culturally productive. Not long after delivering his *Testimony* lecture, he commented:

*Minds of large calibre, and possessed of the kingly faculty, come first into view, in our history, among the fused tribes, just as of old it was the mixed marriages that first produced the giants.*⁵⁶

Miller himself, of course, was born to a union between Celt and Teuton, two 'Caucasian' groups then being treated as inferior and superior by British racist commentators.

In the 1850s, polygenist assertions of multiple human creations represented the cutting edge in ethnology, especially in the hands of the brilliant Agassiz. Leading Darwin scholars Adrian Desmond and James Moore have shown that the polygenist threat spurred the passionately abolitionist Darwin to complete his monogenist account of evolution by natural selection. He had been working on it ever since the 1830s, but Agassiz brought matters to a head. On reading *Types of Mankind* Darwin finally, in May 1856, picked up his pen to write the position-statement that became *On the Origin of Species* three years later.⁵⁷ Nott and Gliddon's books impressed several of Darwin's allies, including Huxley.⁵⁸ Agassiz's creationist model gradually fell by the wayside, but polygenists'

⁵⁶ Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters or The Story of My Education*, ed. by James Robertson (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 253.

⁵⁷ Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin's Sacred Cause: Race, Slavery and the Quest for Human Origins* (London, 2009), pp. 239-51 and 262-6.

⁵⁸ [Thomas Huxley], 'Contemporary Literature – Science', *Westminster Review*, 62 (1854), 242-56, p. 253; Desmond and Moore, *Darwin's Sacred Cause*, pp. 274-5.

insistence on permanent, innate mental inequalities between races continued to inform later evolutionary models of human variety, reinforcing the racial glass ceiling on several levels.⁵⁹

To an educated onlooker in 1850, the initiative in scientific discussions of racial origins seemed divided between evolutionists and creationist polygenists, while the idea of a divine curse on Black people was still current among conservative theologians. All three models ascribed racial difference and racial inequality to God's will and/or the immutable design of nature. All were rejected by Miller.

Miller's rejection of scientific racism in *Testimony*

Miller's opposition to evolution is well known. Like Prichard, he consistently opposed any hypothesis which posited an animal origin for any group of humans. As early as 1841 he attacked the Presbyterian minister James Brodie for entertaining the racist hypothesis that the San or 'Hottentot tribe' was 'a mongrel breed between man and the ourang-outang', or 'a sort of connecting link between men and monkeys' as Miller paraphrased it.⁶⁰ Brodie merely hinted that this hypothesis was not yet proved or disproved, but this was enough to draw lightning from the anti-racist Miller.

Evolutionary theories known to Miller, from De Maillet and Lamarck to *Vestiges*, envisaged the history of life as tracing a continual upward progress towards perfection. Accordingly, Miller's main scientific weapon against them was the concept of degeneration from an originally created perfection. He developed this most fully in his antidote to *Vestiges*, *Foot-Prints of the Creator* (1849). In his view, the sequence of life-forms in the fossil record was generally progressive, but for some groups (such as the fishes) Miller saw the earliest forms as superior in structure, complexity and strength to their later congeners. Miller never explained why God's pre-human creations had deteriorated in this way, seeing this as a mystery of divine justice.

Miller's emphasis on human degeneration in *Testimony*, too, has an anti-evolutionary agenda. Here is how he introduces his ethnographic descriptions:

*Contrary to the conceptions of the assertors of the development hypothesis, we ascertain, as we proceed outwards, that the course is not one of progression from the low to the high, but of descent from the high to the low.*⁶¹

Disparaging as Miller's assessment of these peoples' states was, he wished to remove from them the evolutionary stigma of being improved apes. All humans were descended, not from some 'squalid savage of doubtful humanity' (or missing link), but from 'man as God created him'. It followed that members of the more deprived races could, contrary to the new scientific racism, be 'recovered by the labours of some zealous missionary'.⁶²

Agassiz was the most eminent anti-evolutionist of the day, and as a sincere admirer of his, Miller might have seemed a natural ally. Their closeness to each other needs emphasizing to appreciate the independence of mind with which Miller rejected Agassiz's cherished theory of inherent racial inequality. In his anti-evolutionary diatribes, Miller called Agassiz 'the highest authority' on the history of life, crediting him with identifying God's 'appointed programme' of creation.⁶³ Both men used palæontology, geology and German idealism to oppose evolution and present the history of creation as the unfolding of a vast and predestined divine plan. For both men, palæontology was a way to become 'acquainted with the ideas of God himself'.⁶⁴ Miller emphatically endorsed Agassiz's view that the fossil record contained mute prophecies of the human form: 'In the beginning His plan was formed', as Agassiz had put it. The Calvinist Miller could only agree. Retelling the drama of Creation, Miller quoted at length from Agassiz and Gould's *Principles of Zoölogy*.⁶⁵ They appear to be singing from the same hymn-sheet. Yet only a few pages later, Miller prefaced his discussion of human races by unambiguously rejecting Agassiz's polygenist views. Here he tactfully refrained from naming Agassiz, but alert readers would have noticed

59 George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York, 1968), pp. 42-68; Stepan, *Idea of Race*, pp. 47-110.

60 James Brodie, *The Alphabet Explained ... in Connection with the Origin and History of Nations* (Edinburgh, 1840), p. 240; [Hugh Miller], 'The Meetings of Wednesday', *Witness*, 28 August 1841, p. 3; [Hugh Miller], editorial note, *Witness*, 4 September 1841, p. 2. On these speculations see Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley, 2003), p. 51; Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors*, pp. 68-73.

61 Miller, *Testimony*, p. 253.

62 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 252 and 254.

63 Miller, *Old Red Sandstone*, p. 47; Miller, *Foot-Prints of the Creator: or, The Asterolepis of Stromness* (London, 1849), p. 127. See Janvier, 'Armoured Fish'.

64 Louis Agassiz and Augustus A. Gould, *Principles of Zoölogy ... Part 1: Comparative Physiology* (Boston, 1848), p. 206; compare Miller, *My Schools*, pp. 506-7.

65 Agassiz and Gould, *Principles of Zoölogy*, pp. 205-6, quoted in Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 210-11.

the divergence because Miller's argument up to this point has been so close to Agassiz's.

Tracking Miller's divergence from Agassiz helps to show his anti-racist aims. Chapters 5 and 6 of *Testimony*, both entitled 'Geology in Its Bearings on the Two Theologies' and both based on the same 1851 lecture, together explore how geology can illuminate the theology of nature (God's creative plan, seen in nature) and the theology of revelation (God's redemptive plan, expounded in Scripture). First, chapter 5 quotes Agassiz to frame Miller's vision of the history of creation, unfolded with further nods to Agassiz. Chapter 6 then focuses on the creation of humans as the culmination of God's plan, where for the first time God's creation participated as fellow-workers with God and partakers (in their own small way) in divine creativity. Here geology's main contribution to theology is the identification of beautiful and ingenious fossil forms which prefigure the products of human creativity, testifying to a unity of mind between God and humans.⁶⁶

For Agassiz, only the last-created human variety, the Caucasian, was the culmination of God's plan. Other varieties from China to Peru had been created earlier as 'inferior' forms, not intended for such exalted purposes. For Miller, by contrast, all humans were descended from the same pair, with the same mental capacities; all were intended as fellow-workers with God. Had Miller wished to gloss over his differences from Agassiz on this point, he could have silently ignored non-Caucasian races, giving only Caucasian examples of human creativity. But he did not.

Instead, Miller emphasizes that Caucasians were not alone in exercising a godlike creativity. His main examples of art and technology are taken from modern China.⁶⁷ This was a snub to Agassiz's racial hierarchy, and to white supremacism generally. In this period of the Opium Wars (1839-60), when China's attempts to prevent illegal British drug-dealing in their territories were pushed back by British military aggression and hardball diplomacy, it suited many Westerners to depict Chinese people as backward and feeble-minded – 'the child race of mankind', as Chambers put it in the sixth edition of *Vestiges*.⁶⁸ Witness the following purportedly scientific description of the 'Mongolian' racial group to which they were assigned, in the standard physical atlas of the period:

*eyes small, and iris dark Hair coarse, lank, and black Intellect only moderately developed more obstinate than brave, savagely cruel to vanquished foes ... fearful of foreign intrusion; imagination and taste deficient; imitative and skilful in domestic arts, but without any scientific enterprise; content with a stationary civilisation ...*⁶⁹

Miller did not entirely escape this prejudice, depicting the 'Mongolian' (presumably the nomads of Mongolia itself) in his subsequent catalogue of deprivation as possessing 'unintellectual, pig-like eyes'.⁷⁰ But this, like the whole passage, focuses on external appearance only, along with occasional references to poor living conditions. Unintellectual eyes do not mean lesser mental capacities. On the contrary, as Miller pointed out in 1852, they had the same mental capacities as any human: accusing them of 'irremediable imbecility' was wrong.⁷¹ In autumn 1851, just before delivering his *Testimony* lecture, Miller had visited London's Great Exhibition and Chinese Collection.⁷² He was impressed, seeing Chinese artistry as equal to that of Europe:

*in China, as in Europe, the same human faculties, prompted by the same tastes and necessities, had expatiated in the same tracts of invention The identity of the more common contrivances which I witnessed, with familiar contrivances in our own country, I regarded as altogether as conclusive of an identity of mind in the individuals who had originated them, as if I had actually seen human creatures at work on them all.*⁷³

He repeats the same point later: the parallel evolution of the chair again indicated 'an identity of character' between Chinese and European artisans, partaking equally in a God-given human nature.⁷⁴ This was poles apart from the increasingly conventional hierarchy of racial 'character'.

66 Brooke, 'Like Minds'.

67 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 222-3, 235-8.

68 [Robert Chambers], *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, 6th ed. (London, 1847), p. 292 n. 91.

69 Alexander Keith Johnston, *The Physical Atlas of Natural Phenomena*, new ed. (Edinburgh, 1850), pp. 101-2. See also 'China', in *Supplement to the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Editions of the Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume Third* (Edinburgh, 1824), pp. 66-114, at p. 114 (repeated in 1842 edition).

70 Miller, *Testimony*, p. 253.

71 [Hugh Miller], 'The Emigration Movement', *Witness*, 16 October 1852, p. 2.

72 For Miller's reports on the Great Exhibition (*Witness*, 15 and 18 October 1851), see Miller, *Essays*, pp. 301-19. The 'Chinese Museum' (Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 222 and 235) was the Chinese Collection of Nathan Dunn.

73 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 222-3.

74 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 236.

Miller then argued that the sense of beauty seen in all civilized societies displayed an *aesthetic* 'identity of mind' between them. That this aesthetic sense was also God-given, and thus not subjective, was, for Miller, confirmed by anticipations of man-made forms that God had built into the designs of ancient life-forms (Fig. 5).⁷⁵ Beauty was not in the eye of the beholder: this is why, later in the chapter, Miller judged the physiques of 'Fuegians' and 'Alforians' as deficient in an absolute sense, and Circassians as beautiful. His Enlightenment-universalist convictions led him simultaneously to a prejudiced assessment of their appearances, but to an anti-racist perception of their mental capacities.

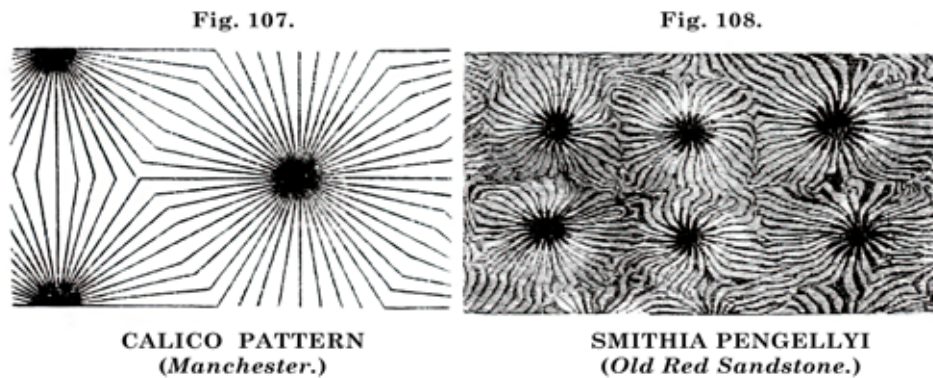


Fig. 5: Detail from Miller, *Testimony of the Rocks* (1857), p. 242, showing a similarity of form between a product of human design (Fig. 107, a then-popular design for printed fabric called 'Lane's Net') and a recently discovered product of divine design (Fig. 108, a fossil coral).

Altogether, Miller flattens out Agassiz's gradation between inferior and superior races, instead ascribing equal capacity to all humans to participate in the Creator's work. Miller's treatment of Creation's end-point therefore also differs from Agassiz's. In chapter 5 Miller had endorsed Agassiz's declaration that 'MAN IS THE END TOWARDS WHICH ALL THE ANIMAL CREATION HAS TENDED'.⁷⁶ But Agassiz had European humans in mind, whereas Miller had a more racially and culturally inclusive conception of 'man'. And whereas Agassiz positioned Cuvier as the summit of created perfection, for the evangelical Miller the ultimate end-point was Christ: Creator meets Creation in human form to redeem it.

So far, Miller has argued that civilizations worldwide participate in God's work by improving on their environments:

*The deputed lord of creation, availing himself of God's natural laws, does what no mere animal ... ever did ... – he adorns and beautifies the earth, and adds tenfold to its original fertility and productiveness.*⁷⁷

But if the godlike aspect of human nature is manifest in what *civilized* humans do, what about peoples who (Victorians believed) lacked civilization? How could nomads who did not even cultivate land be part of a divine plan for humans working alongside God? Many ethnologists would retort that those races were not intended for that exalted purpose, being inherently (biologically) incapable of the mental development seen in Caucasians.

Miller, believing that Christ had died for *all* humans because he was the second Adam, did not wish to exclude any peoples from the bloodline of the first Adam. He also knew that the external differences he was about to outline were often assumed to support the doctrine of innate racial inequality. So he first spends two pages opposing that doctrine and insisting (as in his 1848 article on Buchubai) that 'God hath made of one blood all nations, for to dwell on the face of all the earth'. He quotes seven scientific authorities, including Prichard, to show that science and scripture speak as one.⁷⁸

Miller, like Darwin after him, dismisses polygenism as a charter for slavery:

The question has, indeed, been raised in these latter times, whether each species of animals may not have been originally created ... in several centres, and, of course, the human species among the rest? And the query, – for in reality it amounts to nothing more, – has been favourably entertained on the other side of the Atlantic, where there are uneasy consciences, that would find comfort in the belief that

75 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 236–42. For discussion, see Brooke, 'Like Minds', pp. 176–80

76 Miller, *Testimony*, p. 211, quoting Agassiz and Gould, *Principles of Zoölogy*, p. 206.

77 Miller, *Testimony*, p. 247.

78 Miller, *Testimony*, p. 249.

*Zambo the blackamoor, who was lynched for getting tired of slavery and hard blows, was an animal in no way akin to his master.*⁷⁹

This is a clear reference to Agassiz's hypothesis of 'centres of creation', without naming the source. Miller's 1850 article on human origins fills in some of the gaps. There he names Agassiz and Nott as promoting the same hypothesis, and then exposes its racist potential:

The existence of slavery in the southern provinces, and the strong dislike with which the black population are regarded by the whites throughout the States generally, must dispose the men who hate or enslave them to receive with favour whatever plausibilities go to show that they are not of one blood with themselves, and that they owe to them none of the duties of brotherhood.

If Agassiz's views are accepted, then 'there are races of men reckoned up by millions ... in which we may recognise our slaves and victims, but not our brothers and neighbours'.⁸⁰ When writing his *Testimony* lecture a year later, Miller refrained from naming Agassiz, but was even more dismissive of polygenism.

Yet Miller could not escape the consensus of his culture that nomadic lifeways were barbarous and damaging to social and physical wellbeing. In terms of then-current ethnology, his rejection of racially determinist explanations left him no choice but to argue, with Prichard, that such peoples had fallen into deprivation and suffered the consequences.

'Degradation' and deprivation

Miller's thesis in chapter 6 of *Testimony* was that God intended all humans to be fellow-workers with God himself. Miller mentions 'savage' peoples simply to defend that egalitarian thesis against scientific-racist objections that some races were inherently inferior to others. Even had he wished, he could not have won this argument by denying that civilization was better than nomadism, or that the finest 'Caucasian' specimens were more attractive than Aboriginal Australians. Those prejudices had the status of unquestioned fact in Miller's culture and, while Miller nowhere else voices them as openly as he does in *Testimony*, there is no reason to doubt that he, too, believed them to be true. If he had somehow found a way of evading or glossing over these truisms of his time and place, he would lose the argument for ignoring seemingly obvious objections. In a Victorian context, and from his non-expert perspective (not being an ethnologist himself), Miller could undermine the idea of a fixed racial hierarchy only by *using* the language of racial stereotyping current among his scientific peers, acknowledging these perceived disparities in order to present his alternative explanation for them. Exaggeration helped him to do this: even such dramatic physical differences as these, Miller is saying, are not God's will. This is a vivid example of how different anti-racism in the 1850s was to anti-racism today. Prejudices that are unacceptable today were unavoidable then.

Like other opponents of a static racial hierarchy, Miller believed that the peoples in question had suffered systemic deprivation that had impaired their physical wellbeing. The word 'deprivation' captures best for a modern reader what Miller actually meant by 'degradation' in *Testimony*. Whereas 'degradation' in modern English often refers to permanent deterioration, Miller saw it as a dynamic and reversible process. The same was true of 'civilization', which in Miller's usage was a process going on in real time, not a state of being.

Miller's claim that certain peoples had 'fallen' from created perfection was informed by evangelical theology: Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden (the Fall) had led to their expulsion from Paradise, and to death and sin entering human experience. All humans had inherited these consequences and were inherently sinful, except Jesus Christ, the redeeming 'second Adam'.⁸¹ All humans, individually or in groups, had a tendency to do wrong or go astray, recapitulating the Fall. In Miller's view, this tendency was not racially distributed or restricted to those whose physical profiles he saw as imperfect. When he visited Eigg in the mid-1840s, where the McLeods of Skye had once massacred the island's population (their fellow Gaels), he commented that the jaw of a McLeod would seem harmless next to that of a prehistoric predator:

the animal it had belonged to,— far more ruthless and cruel than reptile-fish, crocodiles, or sharks,— was of such a nature that it could destroy creatures of even its own kind by hundreds at a time, when not in the least incited by hunger Man must surely have become an immensely worse animal than his teeth

⁷⁹ Miller, *Testimony*, p. 249 (emphasis original).

⁸⁰ Miller, *Essays*, pp. 390-3; see Nott, *Two Lectures*, p. 18.

⁸¹ On Miller's evangelicalism, see Brooke, 'Like Minds', pp. 181-5; Taylor, *Hugh Miller*, pp. 54-6 and 78-9.

*show him to have been designed for*⁸²

Present-day lairds were little better. A few chapters later in the same work, Miller mentioned 'the cannibal Ichthyosaurus, that bears the broken remains of its own kind in its bowels', and said that matters had not much improved 'in that latest-born creation in the series, that recognises as its delegated lord the first tenant of earth accountable to his Maker.'⁸³ No race, no matter how handsome, had a monopoly of the moral high ground.

What Miller says of exotic peoples in *Testimony*, then, was for him one example of a wider pattern: episodes of degeneration marked the histories of all civilizations, not only those deemed 'savage'.⁸⁴ In 1842 he had asserted that 'The degradation of savageism ... is not the state in which man began; it is merely a state towards which, in his fallen nature, he tends.'⁸⁵ As I will show, *Testimony* expands on that assertion, drawing on his experiences among deprived Scottish workers and his conviction that their plight was unacceptable.

First, Miller attributes stunted or ugly physiques to the effects of 'savage' lifeways over generations, and well-formed physiques to civilized ways. He drew this reasoning directly from ethnological authorities such as Prichard:

*The most degraded and savage nations are the ugliest. Among the most improved and the partially civilized ... the figure and the features of the native people approach much more to the European.*⁸⁶

The Scottish mathematician and outspoken abolitionist Mary Somerville had drawn the same link in her *Physical Geography* (1848), then a standard reference-work:

The most savage people are also the ugliest. Their countenance is deformed by violent unsubdued passions, anxiety, and suffering. Deep sensibility gives a beautiful and varied expression The refining effects of high culture, and, above all, the Christian religion, by subduing the evil passions, and encouraging the good, are more than anything calculated to improve even the external appearance.

The Caucasian 'family of nations' has, in her view, long been 'the most civilized portion of the human race' and therefore includes the 'handsomest' peoples of all.⁸⁷ This is not white supremacism – Somerville and Prichard repeatedly refuse the notion of innate racial inequalities – but it is highly ethnocentric. The same may be said of Darwin, describing the 'abject and miserable' Yaghan of Tierra del Fuego in a passage that Miller surely knew.⁸⁸

But Miller's assessment of 'savage' peoples differs in two important ways from these actively humanitarian members of the liberal scientific elite. First, Darwin and Somerville softened their descriptions by presenting those peoples as adapted and reconciled to less civilized ways of life. Darwin conceded that 'Nature by making habit omnipotent, and its effects hereditary, has fitted the Fuegian to the climate and the productions of his country'. Thus they gained some measure of 'happiness' from a life that struck Darwin as 'miserable'.⁸⁹ Miller refused that comforting view. His emphasis on the Yaghan's 'wretched' state may appear less tolerant, but it sprang from a social campaigner's conviction that such a state was totally unacceptable and unnatural: hence the overriding tone of pity rather than contempt in his survey. His whole point is that arguments ascribing extreme inequality to God's will were the slippery slope towards racism and slavery. Hence, for Miller, impersonal factors such as climate were secondary. The root cause was wrongdoing, the free will of fallen humanity.

Second, for all his theological baggage, Miller restrains himself from indulging in moral condemnation of individual peoples, of the kind seen in Darwin's emphasis on Yaghan cannibalism and Prichard's description of the 'villainous expression of their savage features'.⁹⁰ This is consistent with Miller's refusal to blame present-day sufferers from deprivation, on which more below. He was also unwilling to follow the common ethnological tendency to pin specific harmful behaviours on specific races, seen in the atlas quoted earlier on the 'Mongolian' profile. For Miller, savage behaviour was the same the world over, as visible in Scottish inner-city slums as in the deserts of Australia. It was part of human nature, not just certain races, to regress towards savagery or indolence.

82 Hugh Miller, 'A Summer Ramble among the Fossiliferous Deposits of the Hebrides: Chapter II', *Witness*, 15 March 1845, p. 2, reprinted in Miller, *Cruise of the Betsey*, pp. 26-7.

83 Miller, *Cruise of the Betsey*, pp. 88-9.

84 [Miller], 'Dr Candlish's Work on Genesis'.

85 [Miller], 'Dr Candlish's Work on Genesis'.

86 Prichard, *Researches*, vol. 1, p. 248.

87 Mary Somerville, *Physical Geography* (London, 1848), vol. 2, pp. 259, 247-8.

88 Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of the Various Countries Visited by H. M. S. Beagle*, 1st ed. (London, 1840), p. 235; Gostwick, 'Degraded Races', p. 13.

89 Darwin, *Journal of Researches*, pp. 235-7.

90 Darwin, *Journal*, pp. 235-7; Prichard, *Researches*, vol. 5, pp. 494-6.

This point can be illustrated by glancing at the one instance (mentioned by Gostwick) where Miller *did* pin a negative behavioural judgement onto one group. This is his unpublished 1829 autobiographical 'Memoir', written when the 27-year-old stonemason was taking his first tentative steps in the literary world. In one passage, later revised for his published autobiography, Miller recalls a boyhood fight with a mixed-race schoolfellow, 'a native of the West Indies', probably the son of a planter living abroad.⁹¹ According to Miller, the other boy tended to pull a knife when losing a fist-fight. He tried this during one fight with Miller, who had armed himself in advance and stabbed the boy in the thigh. Miller describes the boy as 'much dreaded by the other boys for a wild, savage disposition which is, I believe, natural to most of his countryfolks'.⁹²

It is not clear whether 'countryfolks' means the colonial planter class to which this boy probably belonged (often portrayed by abolitionists as brutalized),⁹³ enslaved Black people in the Caribbean, or both. Either way, this is precisely the kind of censorious ethnic labelling that he avoided in his publications, and he removed it from the published version of the story.⁹⁴ In both versions, though, Miller tells this story *against* himself to illustrate how he had become the wildest of savages: squandering his educational opportunities by getting into fights, finishing up leaving the school after fighting the schoolmaster. Miller presents himself as undergoing moral degeneration like other adolescent 'downward careers of recklessness and folly' that bring 'wreck and ruin' in manhood.⁹⁵ The Black boy, by contrast, is portrayed in both versions as behaving with decency and restraint once the fight was over. Miller invokes the ethnic slur only to undermine it and show himself as the true 'savage'. Incidentally, David Alston has suggested that the other boy might have been John Layfield (son or younger relation of Thomas Layfield of Barbice), identified as Miller's close friend in a letter from 1836.⁹⁶ If so, this tells us a lot about how the teenage Miller made friends.

The mature Miller's reluctance to deal out racial judgements reflects his belief that (as he put it in *Testimony*) all humans could become savage or regress towards 'indolence and self-indulgence'. Giving in to this impulse led (even if only temporarily) to 'ignorant sloth, dependent uselessness, and self-induced imbecility, bodily and mental'; resisting it to 'assert by honest labour a noble independence' had a civilizing effect.⁹⁷ This sentiment runs through the Victorian literature of self-help, including Douglass's speech 'Self-Made Men'. Here the African-American Douglass ethnocentrically describes equatorial Black Africans as physically and intellectually weakened by an environmentally induced indolence, unlike (in his view) members of the same race in the northern United States, stimulated by the struggle for survival in a harsher climate.⁹⁸ The same human nature, responding to different environments and opportunities, displays differing degrees of individual development. For Miller, heredity amplified the results: 'we may see' its effects 'every day taking place among ourselves', as with the 'wandering vagrants of Great Britain'. Given enough generations, these 'nomades and paupers ... would have passed into distinct races of men' as the effects of deprivation took root. For Miller, as for other anti-racist and socially committed ethnologists such as William Carpenter, the state of 'hereditary paupers' in modern Britain helps explain the physical features of deprived peoples abroad.⁹⁹

Miller has been accused of blaming the victims in *Testimony*. His talk of 'self-induced imbecility' makes him sound like a political grandee with no understanding of the realities of poverty, blaming the homeless. On the contrary: with his experience of rural and urban working-class life, Miller well understood the systemic nature of poverty and deprivation.¹⁰⁰ As a stonemason he had seen how easily detrimental behavioural patterns could become ingrained in families or communities, causing physical deprivation reproduced over the generations – a process that included what we call the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. In certain environments, these patterns were hard to avoid. Highland crofts were 'favourably placed for the development of all that is excellent in human nature', but the 'miasmatic alleys and typhoid courts of our large towns' bred 'a people sunk into an abyss of degradation and misery, and in which it is the whole tendency of external circumstances to sink them

91 David Alston, pers. comm. (August 2021).

92 *Hugh Miller's Memoir: From Stonemason to Geologist*, ed. by Michael Shortland (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 107.

93 Miller echoes this view in *My Schools*, p. 534.

94 Miller, *My Schools*, pp. 134-5.

95 Miller, *My Schools*, p. 135.

96 Hugh Miller to Alexander Finlay, 15 October 1836, Hugh Miller Letter-Book (Edinburgh University Library), letter 174; David Alston, pers. comm., August 2021.

97 Miller, *Testimony*, p. 255.

98 Frederick Douglass, 'Self-Made Men', p. 15.

99 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 255-6. Compare W. B. Carpenter, 'Varieties of Mankind', in *The Cyclopædia of Anatomy and Physiology Vol. IV Part II*, ed. by Robert B. Todd (London, 1849-52), pp. 1294-1367 (pp. 1343-4).

100 Taylor, *Hugh Miller*, pp. 84-92.

yet deeper'.¹⁰¹

The ruling classes bore much of the blame in Miller's eyes, exacerbating these behaviour-patterns with their callous treatment of tenants. In the previous article I discussed the Highland Clearances, forcing tenant farmers onto unproductive coastal land. Miller rejected claims that Gaels were an indolent race: a Saxon would manage no better on such land. He was equally scathing of Lowland landowners' neglect of labourers' living conditions, and the housing conditions throughout Scotland for unmarried male farm-workers and itinerant stonemasons. Miller had been there; he had seen the results. In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* he showed how masons' seasonal removal from civilization, living in squalid and unsanitary 'bothies', brutalized even the brightest individuals.¹⁰² He made no exception for himself, recalling how easily an alcohol habit could be formed 'in the attempt to escape from the sense of depression and fatigue' brought on by heavy manual labour in such conditions.¹⁰³

Miller did not wag a preachy finger at self-induced deprivation. It was something he had lived through, that all humans could fall into. In his view, the conditions that made it so ubiquitous were created or exacerbated by other humans, not by the innate inferiority of the victims. Similar concerns underpinned the more liberal varieties of abolitionism. Prichard, for example, had stated that tribes 'in the lowest stage of human society' (whether 'ferocious savages' or 'sensual and indolent') were not that way by nature or design, but because of social factors, not least the 'baneful influence' of the slave trade.¹⁰⁴ Abolitionist campaigns, like Douglass's in Scotland, were built around exposing the degrading, brutalizing effects of enslavement on people who deserved a better way of life. In his article 'The Future of the Colored Race' (1866), Douglass argued that the recently emancipated 'Negro' should not be blamed for the state into which enslavement had brought his forebears:

*He stands before us, to-day, physically, a maimed and mutilated man. His mother was lashed to agony before the birth of her babe, and the bitter anguish of the mother is seen in the countenance of her offspring. Slavery has twisted his limbs, ... deformed his body and distorted his features ... he has not the vertical bearing of a perfect man. His lack of symmetry [is] caused by no fault of his own*¹⁰⁵

On this point Miller and Douglass were agreed: this is not how humans are meant to live. For both writers, lurid details about human-induced deficiencies underlined the point that all humans deserved health and freedom. This helps explain why Miller claimed to see nothing but ugliness and squalor among the peoples listed in *Testimony*. For Douglass and Miller as abolitionists, enslavement was against God's will for humans of any race. So, too, for Miller, deprivation was against God's will for any human, its presence a standing rebuke to the other humans responsible. Unlike many conservative abolitionists in this period, Douglass and Miller also insisted that the moral and mental effects of deprivation could be rapidly reversed and thus did not justify continued discrimination against its former victims.¹⁰⁶

For Miller, the physical effects of enslavement were not limited to African-Americans. Long before *Testimony*, Miller had compared the physiques of far-flung indigenous peoples with white Scottish colliery-workers, including those whom he had got to know in the 1820s at Niddrie in Midlothian. Several of these colliery-workers had been born slaves or serfs under a system that was not fully abolished until 1799. Miller was far from placing their situation on the same level as with that of enslaved African-Americans, yet he found the comparison instructive. As he noted, these colliery-communities still lived in unsanitary conditions and appeared to him 'a rude and ignorant race of men' displaying 'the soil and stain of recent slavery', especially the overworked women. Campaigning by Miller and others succeeded, in 1842, in bringing about legislation to ameliorate their condition: this, in his opinion, also improved their physique.

In Miller's view, the women's physical 'marks of serfdom' had included 'a peculiar type of mouth' that he had not seen on any other Scottish women: 'wide, open, thick-lipped, projecting equally above and below'. According to Miller, this mouth

*exactly resembled that which we find in the prints given of savages in their lowest and most degraded state, in such narratives of our modern voyagers as, for instance, the 'Narrative of Captain Fitzroy's Second Voyage of the Beagle.'*¹⁰⁷

101 Miller, *Cruise of the Betsey*, p. 135.

102 For example in Miller, *My Schools*, pp. 176-84 and 226-30.

103 Miller, *My Schools*, pp. 151-2.

104 Prichard, *Researches*, vol. 2, p. 338.

105 Frederick Douglass, *Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor (Chicago, 2000), p. 590.

106 Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, pp. 144-92; compare Miller, 'Moderatism Popular' (quoted above).

107 Miller, *My Schools*, pp. 300-1.

Miller had the Yaghan of Tierra del Fuego in mind here, as his 1842 *Witness* article on another group of colliers specifies. Miller describes one engraving (Fig. 6) as depicting

*the same individual ... in his half-civilized state, when living among Europeans, and subsequently, when, little more than a year after his return to his tribe, he had relapsed into his original barbarism. There is a marked compression of mouth in the one, that speaks of the exercise of intellect and the control of the will; in the other, the lips droop forward ... expressive of only sheer brutality.*¹⁰⁸



Recent analysis has identified artistic licence in the engraving, used to dramatize the benefits of civilization;¹⁰⁹ but Miller took the engraving, as with FitzRoy's and Darwin's descriptions, at face value. His conclusion: in South America or Scotland, barbarous conditions brutalized any human in similar ways. 'The collier cannot be other than a savage so long as his wife and daughter are thus degraded below the level of the brute'.¹¹⁰ Miller in his paternalistic, culturally universalist way compares the 'pitiable' state of extra-modern societies, about whom he

Fig. 6: Detail from engraving portraying Yaghan people in different social environments, from FitzRoy, Narrative of the Surveying Voyages (1839), vol. 2, p. 325. This pair of portraits shows 'Jemmy Button'. Right: 'Jemmy Button in 1833' after living in England. Left: 'Jemmy in 1834', after returning to Tierra del Fuego.

had only read, to the deprivation he had seen among white working-class Scots. He drew his conclusion from the evidence available to him. Deprivation was colour-blind, and civilization was not a permanent racial inheritance but a state that was available to all and could be lost.¹¹¹

So, when Miller writes in *Testimony* that 'Such is man as man himself has made him', he is not blaming the victims. On the contrary, deprivation is systemic and its roots lie far in the past:

*In many instances the degradation has been voluntary; in others it has been forced upon families and races by the iron hand of oppression; in almost all ... the children and the children's children have, as a matter of inevitable necessity, been born to it the lapsed progenitors, when cut off from civilization and all external interference of a missionary character, become the founders of a lapsed race.*¹¹²

Miller here acknowledges that 'almost all' these people are in a state of 'degradation' through no personal fault

¹⁰⁸ [Hugh Miller], 'Our Colliers', *Witness*, 11 June 1842, p. 2. Engraving: Robert FitzRoy, *Narrative of the Surveying Voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle*, 3 vols (London, 1839), vol. 2, p. 325.

¹⁰⁹ Dánae Fiore, 'Social Images through Visual Images: The Use of Drawings and Photographs in the Western Representation of the Aborigines of Tierra del Fuego (Southern South America)', *Public Archaeology*, 4 (2005), 169-82 (pp. 172-3). Fiore misattributes the engraving to Darwin's *Journal of Researches*.

¹¹⁰ [Miller], 'Our Colliers', p. 3.

¹¹¹ Prichard's views on this point were more ambiguous: see Augstein, 'James C. Prichard's Views', pp. 273-82.

¹¹² Miller, *Testimony*, p. 257, my emphasis.

of their own, even though for 'many' there has been a moment of choice. He specifically mentions 'the iron hand of oppression' forcing people into deprivation, recalling his observations elsewhere about the baneful effects of any kind of 'despotism'.

In *Testimony*, Miller's most detailed illustration of deprivation's physical effects again underlines their cross-racial ubiquity. The Anglo-Irish antiquary Samuel Ferguson had described the descendants of northern Irish Gaels who had been driven into exile on mountain and moor by the seventeenth-century Protestant plantations of Ulster. After two centuries of exposure 'to the worst effects of hunger and ignorance, the two great brutalizers of the human race', their present-day descendants in Sligo and northern Mayo were 'distinguished physically by great degradation' in both physique and stature, showing the 'open projecting mouths' and 'depressed noses' that Miller saw in engravings of exotic peoples in works by FitzRoy, Prichard and others.¹¹³ These features were not innate or ancient as polygenists and some evolutionists claimed, but had been externally induced in a relatively short time.

Racist comparisons between Irish Gaels and Black Africans were often made to portray the Irish as an inferior race. Miller rejected this reasoning, as did his immediate source: he took the Ferguson quotation from a section entitled 'Intellect of the African Nations Not Inferior' in Prichard's *Physical History of Mankind*.¹¹⁴ Prichard's and Miller's point is that a 'well-grown, able-bodied, and comely' people have been transformed by 'two centuries of degradation and hardship' into shadows of their former selves, proving that physical or intellectual deficiencies do not arise from race or inherent inferiority.¹¹⁵ Douglass made the same point in his own assault on scientific racism:

*The open, uneducated mouth – the long, gaunt arm – the badly formed foot and ankle ... – the retreating forehead and vacant expression ... – all reminded me of the plantation, and my own cruelly abused people [but] there are no more really handsome people in the world, than the educated Irish people. The Irishman educated, is a model gentleman; the Irishman ignorant and degraded, compares in form and feature, with the negro!*¹¹⁶

Douglass draws the Prichardian lesson to undermine the notion of inherent racial inferiority:

*May not the condition of men explain their various appearances? Need we go behind the vicissitudes of barbarism for an explanation of the gaunt, wiry, ape like appearance of some of the genuine negroes [i.e. in West Africa]? Need we look higher than a vertical sun, or lower than the damp, black soil of the Niger, the Gambia, the Senegal, with their heavy and enervating miasma ... for an explanation of the negro's colour? If a cause, full and adequate, can be found here, why seek further?*¹¹⁷

Like Miller, Douglass used then-current stereotyping of Black Africans to undermine scientific racism, endorsing a degenerationist argument that seemed, at the time, both scientific and humanitarian.

Besides demolishing race-dependent explanations of anatomical inequalities, the Irish example also showed how deprivation could be induced by aggressive British colonialism, the 'iron hand of oppression'. Two pages previously, Miller had predicted that some deprived peoples faced extinction in the face of white colonialism:

*all experience serves to show, that when a tribe of men falls beneath a certain level, it cannot come into competition with civilized man Individuals may be recovered by the labours of some zealous missionary; but it is the fate of the race, after a few generations, to disappear.*¹¹⁸

On the surface, this sounds like acceptance of racial extinction as the divine plan. The extinction of 'savage' races was indeed celebrated as a sign of progress by many liberal Victorian thinkers. *Vestiges* expressed the conventional view:

*Look at the progress even now making over the barbaric parts of the earth by the best examples of the Caucasian type, promising ... to supersede the imperfect nations already existing. Who can tell what progress may be made ... towards reversing the proportions of the perfect and imperfect types?*¹¹⁹

Other abolitionists joined the chorus. For Dickens, writing of the San ('Hottentots'), 'the world will be all the

113 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 256-7, quoting [Samuel Ferguson], 'Attractions of Ireland, No. III: Society', *Dublin University Magazine*, 8 (1836), 658-75.

114 Prichard, *Researches*, vol. 2, p. 349 n., discussed by Augstein, 'James C. Prichard's Views', pp. 273-4.

115 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 256-7.

116 Douglass, *Claims of the Negro*, pp. 30-1.

117 Douglass, *Claims of the Negro*, p. 31 (emphasis original).

118 Miller, *Testimony*, p. 254.

119 [Chambers], *Vestiges*, p. 310. See also Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, pp. 9-10, 22.

better when his place knows him no more';¹²⁰ for Trollope, the 'doom' of Aboriginal Australians 'is to be exterminated; and the sooner that their doom be accomplished,— so that there be no cruelty,— the better will it be for civilisation.'¹²¹ Trollope, like Lyell, Miller and Darwin, used words such as 'exterminate' and 'annihilate' in the sense of population replacement, not deliberate genocide, but the fact that Chambers, Dickens and Trollope were celebrating extinction of any kind will shock the modern reader.

Miller did not share this celebratory view: his litany of endangered races has the tone of a lament. Progress and improvement were no excuse for dispossession. Recall his campaign against the Clearances, paralleled by the *Witness's* stinging critiques of colonial aggression from Tahiti and Vietnam to Mexico.¹²² Miller and his newspaper consistently promoted Prichard's goal of facilitating the survival, and religious and practical improvement, of deprived peoples, as his response to Kahkewaquonaby shows. What, then, would cause the fated disappearance of such people as distinct races (not necessarily as individuals or bloodlines)? Certainly not any inbuilt incapacity for civilization such as Trollope attributed to Aboriginal Australians: 'We have been altogether unable to teach them not to be savage'.¹²³ On the contrary, Miller makes it clear in *Testimony* that one Native American 'nation' had been 'successfully' civilized by the missionary David Brainerd, but had disappeared nonetheless.¹²⁴ The islanders of Tahiti had been converted and civilized by missionaries, yet in their technologically undeveloped state three decades later, they were now at the mercy of French warships and at serious risk of 'extermination'.¹²⁵ Rounding off Miller's grim survey in *Testimony*, the Tasmanians were falling to European diseases ('the latter stages of consumption', i.e. tuberculosis).

In the context of the *Witness's* political stance, it is clear that in *Testimony* Miller was not approving or condoning genocide, but simply recognizing that cultures which lacked the military, organizational and health advantages of a modern imperial power were extremely vulnerable in colonial situations. History had shown – 'all experience serves to show' – the results. When he writes that 'the old Adamic type has been asserting its superiority, and annihilating before it the degraded races', and taking their land, Miller was not calling the Caucasian variety (or 'type') *inherently* superior, any more than a well-fed boxer was inherently superior to a malnourished opponent.¹²⁶ He was acknowledging that deprivation made people losers in a very unequal struggle.

Inevitable as this outcome seemed to Miller, as it did to every ethnologist in the 1850s, he was one of the few to resist the notion that it was God's will. Many others saw Providence darkly at work. Even the uncompromisingly humanitarian Somerville suggested that, much as she hoped those peoples' extinction could be averted, it seemed to be 'the design of Providence to supplant the savage by civilized man in the continent of Australia as well as in North America'.¹²⁷ Like his fellow evangelical Prichard, Miller's whole *Testimony* lecture opposed the view that God had intended such tragedies. Much as he admired Cromwell's Protestant convictions, his allusion to the results of the Protestant plantations in Ireland hardly covers the colonists in glory: he describes a humanitarian catastrophe, still reverberating centuries later. The fate of the Irish Gaels, so redolent of dispossessed Scottish Gaels in Miller's own time, casts its shadow back over the colonial scenario which Miller sees as endangering other deprived peoples. His predictions of racial extinction expose the dark side of colonial triumphalism, just as his overall argument is pitted against white supremacism.

We may wonder why Miller did not more openly condemn the process of population replacement he described in *Testimony*. The book's genre may explain this. Miller's attacks on abuses of power by lairds and rulers appear in his numerous political and social commentaries before and after his *Testimony* lecture. But *Testimony* is a work of cosmology, exploring the ways of Providence and the shape of earth history. One does not read cosmology for political activism. *Testimony's* discussion of humanity's place in Creation is detached and remote, expounding general causal patterns rather than directly intervening in political debates. Fortunately, Miller's numerous other, more politically engaged writings humanize the sometimes chilling panorama presented in *Testimony* and help us to read between its lines.

120 [Charles Dickens], 'The Noble Savage', *Household Words*, no. 168 (11 June 1853), pp. 337-9, at p. 339.

121 Anthony Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand*, 2 vols (London, 1872), vol. 2, p. 87.

122 'The Voice from the Pacific', *Witness*, 16 December 1846, p. 2; 'The Massacre in Cochin China', *Witness*, 3 July 1847, p. 2; 'The Mexican Invasion – Its Lesson', *Witness*, 19 May 1847, p. 2.

123 Trollope, *Australia*, vol. 2, p. 85.

124 Miller, *Testimony*, p. 254.

125 'Tahiti', *Witness*, 21 November 1846, p. 2; 'Voice from the Pacific'.

126 Miller, *Testimony*, pp. 255 and 252.

127 Somerville, *Physical Geography*, vol. 2, pp. 269-70.

Conclusion

Taken out of context, Miller's discussion in *Testimony* of marginalized peoples seems inexcusable today. But in fact, as I have shown, its aim was to refute, not support, the new racisms emerging in his time. Despite his subordinate status in the elite scientific community, Miller boldly and publicly opposed his own former mentor Agassiz and others at the then cutting edge. *Testimony* is not a work of political polemic, but its argument is consistent with Miller's other campaigns on behalf of the downtrodden around the world. In all his writings, Miller was strongly and consistently anti-racist as well as anti-slavery, repeatedly emphasizing the fact that all races had the same human nature, potential and inherent capacities. He traced racial differences not to inherent, natural or God-given inequalities, but to unequal upbringing, opportunities and environment. In Enlightenment and evangelical manner, he used his knowledge of abuse, injustice and deprivation in Scotland to bear on what he imagined to be the conditions of other peoples around the world.

In modern terms, these were liberal convictions: not nature but nurture, not genes but environment. In a Victorian context, Miller's approach was decidedly old-fashioned. As with Prichard, his philosophical conservatism and evangelicalism enabled him to sidestep the most toxic aspects of the new race science, and even to anticipate some aspects of much later anti-racist thinking on race and class. His concept of reversible 'degradation' reflects then-current understandings of heredity, but it also has affinities with the modern liberal concepts of inherited poverty, illness and demoralization that developed in twentieth-century Western social sciences in reaction against decades of scientific racism.¹²⁸

At the same time, Miller's writings force us to acknowledge the ethnocentric paternalism that he fully endorsed, as did all other anti-racist campaigners well into the twentieth century. In Miller's day these included not only Prichard and Somerville, but also the African-American Douglass and the Native American Kahkewaquonaby: nineteenth-century ideologies of progress through education and enlightenment in the Western mould were too powerful for even the most radical campaigners to resist. Unacceptable as it is today, though, their paternalism concerning extra-modern societies and the rural and urban poor formed the very standpoint from which these individuals were able to convince people of *their own time* that racism, despotism and other injustices were wrong. And with hindsight, we can see that their campaigns laid the foundations for the more far-reaching critiques of racism current today. This is what it means to recognize that anti-racism has a history. If we can now question Miller's and Douglass's assumptions about the superiority of Western norms of civility, and their disparaging and patronizing views about certain other peoples' physical appearances and ways of life, this is partly thanks to their unsparing efforts to speak truth to power, reasserting ties of common humanity that transcend cultural or racial differences.

Stephen Jay Gould, writing of Blumenbach's and Darwin's failure to hold present-day liberal attitudes, commented:

*If I choose to impose individual blame for all past social ills, there will be no one left to like in some of the most fascinating periods of our history. Though I hold no shred of sympathy for active persecutors, I cannot excoriate individuals who acquiesced passively in a standard societal judgment.*¹²⁹

Nobody is beyond criticism, especially those whom we hold up for public admiration. But the 'standard societal judgment' espoused by Miller was part of the very fabric of his genuine achievements. Throughout his editorial career, Miller devoted near-superhuman energy to opposing abuses of power at home and abroad, combatting some of the most pernicious inequalities between classes, churches, nations and peoples – besides countering that inequality in practice by teaching readers of all classes how to think, and how to make right use of the gifts they had been given as members of the human race. In pursuing this goal with such single-minded determination, he broke himself. The least that he deserves from us today is our recognition.

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¹²⁸ See, for example, Jackson and Weidman, *Race*, pp. 177-93.

¹²⁹ Gould, *Mismeasure of Man*, p. 419.



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