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OF

FRANZ BOAS

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BY

ROBERT H. LOWIE

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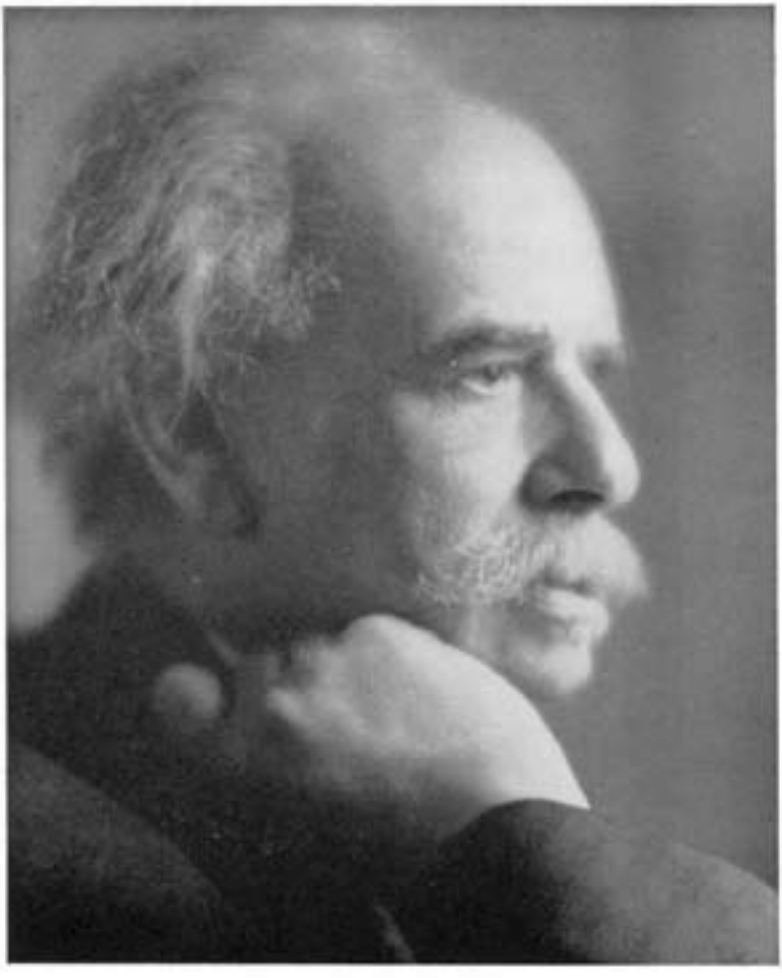

Franz Boas.

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BY ROBERT H. LOWIE

Franz Boas, for many years the undisputed dean of American anthropologists, was born in Minden, Westphalia on July 9, 1858. The son of educated parents in easy circumstances, he enjoyed standard preparatory instruction; and to the high ethical teaching imbibed in the household he referred feelingly in an open letter to President Von Hindenburg (March 27, 1933).

Entering the University of Heidelberg in 1877, he later shifted to Bonn and ultimately to Kiel, where he took his Ph.D. in 1881. Though his major interests then lay in physics and geography—his dissertation dealt with the recognition of the color of water—, his principal professor, Theobald Fischer, directed him also towards the historical and ethnographic aspects of geography. Through the mathematical training acquired during his university days Boas was subsequently able to follow, critically and constructively, the rise of biometrics and its anthropological applications. But he did not narrowly specialize. For example, he read Gustav Theodor Fechner, including the delightfully humorous *Vier Paradoxa*. From his son-in-law, Dr. Cecil Yampolsky, I learn that Boas's letters of this period have been carefully preserved and that they reveal the nascent investigator's ardor for research. Publication of the correspondence would be a great boon, for it is likely to reveal intimate glimpses of the writer's personality, such as are all too rarely vouchsafed by his monographs and books.

[1] The American Anthropological Association has issued an obituary memoir (Memoir 61, 1943), which contains a complete bibliography and articles on Boas as a man (A. L. Kroeber), an ethnologist (Ruth Benedict), a linguist (M. B. Emeneau), a physical anthropologist (Melville J. Herskovits), a folklorist (Gladys A. Reichard), and an archeologist (J. Alden Mason). I have drawn upon this publication, especially on Kroeber's biographical essay.

Two years after the doctorate came the crucial expedition to Baffinland, ostensibly in the interests of geographical exploration, but ushering in a new era in Boas's life and in the history of Eskimo ethnography. Homeward bound, Boas paid his first visit to the United States and to New York. On his return to Germany he attached himself as an assistant to the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, the institution founded and headed by Adolf Bastian; and in 1886 he received permission to lecture at the University as a Docent. Doubtless he regularly attended the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory, meeting its ruling spirit, the great pathologist Rudolf Virchow, to whom years later Boas paid a glowing obituary tribute (*Science,* n. s., 16: 441-445, 1902). It would be most interesting to know how these congenial intellects interacted, but nothing specific on their relationship is known. The obvious similarities between the two men have been repeatedly noted—their keen, analytical powers, their exceptional capacities for varied work, their independence, moral courage, and alert social consciousness. Similarly, it would be worth knowing to what extent Bastian influenced the younger man. Conceivably Boas's insistence on definite proof of cultural diffusion goes back to this source, but it is quite as plausibly explained in terms of Boas's own mentality. What personal intercourse with the older man doubtless did provide was an intimate knowledge of Bastian's theoretical views, often veiled for the mere reader by the most crabbed of styles.

The expedition to Baffinland yielded a number of papers, both popular and technical, on the region, the ethnographic publications culminating in the monograph on "The Central Eskimo" (6th Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington, 1888). In the meantime Boas found a new realm to conquer. A party of Bella Coola Indians exhibited in Berlin and the ample collections of the Museum stimulated an interest in northwestern North America. Boas pumped the natives for linguistic information, published the data secured,

and in 1886 himself set forth for the coast of British Columbia. Thus started a notable research programme that occupied him literally until his death.

Returning to New York in 1887, Boas accepted a position as Assistant Editor of *Science* and married Marie Krackowizer, the daughter of an Austrian physician and Forty-eighter who had gained distinction in America both as a medical man and a political reformer. Henceforth the United States became Boas's home.

The British Association for the Advancement of Science had created a committee for the study of the tribes of British Columbia. From 1888 on, during Edward B. Tylor's chairmanship, Boas repeatedly revisited the Northwest coast under this body's auspices. His early reports bear witness to the range of his interests, which took in not only ethnography, but also linguistics and somatology. Sometime during these years Boas visited Tylor and Francis Galton in England, men for whom he retained a profound respect, which *more suo* did not preclude critical dissent. Here again it would be instructive to learn more about the measure of their direct influence. Tylor's famous paper on the application of statistics to sociological problems (1889) certainly impressed Boas; for a while, he told me, it seemed as though everything could be solved by the methods there outlined. Galton he regarded as the true father of biometrics, for which Karl Pearson had furnished the technical apparatus. He recognized, of course, Pearson's exceptional ability and once tried to visit him in England; but Pearson, though he had referred very cordially to Boas in the second edition of *The Grammar of Science,* for some reason declined to see him.

In 1888 Boas accepted a docentship at Clark University, remaining there until 1892, when he had his and America's first anthropological Ph.D. student, A. F. Chamberlain. He left Clark to become F. W. Putnam's chief assistant at the anthropological exhibits of the Chicago World's Fair, the core of the subsequent Field (Columbian) Museum. At this new

institution he served as curator of anthropology, but was superseded by Wm. H. Holmes. A year or two later he accepted an assistant curatorship under Putnam at the American Museum of Natural History, a position soon combined with a lecturership at Columbia. At that time this institution offered anthropological work under several distinct auspices, Ripley of *The Races of Europe* fame lecturing on that subject in the department of economics, while Livingston Farrand held forth on comparative sociology, religion, and art in the department of psychology. In 1889, however, Boas was appointed to head a new department of anthropology, with Farrand as his adjunct. Two years later he also became Putnam's successor at the American Museum.

His dual responsibility enabled Boas to bring students into contact with anthropological collections and, above all, to provide them with opportunities for field work under the auspices of the Museum. During this period developed the most ambitious research project of his career, the Morris K. Jesup Expedition, actually a series of expeditions designed to shed light on Asiatic-American relationships. Boas's collaborators included Farrand, Harlan I. Smith, and other Americans, as well as several noted European scholars, such as Waldemar Bogoras, Waldemar Jochelson, and Berthold Laufer. In this connection and later Boas evinced a rare capacity for enlisting the coöperation of men qualified to advance science. It was during his curatorship, too, that Roland B. Dixon, assisted by A. M. Tozzer, undertook the first strictly scientific investigation of a Californian tribe, culminating in the model monograph on *The Northern Maidu*. Even unacademic men—intelligent whalers, such as Captains Mutch and Comer—were drafted to make systematic observations on the Central Eskimo.

Several students, subsequently distinguished in the science, won their ethnographer's spurs under Boas's jointly curatorial and professorial tutelage—A. L. Kroeber, Clark Wissler, William Jones. Another fruitful institutional connection

resulted from Boas's appointment (1901) as Honorary Philologist of the Bureau of American Ethnology. It facilitated the accumulation and ultimate publication of vast bodies of linguistic material, as evidenced in the *Handbook of American Indian Languages* (1911, 1922).

A clash with Dr. Hermon C. Bumpus, then director of the American Museum, concerning methods of installation and the generic issue of departmental autonomy, led to Boas's resignation (1905) as curator and for many years severed the intimate bonds of the Museum department with that at Columbia. However, he soon found other outlets for his surplus energy. In 1908 he became editor of the *Journal of American Folk-Lore;* in 1910 he helped create the International School of American Archaeology and Ethnology in Mexico; in 1917 he founded the *International Journal of American Linguistics;* and for many years he edited the *Publications of the American Ethnological Society.* In 1908, moreover, the United States Immigration Commission authorized him to undertake a somatological study of European immigrants. The task once more involved the careful planning of a large-scale project with the aid of many assistants. Nor did personal field work cease: he directed excavations in Mexico and Porto Rico, went to the Kootenay and to the Keresan Indians, even revisited the Kwakiutl in his old age. Besides all this he regularly attended scientific congresses in America and Europe.

Boas's many-sided scientific activities found national and international recognition. He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in April, 1900; was a member of the American Philosophical Society; president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1931 and of the New York Academy of Sciences in 1910. Among his foreign honors may be mentioned the doctorate bestowed by Oxford University.

World War I and its aftermath brought to the fore some little suspected facets of Boas's personality. He had long

acquired American citizenship, but like many others found himself beset by a conflict of emotions. He was an internationalist if ever there was one; but he was also steeped in the culture of his native land, had close relatives living there, was linked by personal and professional ties with innumerable Germans. What is more, he had been in his 'teens when the millennial dream of a united *Reich* had come true; had lived through a period of spectacular positive achievement in Germany. His attitude could not well be that of the Forty-eighter immigrants. He himself was aware of the difference and—probably thinking of his uncle, Dr. A. Jacobi—alluded in conversation to this disagreement between the two generations of German-Americans.

Feeling strongly, as always, on matters of principle, he bitterly resented the pro-Ally attitude of Americans as a breach of neutrality. "Oh, if we had a Grover Cleveland in the White House!" he exclaimed once, presumably referring to the Venezuelan episode. His was not a temperament that could restrain utterance in such a crisis. He wrote letters to *The New York Times* and to *The Nation;* contributed articles to *The Dial* and the *Illinois Staatszeitung;* preached a sermon on internationalism at St. Clark's Church; and parried a move to investigate the loyalty of the Columbia faculty by reading to a class his ideas on patriotism.

To be sure, only misunderstanding or malice could construe his stand as nationalistically pro-Kaiser. His posthumously issued pronouncements dating back to the period (*Race and Democratic Society,* New York, 1945) read very well in 1946. But thirty years ago they jarred upon people on the verge of war or actually embattled. Such auditors did not like to hear that their individualism and democracy, rooted in local conditions, were not necessarily superior to a polity like Germany's with her very different history. Still less did they thrill to the idea that obligations to mankind ought to take precedence of patriotism; nor were their susceptibilities assuaged by the admission that patriots—like the witch-

hunters of an earlier period—might be utterly sincere and morally pure. Boas, however, pursued his way, unmindful of general unpopularity and the threat of academic discipline.

Post-bellum days saw him at the unprovocative, but equally novel task of organizing the Emergency Society for German and Austrian Science. The man who had hitherto begrudged every minute of social life as an encroachment on professional work now lavished precious hours on routine jobs, on correspondence, on the search for new contacts that might aid in restoring the imperiled life of German science. This labor of love and self-abnegation was duly appreciated by its beneficiaries. When he applied for a visa in 1924, the German Consul at New York declined the customary fee. At the International Americanists' Congress held in Hamburg in 1930 Professor Sapper conveyed to Boas a diploma of honorary membership in the Geographical Society of Würzburg, at the same time lauding his efforts on behalf of German scholarship, "for many a scientific post was able to resist the financial pressure of those days solely thanks to his organization of German-American aid." Similarly, Brockhaus's encyclopaedia celebrated his "grosszügige Organisation der Unterstützung der deutschen Wissenschaft" (3:66, 1929).

Maintaining singular mental alertness, Boas remained at Columbia long beyond the usual length of service. He became "emeritus in residence" in 1936, emeritus in 1938, but retained his old office at the University. As a septuagenarian he continued to loom large at international congresses, still made trips to Europe, and continued to inspire students and visitors from foreign parts. His declining years were fraught with sadness. He lost his younger son and his wife in automobile accidents, and his second daughter through an insidious disease. Such solace as was possible he found in unremitting scientific work.

The rise of Hitler stirred him to the depths of his soul. That the country whose cultural heritage he gloried in, the country on whose behalf he had suffered abuse and ostracism

in the first World War, should flout the principles dear to him was an unbearable thought. Besides, being of Jewish extraction, he had relatives in Germany whose very existence was threatened by the *Umbruch*. He reacted once more in character, writing an open letter to President Hindenburg, denouncing the tenets of Nazism in the daily press or in popular magazines; dragging himself when already enfeebled by old age and an encroaching heart disease to the platform at public gatherings in order to inveigh against Hitlerian excesses.

His campaign against racism naturally brought him a wider following than the monographs on the Kwakiutl or even the academic treatment of race in *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911, 1938). He became the spokesman not only of disinterested humanitarians, but also of Leftists and Communists. Communists are not universally popular, and even in quarters averse to Nazi philosophy the association with them sufficed to make Boas a suspect fellow-traveler. The facts seem to be as follows. Boas had a live social sense that automatically made him favor the underdog, so that he was unquestionably a liberal rather than a conservative in his general outlook. On the other hand, he loathed regimentation, whether by a college president, a party machine, or an unenlightened public opinion. When Lily Braun, the renegade daughter of a Prussian general, published her memoirs in 1908, Boas read them and was repelled by their picture of Social Democratic party tyranny. In possibly my very last conversation with him, a year or so before his death, he broached the subject of the Bolsheviks, summarizing his position in these words: "The Communists have done many very good things, they have also done many very bad things." Assuredly this was not the voice of blind partisanship. As for Marxist doctrines, he had all his life recoiled from closed systems, hence could not accept a philosophy of economic determinism or any other dogmatic scheme. On the other hand, no one was less likely than he to avoid contacts simply because they might arouse

general disapproval. "Fellow-traveler", "pink", and "red" were to him meaningless catchwords.

On December 21, 1942 Boas was lunching with Professor Paul Rivet (Paris) at the Columbia Faculty Club in the company of several colleagues. The guest of honor has graphically recorded the experience (*Renaissance,* 1:313f., 1943). Boas had just voiced his contempt for racism, when the fatal stroke occurred: "Sans un cri, sans une plainte, nous le vîmes se renverser en arrière; quelques râles, un grand cerveau avait cessé de penser."

* * * * *

Boas's services to anthropology were so great and manifold that occasionally enthusiastic disciples unfamiliar with history talked and wrote as though his predecessors and contemporaries were negligible. One obituary article declared: "He found anthropology a collection of wild guesses and a happy hunting ground for the romantic lover of primitive things; he left it a discipline in which theories could be tested and in which he had delimited possibilities from impossibilities." This is to parade Boas as a mythological culture-hero creating something out of nothing. The conception would have been intolerable to Boas, who fully esteemed what had been done by E. B. Tylor, Lewis H. Morgan, Eduard Hahn, Karl von den Steinen, and others. Indeed, he was especially appreciative of men who had achieved what he himself never attempted—an intimate, yet authentic, picture of aboriginal life. I have hardly ever heard him speak with such veritable enthusiasm as when lauding Bogoras's account of the Chukchi, Rasmussen's of the Eskimo, Turi's of the Lapps.

In the following paragraphs, then, I shall try to sketch Boas's achievement in perspective and without unfairness to others.

* * * * *

To begin with an obvious fact, he approached the study of man from every angle: as Rivet puts it, "son oeuvre embrasse le problème humain dans son entier . . . . Tout ce qui concerne l'homme sollicite sa curiosité . . . ." What is

more, from the start he saw the need of acquiring in each branch of the science the highest degree of technical equipment. The physical anthropologist must use the tools of biometrics; the linguist must become a phonetician and an analyst along the lines of Indo-European philology; the ethnographer must envisage the subtler as well as the more obvious phases of social life—folk-literature, music, the subjective attitudes of primitive man no less than artifacts or social structure. Nothing is more remarkable than the systematic way in which Boas, trained in quite different fields, acquired the techniques requisite for the highest type of work in the several subdivisions of anthropology. Even in archeology, which he treated with comparative neglect, his work has been declared to show "a perfect appreciation of the problems and the best archeological techniques."

Further, this many-sided virtuosity was justified by the solidity of his results. Everywhere he saw new problems and devised new methods of attack. Even his archeological contributions, Mason assures us, "all have been substantiated by later and more detailed work. They have formed the basis for all later research in this region." What is more, they preceded by several years the stratigraphic approach that rightly shed luster on Kidder's and Nelson's work in the Pueblo area. Again, in linguistics, Boas was, if not the first, yet the most persistent "to analyze exotic material without forcing it into the strait-jacket of the familiar" (Emeneau). As a physical anthropologist he deprecated sheer taxonomy; defined race on a profounder basis; demonstrated the (*nota bene,* limited) plasticity of the human organism; studied the phenomena of growth on a major scale; and was one of the earliest investigators to note segregation in hybrid human groups. His ethnological contributions were so varied that two must suffice for purposes of illustration. He was the first to inquire into the aboriginal artist's subjective attitude toward his tasks; and, paralleling the work of Homeric scholars, he correlated the social life depicted in a people's

folk-literature with their observed culture. In theory he may be described as an epistemologist rather than a metaphysician: he suspected traditional labels and catchwords, inquired into their empirical foundation, and often arrived at a new and illuminating re-classification of data.

Tastes differ in science, as in everything else. Hence Boas's achievement was bound to disappoint certain minds. Keenly aware of the gaps in our knowledge, he refused to fill them with plausible speculations resulting in a spuriously complete picture of the whole field. He proclaimed no all-embracing "laws" and, except for his views on race, voiced no simple message that might appeal to large masses. In point of form he lacked the polished diction of a Frazer or the sprightly humor of his friend, Karl von den Steinen. Nor did he complete a single large-scale portrait of a tribal culture, not even of his beloved Kwakiutl.

Similarly, his teaching was not designed for everyone's palate. The most effective trainer of anthropological investigators was not an ideal pedagogue. He was, indeed, uncanny in his capacity to harness a student's skills for the advancement of science, but he did not trouble to ferret out a learner's needs at a particular stage of progress. Novices were not pampered with milk for babes. Fearful lest they turn dilettanti, he imposed on virtually every newcomer in my day his course on statistical theory (usually audited by professors from other departments) and another on American Indian languages. His ethnographic lectures rarely, if ever, systematically surveyed the area announced, but discussed the problems that engaged his attention. Other men's views he often treated in a way likely to mislead the immature, for by concentrating on controversial issues he sometimes conveyed the impression of total condemnation when there was merely partial dissent. One might easily carry away the idea that he had a low opinion of Tylor or Ratzel, as was certainly not the case. His critique of environmentalism, for instance, was urged so forcibly that for years I failed to grasp how carefully he

took cognizance of geographical factors. As to the skepticism he instilled by precept and example, he himself was at times smitten with qualms, wondering whether he was inhibiting the free play of the imagination, which, contrary to appearances, he rated very high. One student summarized his total reaction after a seminar of Boas's as follows: "All books are bad; articles *may* be good", the suppressed implication being that even they seldom were.

Yet he valued high-class work even when done by men of utterly different personality. Of Bogoras and Rasmussen I have already spoken. He keenly appreciated Francis Galton, William James, William Morton Wheeler, Karl von den Steinen. Of his Columbia colleagues I think he rated E. B. Wilson highest. "*He* is a first-rate man", he once said to me. Thomas Hunt Morgan he accepted as "very good", but with qualifications. Among Washington scientists, Karl Grove Gilbert enjoyed his esteem. Contrary to opinions occasionally heard, his scientific judgment was little warped by personal animosity. There was not much love lost between him and certain Washingtonian colleagues; but he described one of his bitterest enemies to me as a man of great native ability and gave another full credit for founding a technical journal.

To revert to his teaching, my novitiate probably came at the worst possible period for establishing rapport, for it was the time of his feud with the director of the American Museum. Boas seemed perpetually busy and preoccupied. I actually dreaded meeting him on the way to classes in Schermerhorn Hall. Utter silence would follow a curt "Good morning" till I found the situation intolerable. "Have you read Kollmann's article on Pygmies in the last issue of *Globus*?" I once asked him on one of these embarrassing occasions. He answered, "No"; I offered a few remarks on the subject; then we again walked on in silence. Having a conference with him was something of an event for A. B. Lewis, A. A. Goldenweiser, Paul Radin, and myself; Speck and Sapir, with their philological background, enjoyed, I think, a rather easier

entrée. This also had held true in Kroeber's and William Jones's time, and as a visitor in later periods I was able to watch his free and easy relations with subsequent generations of his disciples. Accordingly, I cannot but ascribe his earlier reserve to the tribulations of the era.

Systematic information, as indicated, he did not vouchsafe in ethnological courses, *that* the student was supposed somehow to get for himself. Yet it was not an easy task at a time when the good books had grown antiquated, so that trustworthy knowledge was obtainable only by wading through tomes of unilluminating descriptive detail. However, Boas was singularly unexacting in regard to a student's factual information. Probably there is not nowadays a single undergraduate major in any of our large anthropological departments who does not control a wider range of data than I did when Boas deemed me fit for the doctorate. It was enough that I had worked in the field, gained a theoretical conception there, and thrashed out the issue in a formal paper. On the other hand, he came very near holding up A. B. Lewis, whose knowledge was incomparably superior to mine, but whose dissertation discussed nothing of theoretical significance. Berthold Laufer, who liked it, observed querulously to me, "Boas always wants a thesis to have a point!"

Why did we reverence so indifferent a pedagogue as a great teacher? For the same reason, no doubt, that in later years mature men and women—Elsie Clews Parsons, Pliny Earle Goddard, and George A. Dorsey, for example—hailed him as their leader. Yet Goddard had come to New York full of skepticism about Boas; and Dorsey had been at swords' points with him in the American Anthropological Association. The explanation is simple. Here was a scientist primarily interested in science—not in the *organization* of research, not in the personalities of colleagues, not in a display of his cleverness, but in the problems that sprang from his data, in the quest of the truth. He seemed to personify the very spirit of science, and with his high seriousness—unsurpassed by any investi-

gator I have known in any sphere—he communicated something of that spirit to others. Therein lies his greatness as a teacher.

Constituted as he was, he could not avoid misunderstandings either as to his views or his character. Even scientific guilds live by slogans and balk at finer distinctions. Boas threw out a hint how totemism might have evolved in British Columbia and was forthwith credited with a universal theory of the phenomenon. Pointing to the positive achievements of colored races, he rejected the arguments of racists, hence was either hailed or denounced as a dogmatic equalitarian. Yet he clearly formulated in both editions of his most popular book a rather different position: "It may be well to state here once more with some emphasis that it would be erroneous to claim as proved that there are no differences in the mental make-up of the Negro race taken as a whole and of any other race taken as a whole, and that their activities should run in exactly the same lines" (*The Mind of Primitive Man,* New York, 1938, p. 270). Again, his championship of a strictly limited plasticity was misinterpreted as a denial of heredity. Some forty years ago, at a joint meeting of anthropologists and psychologists, even his friend, James McKeen Cattell, contrasted Boas's environmentalism and Thorndike's emphasis on heredity. Boas was at once on his feet, protesting that he, too, attached very great importance to heredity.

Boas's aversion to systems and sweeping generalizations lent color to the charge that he was absorbed in detail—content, like Browning's Grammarian, with settling *Hoti's* business and giving the doctrine of the enclitic *De*. For, sharing Bastian's and Haddon's eagerness to rescue rapidly vanishing data, he did devote enormous energy to securing and making accessible raw material. It is easy to go through a thousand pages of his monographs without encountering a line of interpretation. But that was only one side of him and, of course, the least interesting. The faithful recorder was, above all, a thinker. I remember his suddenly electrifying a seminar with

the statement that he was concerned with detail only as a way to understanding human mentality. On another occasion he quoted von den Steinen's saying that we must look at primitive man without the spectacles of our civilization; Boas amended it to read that we must look at *ourselves* without spectacles. He was ever aware of the preconceptions with which, as Virchow once put it, we are all "crammed full from infancy on." He once told me how hard he had had to struggle to overcome early rationalistic influences; and the burden of all his ethnological teaching, paralleling his linguistic position, was that every philosophy and form of behavior must be apprehended from the insider's point of view.

As explained, he was not a doctrinaire on the subject of race. It is worth adding that he was not a sentimentalist either. He befriended Indians, but unless (like Jones) they had qualified academically he did not welcome them to his classes. Similarly, he was strongly suspicious of any prospective disciples who were goaded by a romantic interest in the noble Red Man rather than by the urge to advance knowledge.

Notwithstanding his neglect of customary canons of presentation, Boas was far from lacking in aesthetic appreciation. Characteristically his abiding ethnological interests were primitive art and oral literature. A devotee of music, he played the piano very well for an amateur. Above all other composers he revered Beethoven. "To think that it was possible for such greatness to exist!" I have heard him say. Chopin, on the other hand, repelled him as morbid. In literature he naturally admired Goethe. Some years ago I asked him whether he still occasionally read him. "Of course," was the instant reply. Sheer wit or glamor had no appeal. George Bernard Shaw palled on him. I cited Heine as a parallel, only to have my defense parried with "Well, doesn't *he* tire you?" He was also very critical of Max Reinhart's staging, but somewhat grudgingly admitted the effectiveness of his production of Büchner's *Danton*.

That Boas made enemies is an empirical fact. Its expla-

nation lies partly in circumstances, partly in his personality. For any adult immigrant to adapt himself fully to the folkways of his adoptive country requires a prodigy of flexibility and tact, especially in the peculiarly exacting atmosphere of an Anglo-Saxon society. Boas often appeared ruthless when from his own point of view he was merely candid. He could certainly be very blunt when matters of principle were involved, but then the personalities who make history have rarely been marked by a dainty concern for the sensibilities of queasy souls. On the other hand, no one could be more understanding and kind in basically human situations. As the factotum of the department at the American Museum once confided to me, Dr. Boas had been a strict master, but a generous contributor to any employees' fund. Once, too, Boas disposed of some of his insurance in order to aid a former student in an alleged crisis; he entered with fullest sympathy into the feelings of a young lover or newlywed; and no one could write tenderer notes of condolence on the occasion of a bereavement.

But where no fundamental human factor was involved, empathy was too readily blotted out by contrary emotional urges. In a seminar he once referred to a map in the Swedish journal *Ymer*. "What language is the article in?" asked a student of great erudition, but little initiative. "The map can be understood independently of the language," Boas snarled back. Estrangements from one-time students were in part merely the familiar phenomenon of filial revolt, but in part they resulted from Boas's taking a rational point of view that clashed with the disciple's emotional urges. He was wont to survey the chessboard of anthropological jobs and figure out how science could be best served, then he would try to move anthropologists about like the pawns in a game. His judgment was usually right, but some men and women resented the impersonality of his strategy. One case may be cited as typical. He had secured for an outstanding student an excellent position with superb research opportunities, but in a city without a university and meager in cultural facilities. After a few years

the incumbent grew restive, felt marooned, and eagerly accepted a metropolitan appointment—much to Boas's surprise and disgust. The master found it difficult to understand that extra-scientific motives should have tipped the scales.

Deficiency in empathy was naturally intensified when principles seemed at stake. It was not easy for him to do justice to an ethically uncongenial attitude. In 1919 he excoriated four anthropologists who had mingled intelligence work with research in Latin America during the War. It did not occur to him that, from their point of view, they had been merely discharging a patriotic duty. In other cases he was unwilling to make allowances for human frailty. In 1933 he could not understand the conduct of Germans who welcomed Hitler even when they repudiated his racist programme. The point is not that he disapproved, but that he seemed unable to project himself into the mental state of men who were at once kindly and fervidly patriotic, who were in other words caught in a fearful conflict of humanitarian and nationalistic loyalties. He forgot that one cannot expect every man to be a hero.

Such absorption in his own ideals was, of course, from another angle part and parcel of his greatness. In trying to boil down my admiration for him into a few words, I find that I have been forestalled by Wundt's eulogy on an otherwise very different personality, Gustav Theodor Fechner: "absolute lack of bias [due to tradition] and intrepidity." The mere fact that a view was universally accepted and supported by eminent authority was precisely a ground for skepticism in both Fechner's and Boas's case. Observations Boas had not himself made he was likely to challenge or at least to mistrust. Meeting him in Berkeley in 1914, I dropped the innocent remark that there were many tall women about town. Without directly denying the statement, Boas pooh-poohed its significance: "In a population whose males average 175 cm [he was never at ease with feet and inches] you must expect to find some tall women." A few days later he remarked, "Aren't

there many tall women in Berkeley?" He had by that time observed for himself.

Qualities and men are rightly prized for their rarity. Boas had unusual intellectual powers and extraordinary devotion to science, yet if I were to single out his unequivocal claim to greatness I should rather stress the qualities he shared with Fechner, for it was these that mark him as a figure to be aligned with those who have made human history. The correctness of his attitudes seems quite immaterial; what counts is his remaining true to his vision, with total disregard of whether the mob stigmatized him as "pro-German" at one stage or as "Communist" at another. To have known such a man in the flesh is what I esteem above any of his specific teachings, as, once more to quote Wundt, "an inalienable gain of my life" (*einen unverlierbaren Gewinn meines Lebens*).

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