

# TWO ESSAYS:

ONE

UPON SINGLE VISION WITH TWO EYES;

THE OTHER

ON DEW.

A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. LLOYD, LORD KENYON

AND

AN ACCOUNT

OF

A FEMALE OF THE WHITE RACE OF MANKIND,  
PART OF WHOSE SKIN RESEMBLES THAT OF A NEGRO;

WITH

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE CAUSES OF THE DIFFERENCES IN  
COLOUR AND FORM BETWEEN THE WHITE AND NEGRO  
RACES OF MEN.

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BY THE LATE WILLIAM CHARLES WELLS,  
M. D. F. R. S. L. & E.

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WITH

*A MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE,*

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

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**A C C O U N T**  
OF A FEMALE  
OF THE WHITE RACE OF MANKIND,  
PART OF WHOSE SKIN  
RESEMBLES THAT OF A NEGRO, &c.

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**I**NSTANCES of the absence of the black colour, in the whole or part of the skin in persons of the negro race, are not very uncommon; but there is, I believe, no one upon record of an individual of the white race having any part of the body, covered with a skin similar to that of a negro. The following account, therefore, of such an instance, will, perhaps, be acceptable to the philosophical public. I have been enabled to form it by the permission of Dr. Turner, one of my colleagues at St. Thomas's Hospital, into which the person, whose case I am to describe, was lately admitted by him, on account of some bodily ailment.

Hannah West, the subject of this account, was born in a village in Sussex, about three miles distant from the sea, and is now in the twenty-third year of her age. Both of her parents were natives of the same county. Her father was a footman in a gentleman's family, and died while she was very young. She cannot, therefore, remember his appearance; but she has never heard, that it was in any way extraordinary. Her mother is still alive, and has black hair and hazel eyes, but a fair skin, without any stain or mark upon it. West was the only child of her father; but her mother, having married a second time, has had eleven other children. Nine of these are living, all of whom are without any blackness of the skin. Her mother, she says, received a fright, while pregnant with her, by accidentally treading on a live lobster; and to this was attributed the blackness of part of her skin, which was observed at her birth.

West is somewhat above the middle size, is rather of a full habit, and till she came to London from Sussex, which was about four months ago, always enjoyed very good health. The hair of her head is of a light brown colour, and is very soft; her eyes of a faint blue; her nose prominent and a little aquiline; her lips thin; the skin of the greater portion of the uncovered

parts of her body very white ; in short, her appearance is in every respect, except the one which has been mentioned, that of a very fair female of the white race of mankind.

The parts covered by the black skin are, the left shoulder, arm, fore-arm, and hand. All these parts, however, are not universally black ; for on the outside of the fore-arm, a little below the elbow, a stripe of white skin commences, about two inches in breadth, and differing in no circumstance from the skin of the other arm, which, proceeding upwards, gradually bends under the arm, and at the arm-pit joins with the white skin of the trunk of the body. The black skin, wherever it is contiguous to the white, terminates rather abruptly, so that its boundary may always be distinctly traced.

The colour of the black skin is not every where uniformly dark. Thus, the skin of the back of the hand, and of the wrist, is marked by fine lines of a reddish black, which cross one another at right angles, while the small rectangular spaces bounded by these lines are entirely black. Part of the cuticle of the hand having been removed by exciting a blister, the reddish lines were found to be the summits of very thin folds of the true skin, which were raised above its general level, and were less thickly covered with the black *rete mucosum* than the

more depressed parts. Their reddish colour was, no doubt, occasioned by the external air, as the skin of the other hand was red from that cause. All the other parts of the black skin are fully as dark, as I found on making the comparison, as the corresponding parts of a dark negro, and are much darker than those of many negroes. One part, indeed, of her skin is considerably darker than the corresponding part in any negro whom I have seen; for the palm of her hand and inside of her fingers are black, whereas these parts in a negro are only of a tawny hue.

A considerable part of the black skin is as smooth to the touch, as the skin of the white arm; but the cuticular lines in the black arm, appeared everywhere stronger to the sight, than similar lines in the arm of a black man, whose skin I examined at the same time. In the greater part, however, of West's black skin, those lines sink deeper beneath its general surface, than the lines of any other human skin that I have seen, which was not evidently diseased. These depressions are extremely narrow, and proceed chiefly in one direction, obliquely upwards and inwards from the outer part of the arm. On removing a small portion of the cuticle, they were found to be occasioned by the sinking down of that membrane between very

narrow and slightly elevated folds of the true skin, nearly contiguous to one another, which held the direction mentioned.

A great part of the black shoulder exhibits a singular appearance; for, near to the back bone, the skin, over an extent of six inches in length and two in breadth, resembles a thick coat of pitch, or black paint, which by drying had split into a great number of small square portions. The fissures in the skin are about a line in depth. Mr. James Wilson, teacher of anatomy, and fellow of the Royal Society, who saw this person once along with me, pulled away a little of this black matter, upon which several narrow processes of the skin, perpendicular to the plane of the part, became visible.

Winslow says, that the cuticle of a negro is black, and that the contrary supposition arose from its tenuity and transparency, in like manner as a thin film of black horn appears almost colourless. I have found by my own observations, that this opinion of Winslow is just; and I found also, that the cuticle of West's black skin is likewise dark. I may add, that the nails of her black fingers are darker than those of the white, and darker also than those of a negro's hand.

Sir Everard Home, who likewise saw this person once along with me, thought that the

black arm smelt more strongly than the white. I made the experiment immediately after him, and thought so too. But on repeating it several times with more attention, I could perceive no difference. It seems to me, indeed, from a similar experiment made on the arm of a dark negro, whose appearance did not lead me to suppose, that he had been very careful with respect to the cleanliness of his person, either that all negroes do not possess a strong smell, or that this does not proceed from all parts of their skin, since I could perceive no difference between the odour of his arm, and that of the white arm of West.

On the black fore-arm are about a dozen small hard substances, the largest of which are of the size of a common pea. Some of them are very black; others are less black, and one or two are of a reddish black colour. I thought, at first, that they consisted of thickened cuticle, but I found afterwards, that they readily bled upon being punctured with a needle.

The upper and outer part of the black arm has a number of very black hairs growing from it, some of which are three quarters of an inch long. The inner part of the arm, which is equally black, is free from hairs.

The black arm is as firm to the touch, and as fleshy as the white; and according to the young

woman's own report, there is no difference in their strength or feelings of any kind.

The last circumstance which I shall mention concerning her is, that no change has taken place within her remembrance, either in the degree or extent of the blackness of her skin.

Two inferences may, I think, be made from what has been related respecting Hannah West.

The first is, that the blackness of the skin in negroes is no proof of their forming a different species of men from the white race.

When a white man is much exposed to the action of the sun, his skin becomes more or less brown, and as the intensity of this colour, after equal degrees of exposure, is generally proportional to the heat of the climatè, it has hence been supposed, that the colour of negroes is derived from a very great degree of the same cause. But this conclusion seems to me very faulty. For, setting aside that a white man, rendered brown by the sun's rays, begets as white children as those of another of the same race, the colour of whose skin had never been altered, it appears to me probable, from observations lately made on two negroes, that the action of the sun tends rather to diminish than augment the colour of their race. Both of those persons were born in European settlements, and had been accustomed to have their

bodies clothed, yet, in both, the trunk, arms, and lower extremities, were considerably darker than the face, and in one, were somewhat darker than the hands. But admitting this observation to be of no force, still it must be granted, in consequence of what has been said upon the state of part of West's skin,—that great heat is not indispensably necessary to render the human colour black; which is the second conclusion to be drawn from the account which has been given of her.

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On considering the difference of colour between Europeans and Africans, a view has occurred to me of this subject, which has not been given by any author, whose works have fallen into my hands. I shall, therefore, venture to mention it here, though at the hazard of its being thought rather fanciful than just.

There is no circumstance, perhaps, in which these two races differ so much, as in their capacity to bear, with impunity, the action of the causes of many diseases. The fatality to Europeans of the climate of the middle parts of Africa, which are, however, inhabited by negroes without injury to their health, is well known. Let it then be supposed, that any number of Europeans were to be sent to that

country, and that they were to subsist themselves by their bodily labour; it seems certain, that the whole colony would soon become extinct. On the other hand, the greater liability of negroes in Europe to be attacked with fatal diseases is equally well established. If, therefore, a colony of the former race were brought to Europe, and forced to labour in the open air for their subsistence, many of them would quickly die, and the remainder, from their inability to make great bodily exertions in cold weather, and their being frequently diseased, would be prevented from working an equal number of days in the year with the whites. The consequence would be, that without taking farther into account the unfriendliness of the climate to them, their gains would be inadequate to the maintenance of themselves and their families. They would thence become feeble, and be rendered still more incapable of supporting life by their labour. In the mean time, their children would die from want, or diseases induced by deficient or improper nourishment, and in this way, a colony of the negro race in a cold country would quickly cease to exist.

This difference in the capacity of the two races to resist the operation of the causes of many diseases, I assume as a fact, though I am

utterly unable to explain it. I do not, however, suppose, that their different susceptibility of diseases depends, properly, on their difference of colour. On the contrary, I think it probable, that this is only a sign of some difference in them, which, though strongly manifested by its effects in life, is yet too subtle to be discovered by an anatomist after death; in like manner as a human body, which is incapable of receiving the small-pox, differs in no observable thing from another, which is still liable to be affected with that disease.

Regarding then as certain, that the negro race are better fitted to resist the attacks of the diseases of hot climates than the white, it is reasonable to infer, that those, who only approach the black race, will be likewise better fitted to do so, than others who are entirely white. This is, in fact, found to be true, with regard to the mixture of the two races; since mulattoes are much more healthy in hot climates than whites. But amongst men, as well as among other animals, varieties of a greater or less magnitude are constantly occurring. In a civilized country, which has been long peopled, those varieties, for the most part, quickly disappear, from the intermarriages of different families. Thus, if a very tall man be produced, he very commonly marries a woman much less

than himself, and their progeny scarcely differs in size from their countrymen. In districts, however, of very small extent, and having little intercourse with other countries, an accidental difference in the appearance of the inhabitants will often descend to their late posterity. The clan of the Macras, for instance, possess both sides of Loch-Duich in Scotland; but those who inhabit one side of the loch are called the black Macras, and the others the white, from a difference which has always been observed in their complexions. Again, those who attend to the improvement of domestic animals, when they find individuals possessing, in a greater degree than common, the qualities they desire, couple a male and female of these together, then take the best of their offspring as a new stock, and in this way proceed, till they approach as near the point in view, as the nature of things will permit. But, what is here done by art, seems to be done, with equal efficacy, though more slowly, by nature, in the formation of varieties of mankind, fitted for the country which they inhabit. Of the accidental varieties of man, which would occur among the first few and scattered inhabitants of the middle regions of Africa, some one would be better fitted than the others to bear the diseases of the country. This race would consequently multiply, while the others

would decrease, not only from their inability to sustain the attacks of disease, but from their incapacity of contending with their more vigorous neighbours. The colour of this vigorous race I take for granted, from what has been already said, would be dark. But the same disposition to form varieties still existing, a darker and a darker race would in the course of time occur, and as the darkest would be the best fitted for the climate, this would at length become the most prevalent, if not the only race, in the particular country in which it had originated.

In like manner, that part of the original stock of the human race, which proceeded to the colder regions of the earth, would in process of time become white, if they were not originally so, from persons of this colour being better fitted to resist the diseases of such climates, than others of a dark skin.

The cause which I have stated, as likely to have influence on the colour of the human race, would necessarily operate chiefly during its infancy, when a few wandering savages, from ignorance and improvidence, must have found it difficult to subsist throughout the various seasons of the year, even in countries the most favourable to their health. But, when men have acquired the knowledge of agriculture, and other arts, and in consequence adopt a

more refined mode of life, it has been found, that an adherence to their ancient customs and practices will preserve them long as a distinct race from the original inhabitants of the country to which they had emigrated. Examples of this kind are frequent in the islands in the eastern seas in the torrid zone, where the inhabitants of the sea-coast, evidently strangers, are in some degree polished, and of a brown colour, while the ancient natives, who live in the interior parts, are savage and black. Similar facts occur in respect to other species of animals. It seems certain, for instance, that fine woolled sheep, like the Spanish, never both arose and sustained their breed in the northern parts of Europe; yet, by care, this feeble race, after being formed in Spain, has been propagated and preserved in very cold countries. Thus the late Mr. Dryander, the learned librarian of the Royal Society, informed me, that the breed of fine woolled Spanish sheep had been kept perfect in Sweden during a very long term of years, I think he said a century. If, then, my memory be accurate upon this point, we have here an example of a variety of animals, much more liable to be affected by external circumstances than the human race, being preserved without change, in a country very different from their own, by assimilating their new

state as much as possible to their old, during at least fifty generations, that is, during a period equivalent to 1500 years in the history of man.

Hitherto, while speaking of the external appearance of negroes, I have taken notice only of their colour. I shall now say a few words upon their woolly hair, and, according to our notions of beauty, the deformity of their features.

There are several facts which seem to show, that these circumstances are somehow connected with their low state of civilization.

First; the black inhabitants of the Indian Peninsula within the Ganges, who, compared with the African negroes, may be regarded as a polished people, have hair and features much less dissimilar to the European.

Secondly; Woolly heads, and deformed features, appear again, as we proceed further to the east, among the savage inhabitants of New Guinea, and the adjacent islands, at the distance nearly of half of the circumference of our globe from Africa, and consequently without the smallest probability of any communication having ever existed between the two countries.

Lastly; it appears probable from the reliques of ancient art, that the early inhabitants of Egypt were of the negro race. If, then, the negroes of Africa were ever to be civilized, their woolly hair and deformed features would, perhaps, in

a long series of years, like those of the Egyptians, be changed. On the other hand, their present external appearance may possibly be regarded not only as a sign, but as a cause of their degraded condition, by preventing, in some unknown way, the proper developement of their mental faculties; for the African negroes have in all ages been slaves; and the negroes in the eastern seas are in no instance, I believe, masters of their handsomer neighbours, but are in many places in entire subjection to them, though the latter be frequently less numerous.

It will no doubt be objected to what I have advanced respecting the difference of colour between Europeans and Africans, that the Indian inhabitants of the greater part of the immense continent of America have skins nearly of one hue. Plausible reasons may, I think, be given for this fact, consistently with what has been said upon the colour of the two former races; but I forbear trespassing any longer upon the time of the reader, in discussing a subject which admits only of conjectural reasoning.