

II.

NOTICE OF AN IDOL HUMAN HEAD FROM ECUADOR, NOW PRESENTED TO THE MUSEUM BY DR R. H. GUNNING. BY PROFESSOR DUNS, D.D., F.S.A. Scot.

This rare specimen of shrunk human head, when entrusted to me by Dr Gunning for presentation to the Society, was accompanied by a slip of paper bearing the words, *Cabeça reduzida, Pastaza*—a reduced head, Pastaza. It is an exceedingly striking and extreme illustration of the practice widely prevalent, both in ancient and recent times, of artificial deformation of the human head. The subject is of much interest to ethnologists, but too wide for treatment at present. It is suggested by the form now before us, and may be very briefly referred to as introductory to this notice. In all other instances the whole head is subjected to the process. In this one only the integument is specially dealt with. In most others the deformation is worked out during life, but there are many tribes who practise it on the head, both of relatives and enemies, after death;—some by removing certain parts from the skull before it is hung up in their idol houses, or suspended round their necks or waists as an ornament; others by carefully preserving the skin and bones of the face, the frontal and temporal bones, and the outer ear, in order to use this as a masque—a rounded bit of wood being fastened behind the open mouth, which the wearer grasps with his teeth when he puts on the



Fig. 1. Shrunken Human Head from Pastaza.

masque. But the mode in which the Mundurucús preserve the heads of enemies comes somewhat nearer the example on the table. The Mundurucús are an Amazon tribe, living not very remote from the region where the "Idol's head" was obtained. "They preserve the memory of valiant deeds by preserving a trophy of the slain enemy. Indeed, this is the only way possible to preserve the accounts of their valour, and the Mundurucús follow in this respect the example of the Dyaks, by cutting off and preserving the head of the dead man. When a Mundurucú has been fortunate enough to kill an enemy, he cuts off the head with his bamboo knife, removes the brain, soaks the whole head in a bitter vegetable oil called 'andiroba,' and dries it over the fire or in the sun. When it is quite dry, he puts false eyes into its empty orbits, combs, parts, and plaits the hair, and decorates it with brilliant feathers, and lastly passes a string through the tongue, by means of which it can be suspended to the beams of the malocca or council-house."¹ A good representation of two of these heads, and also of a Jivaro

¹ Wood's *Natural History—Man*, p. 574.

shrunk head, forms the subject of plate cxxix. in the "Series of Photographs of the British Museum," which I now show to the Society. Perhaps, however, the artificial deformation of the living human head is of even greater interest to the anthropologist, because of the elements of uncertainty it imparts to schemes which assume that cranial features give sure indices of, so-called, racial groups. It has often been forgotten that there has ever been the presence and the influence of a strong tendency, on the part of great tribes especially, to perpetuate and to exaggerate characteristic features of which they were proud. "Looking at a Hottentot face, one understands why the mothers would squeeze the babies' snub noses yet further in, while in ancient times a little Persian prince would have a bold aquiline nose shaped for him. In all quarters of the globe is found the custom of compressing infants' heads by bandages and pads to make the little plastic skull grow to an approved shape."¹ There seems almost no doubt that this practice was prevalent in ancient Peru, and that the forms of skull represented in the engravings now on the table are to be traced to its operation. The coloured artistic engraving of a Flat-head mother and child now shown points to the existence of the practice still among a tribe of North American Indians.²

In preparing the notice of this idol head, I was anxious to make it as descriptive as possible. I found, however, that the references to it in the literature of ethnology are almost as rare as the specimens themselves, while such as we have fail in many particulars to satisfy unbiassed inquiry. Are the shrunk heads ancient? Does the practice of preparing them still continue? Do all the tribes which inhabit the same region use them? If not, can we differentiate all who do? One of the specimens I have seen is black; this one is red. Does this point to tribal difference? Assuming that they are idols, or oracles, what is the significance of those threads hanging from the mouth, and what that of the blood-red marks across them? The priest is said to suspend the idol round his neck by the curiously plaited cord attached to the top of the head; what is the significance of this? Is it that at death the lips are closed for ever, and that no revelation can come from the dead but

¹ Tylor's *Anthropology*, p. 240.

² Paul Kane's *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America*, p. 574.

through the idol priest? Then, how have the bones been so completely removed from the head without destroying the integument? How have the characteristic features been preserved? And, above all, how has the shrunk form been realised? It is doubtful if all we know of such specimens can be held to furnish material for a satisfactory answer to any of those questions. The literature is very scanty. In the *Intellectual Observer*, vol. i. 1862, there is a notice of the Jivaro idol head by William Bollaert, F.R.G.S. In the *Transactions of the Ethnological Society*, vol. ii. (new series), 1863, there is the translation of a letter on the same subject, by M. José Felix Barriero, dated "Ecuador, Macas, 2nd December 1860." The only other source of information known to me is a "Note on the Macas Indians," by Sir John Lubbock, in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, vol. iii. 1874. "On the eastern side," says Mr Bollaert, "of the Republic of Ecuador, formerly known as Quito, lives a tribe of Indians called Jivaros, a strange, wild people, dwelling in the midst of a most beautiful mountainous country, rich with tropical forests, and including in its wild grandeur the volcano of Macas. The Jivaros are a warlike, brave, and astute people. Their bodies are muscular; they have small and very animated black eyes, aquiline noses, and thin lips. One of their prominent customs is to deify the heads of their prisoners. This fact has been known for some time, but only lately have any specimens been obtained. The first was brought to Europe by Professor Cassola, in June 1861, and was exhibited to a few friends in London. This had been stolen from a temple."

M. Barriero, writing as above, to Don R. de Silva Ferro, Chilian consul, London, says:—"You request information about the idol head of the Jivaros; how I obtained it, and how it had been prepared by them. What I now communicate to you is the result of more than two years' research. A Jivaro of the tribe was baptised, when he undertook the commission to procure one of their idols; however, the first year he was not successful. The next year he put the following plan into execution:—He made the Jivaro believe that the idol wished to travel a little, for being in a sort of imprisonment, it would do nothing for its owner, suggesting that the idol should be handed over to him so as to

make a trial. The baptised Indian brought it to me, returning with many presents to the owner, who then went on a hunting expedition, which turned out well. The fame of such success may facilitate the journeying of more of these idols."

M. Barriero then describes the treatment of the body of the enemy killed in war, the decapitation of the victim, and the use to which the head is put. Feasts are held, the head is ultimately deified, and set up on a pole in one of the houses. "When they have feasted, the priest takes the head of the victim, and holding it up by a string, makes a long speech, eulogising the feats the owner of the head had done in his lifetime, the valour he showed at his death, the fame of his ancestors, that it was worthy of adoration," &c. There is more feasting, the head is again tied to the pole, the victor strikes it with his lance, and speaks to it contemptuously. Then the priest becomes spokesman for the head, and in turn charges the victor with cowardice. The strife continues amidst great excitement, until the victor again strikes and wounds it. After this he sews the mouth up, and condemns the idol to perpetual silence. The idol now becomes an oracle to be consulted through the priest. The specimen referred to by M. Barriero was exhibited in the London Exhibition of 1862, as an "Inca's head."

In the *Note on the Macas Indians*, Sir John Lubbock, referring to these idol shrunk heads, says:—"The process of preparation, according to the account given me by Mr Buckley, is very simple. The head is removed, and after being boiled for some time with an infusion of herbs, the bones, &c., are removed through the neck. Heated stones are then put into the hollow, and as they cool are continually replaced by others; the heat thus applied dries and contracts the skin, reducing the head to the size shown in the specimen. It will be seen that Mr Buckley's account confirms that given by M. Barriero." But this scheme is not satisfactory. It is altogether unlikely that the amount of shrinkage implied in this reduction of the head simultaneously with the preservation of the features could be brought about by the application of heated stones. I think the explanation is rather to be found in connection with "the boiling for some time with an infusion of herbs." In a paper by me, "On some Brazilian Weapons and other Articles," published in the

last volume of our *Proceedings*, I called the attention of the Society to the skill in organic chemistry characteristic of Amazon tribes, in a region not very remote from that in which these shrunk heads are prepared. This they show, for example, in extracting and so compounding the noxious principles in strychnos (*Loganiaceæ*), dogbanes (*Apocynaceæ*), and some spurge (Euphorbiaceæ), as to produce the deadly arrow poison, or *woorare*. And other examples might be given. Is it not then highly probable that the herbs they select for the infusion, in which the head is kept for a time, may be such as, in the boiling, part with principles which shrink the integument to less even than one-fourth of its normal size? I have long known the method by which the adult brain can be shrunk to about half its normal size, without destroying its shape, by treating it with nitric acid. Not unlikely a substance may be discovered which might bring about a similar shrinkage in the *cutis* without wrinkling. The present specimen was sent to Dr Gunning by the manager of a steamboat company, whose vessels ply on the Amazon. The Macas district of Ecuador is inhabited by between twenty and thirty Indian tribes, one of these being the Pastaza, from which this head is named. The features of the idol are well preserved; the lower part of the face has an almost exaggerated prognathous appearance; the hair is firmly attached to the integument; the septum of the nose has recently been removed; the eyebrows are wanting, differing in this respect from another specimen I have seen; the hair is about twenty-one inches in length, and of a deep glossy black; the form of the ear is well preserved, the holes in the lobule showing that ear-ornaments had been worn. Of course, exact craniometric characteristics are out of the question, where we have only the *cutis* from which the bones have been removed. We may, however, after this explanation, follow the lines had in view in cranial measurements. This gives the following dimensions:—

Alveolo-condylean plane (Broca),	$3\frac{3}{8}$ inches.
Vertical or basilo-bregmatic diameter (Broca), .	$3\frac{1}{8}$ "
Glabello-lambdaoidcan, or antero-posterior plane,	3 "
Parietal diameter,	$2\frac{3}{8}$ "

Just over the place where, in the perfect cranium, the coronal and

temporal sutures meet, the integument, while yet yielding, has been compressed between the finger and thumb, and thereby a broader brow has been produced than would have been the case had the squeeze been given higher up.

The foregoing remarks suggest some points of great anthropological interest, but it would be out of place to do more than name them in this notice. I refer to such topics as the existence of identical customs in tribes very far remote from each other; as, for example, those of the upper Amazon and the Dyaks of Borneo, or those of North American Indians and of tribes of Central Africa. Then, we have the persistent local isolation of one or perhaps two tribes, by the existence among them of practices to which they tenaciously cling, but in which their neighbours refuse to imitate them, as, say, the preparation and use of *woorare* by families on one side of the Amazon, and their absence from among those on the opposite bank; or, the habit of preparing these shrunk heads limited to the inhabitants of a comparatively narrow area. Hitherto the argument in favour of the doctrine of the unity of the human race has had chiefly in view the existence of similar habits and observances in nations widely different and remote. But the same argument from the *diversities* of customs, domestic, social, or superstitious, among families closely related, both as tribes and geographically, yet remains to be worked out.