

Fletcher, Robert
Tattooing among civilized
people

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01244938 5



TATTOOING

AMONG CIVILIZED PEOPLE.

READ BEFORE THE

ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON,

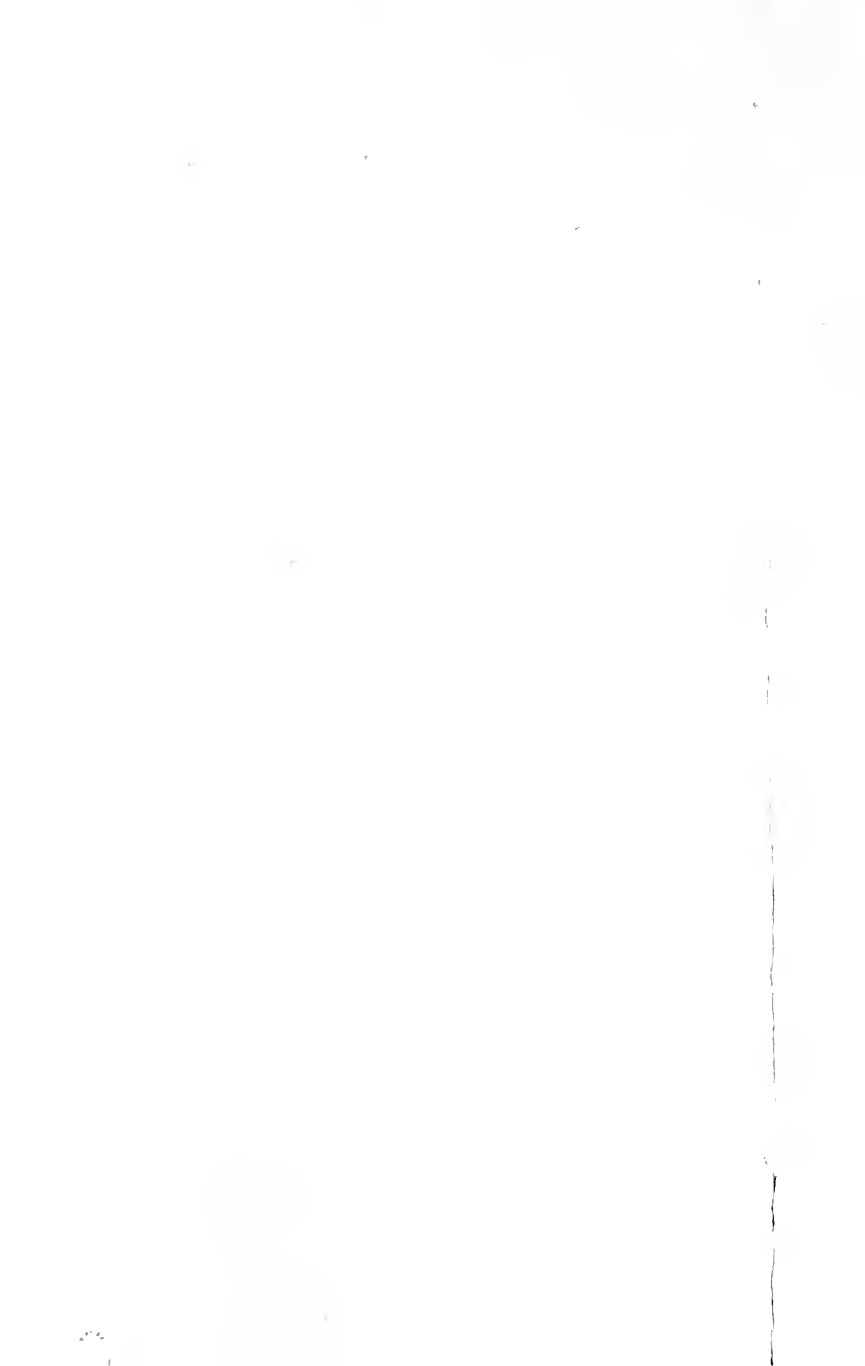
DECEMBER 19, 1882.

BY

ROBERT FLETCHER,

FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

WASHINGTON, D. C. :
JUDD & DETWEILER.
1883.



TATTOOING

AMONG CIVILIZED PEOPLE.

READ BEFORE THE

ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON,

DECEMBER 19, 1882.

BY

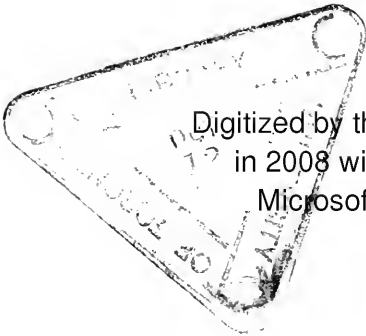
ROBERT FLETCHER,

FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

WASHINGTON, D. C. :
JUDD & DETWEILER.

1883.

PHOTOCOPIED BY



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

65W
17

boots, the face and other parts having faded out completely. Of all colors employed, Indian ink is the most permanent, and if with that pigment, or with charcoal, the punctures have reached the corium, or true skin, the design is almost certain to be indelible. Next to the blacks, indigo is the most staying color. Tattoo marks may be removed by artificial means though they have wonderful power of resistance. Horteloup mentions a case where a red-hot bar of iron fell on a tattooed arm and obliterated a portion of a ship, but even then, with a lens, the white lines completing the rigging could be made out. The application of caustics or of repeated vesication is partially successful, but the resource of the criminal whose tattooed marks have been registered while he was in prison is to alter the pattern by additional tattooing. This can be readily done: an eagle can be changed to a female figure, or an anchor to a serpent. Bertillon records it as the result of his experience that "the cicatrices of tattooing may always be augmented but cannot be diminished."

Some changes of the kind have been closely observed. A horse-shoer who had become a blacksmith adroitly altered a horse-shoe into a forge, adding two figures beating iron upon it. A butcher, changing his occupation, converted a bull's head into an expanded rose. A baker had inscribed the name "Adèle" upon his arm, and when in due course of time she proved faithless, he converted the letters into the well-known cocked hat of Napoleon.

The artifice has the sanction of antiquity. Athenæus relates in book XII of his *Deipnosophists* that the wives of the Scythians, exulting over the capture of a number of Thracian women, so marked them with points that they had the appearance of being painted. Some years later, the victims of this outrage stained the remaining surface of their bodies in the same manner so as to present the appearance of intentional adornment, and thus did away with the recollection of the stigma.

In the famous Tichborne case the absence of tattooed marks which should have been present formed one of the strongest points against the prisoner. At the age of 17 Roger Tichborne had three symbols tattooed upon his arm; namely, a cross, an anchor, and a heart, indicating Faith, Hope, and Charity. His friend, Lord Bellew, frequently saw these marks, and, himself, tattooed with Indian ink the initials R. C. T., in letters half an inch long, on Tichborne's arm, above the symbols. On the same occasion, with

the same needles and ink, Tichborne tattooed an anchor on Lord Bellew's arm. This remained perfectly distinct 25 years later when it was exhibited to the jury. No evidence of tattooing was discoverable on the arm of "the claimant," and he had admitted that he never was tattooed.

Where large bodies of men are thrown together, with much idle time, it is among them that we should expect to find a custom like tattooing most prevalent. Accordingly, it is soldiers, sailors, and, above all, criminals, including prostitutes, who most extensively resort to it.

As regards soldiers and sailors, the love of imitation and a desire to emulate the adornments of their veteran comrades are doubtless the chief motives for the practice. The designs most in vogue with them are such as relate to the glories of their profession, and flags, cannon, ships, patriotic symbols, and amorous devices form the stock in trade of the artist in the barracks or on shipboard.

The criminal classes furnish the most elaborate and the most curious examples of tattooing. Of late years the study of the criminal from a psychological point of view has been pursued with remarkable results by certain observers. Their investigations have been especially directed to the peculiarities of the brain, and although the study is yet in its infancy it may be predicted that the relations of crime to abnormal conditions of the brain, whether congenital or acquired, will form an important part of the ever expanding science of craniology.

Among the most distinguished of these observers is the professor of medical jurisprudence at Turin, Cesar Lombroso. He is the editor, in conjunction with Garofalo, of a journal entitled, "*Archivio di psichiatria*,"³ the full title of which, translated, is "Archives of disorders of the mind, penal science, and criminal anthropology, to aid in the study of insane and criminal man." But his most important work is "*L'Uomo delinquente*"⁴—"The criminal man in relation to anthropology, jurisprudence, and prison discipline," a work of 740 pages, published in 1878. A chapter in this extremely interesting book is devoted to the subject of tattooing, and from it, and from subsequent papers of Lombroso and others in the

³ *Archivio di psichiatria, scienze penali ed antropologia criminale, etc.* Torino.

⁴ *L'Uomo delinquente in rapporto all' antropologia, giurisprudenza e alle discipline carcerarie.* Torino. 1878. Svo.

journal referred to, are condensed some of the facts and statistics about to be presented to you.

Another writer, whose researches it will be convenient to compare with those of Lombroso, is Dr. A. Lacassagne, a French army surgeon and the professor of medical jurisprudence at the Faculty of Medicine at Lyons. He published, last year, a volume of 116 pages, entitled "Les tatouages, étude anthropologique et médico-légale."⁵

Lombroso's observations were made on 6,784 subjects, of whom rather more than half were soldiers and the remainder criminals, prostitutes, and military prisoners. Of tattooed soldiers, the larger portion were from Lombardy and Piedmont, men of Keltic origin.

Dr. Lacassagne's observations were made in Algeria. There are three battalions in the French army known as *les bataillons d'Afrique*. They are composed of men who have been condemned for desertion, theft, insubordination, and other offenses. At the expiration of his sentence the offender is sent to one of these battalions to serve out the time he owes to the state. Dr. Lacassagne went to work very systematically to obtain copies of the tattooing which many of these men exhibited. He laid a piece of tracing-cloth upon the skin and with a pencil copied the design. The cloth, when laid upon white paper, made the drawing appear very clearly, and with red, blue, or black ink, according to the original, he went over the pencil lines. The tracing was finally pasted on a sheet of card-board, on the back of which he wrote the particulars of the case to the number of 20. These details included the name, age, place of birth, and occupation of the subject; the date of the tattooing, its locality, any change which had taken place in it, the method employed, the coloring matter made use of, and so forth. In this way, he obtained 1,333 transcripts of tattooing, taken from 378 persons. The variety and number of designs is especially characteristic of prisoners. It may be laid down as a rule that the more inveterate the criminal the more extensively will he be tattooed.

As regards the region of the body chosen for the operation, Lombroso found the palmar surface of the fore-arm to be most frequently selected. A few were tattooed on the shoulders: some, generally sailors, on the breast. Miners are often tattooed on the

⁵ Paris, 1881. Svo.

fingers, the design being in the shape of a ring. He found no instance of tattooing on the back or on the genitals, except in men who had been in the South Seas, or who were old convicts.

Lacassagne gives the following table showing the parts of the body operated upon in his 378 subjects :

Upon both arms and upon the abdomen.....	1
the abdomen alone	4
the arms and thighs.....	6
the breast alone	8
the penis.....	11
the whole body	29
both arms and upon the breast	45
the left arm only	59
the right arm only.....	88
both arms.....	127
	<hr/>
	378

Of the designs covering the whole body, one consisted of the complete uniform of a general, another of the complete uniform of an admiral. Two instances were met with of tattooing on the face. In one, *martyr de la liberté*, and a serpent, had been drawn on the forehead ; in the other, the prophetic words *le baigne m'attend*—the galleys await me.

The part of the body selected has often a special relation to the character of the design. Upon the abdomen, below the umbilicus, the emblems or inscriptions were mostly erotic or obscene. In all the eleven cases of tattooing on the penis, a boot, sometimes with a spur on it, was the emblem adopted, and the men acknowledged that the object was to admit of a frightful play upon words, untranslatable, and too vile to be repeated.

The breast is reserved for large compositions, portraits, and even verses.

On the back are sometimes seen some very extensive pieces of tattooing. Lacassagne describes a portrait of the Admiral Jean Bart, which was 37 c. long by 33 c. wide. A Joan of Arc, 41 c. by 39 c. An Abd-el-Kader, 30 c. by 30 c.

Upon the buttocks, obscene designs were mostly found, a common one being a serpent in numerous folds with the head directed to the anus. In another instance, a large eye was drawn on each buttock. In another, two zouaves crossing bayonets and supporting a scroll inscribed *on n'entre pas*. A portrait of Bismarck or of

a Prussian soldier was not unusual, the locality indicating a patriotic contempt for the enemies of France.

Sailors who have visited many countries furnish, in some instances, by the marks on their bodies, a chronology of their career; a certain tree indicates a tropical country; a certain color, some particular island; tattooing by incisions, instead of pricking, indicates a visit to New Zealand or to some parts of Africa. Berchon had seen more than 50 men completely covered with designs. Several sailors had a squadron of vessels on the back with the waves of the sea spread over the buttocks. In addition, their chests, arms, and legs were also covered with designs. One sailor carried upon his body the certificates of his constant rebellion against authority. Desertions in all parts of the world had furnished him opportunities to procure almost every fashion of tattooing, and he was covered with a bewildering mass of inscriptions and designs. Among the former was a complete warrant as master-at-arms written in full sized letters across his abdomen.

It is not always at long intervals that the body is covered with the tattooer's work. In 1859 a soldier, who was being treated for rheumatism in the hospital at Rochefort, nearly fell a victim to his taste for this species of adornment. In July he began with a ring on his middle finger. In August, at one sitting, which lasted three hours and a half, he had a rose and a female bust tattooed on his right fore-arm and a pansy and a bust of his general on the left fore-arm. Shortly after, he had the bust of a Spanish brigand tattooed upon the upper part of his right arm. In the beginning of October he had a final sitting. The artist tattooed upon the upper part of his left arm a figure of Liberty in the Phrygian cap, with a banner in one hand and a drawn sword in the other. Upon his chest were drawn two naked female figures, united by a long garland of flowers, while above them was a winged Cupid, armed with bow and arrows, and also surrounded by a wreath. This allegorical group—which was very skilfully drawn in black and red—was intended to symbolize “conjugal love.” Four days later the man entered the surgical ward of the hospital with a grievously inflamed arm; gangrene followed, and amputation at the shoulder-joint became requisite to save the life of the too æsthetic soldier.

Before leaving the subject of the parts of the body chosen for tattooing the statistics may be given of some American cases. In 1877 a tramp named Kelly traveled about the country, chiefly

through Pennsylvania, making a business of tattooing. He was saturated with syphilis, and had what are termed mucous patches in his mouth. In performing his operation he moistened the needles and the colors with his saliva, and the consequence was that he inoculated a great many men with syphilis. Dr. F. J. Maury⁶ gives the details of 22 of the cases which came under his care. The location of the tattooing in 19 of them was as follows :

On the chest.....	1
shoulder.....	1
hand.....	1
forearm	16

The next division of our subject relates to the character of the designs imprinted by tattooing.

Lombroso divides them into four classes: emblems of love, of religion, of war, of profession. Lacassagne gives the following details of the 1,333 tracings obtained by him from the *bataillon d'Afrique* :

Patriotic and religious emblems.....	91
Professional emblems	98
Inscriptions.....	111
Military emblems.....	149
Metaphorical emblems	260
Amorous and erotic emblems.....	280
Fantastic, historical, and miscellaneous.....	344
	1,333

Religious designs are more frequent among Italians and Spaniards than among Frenchmen. They consist, for the most part, of a cross surmounting a globe; a heart surrounded with wax tapers; a crucifix; the portrait of a patron saint, or a skull. These designs have generally been produced before the commencement of military life.

Many Italians have been tattooed at Loretta. Around this famous shrine are seen professional tattooers, *marcatori*, who charge from half to three-quarters of a lire for producing a design commemorative of the pilgrim's visit to the shrine of our lady of Loretto. A like profitable industry is pursued at Jerusalem.

Amorous and erotic emblems form, as might be anticipated, a large part of the tattooer's work. Among them are found the

⁶ Amer. Jour. Med. Sciences. Philad., 1878. N. S. lxxv, pp. 44-62.

name or initials of a mistress, the date of a first love affair, a heart pierced by an arrow and dropping blood, female faces and figures of all varieties, and obscenities which beggar description.

Professional emblems which relate to trades and professions are very numerous, and are frequently of importance in identifying criminals.

Inscriptions are favorite subjects of tattooing. They consist of sentences, proverbs, dates, sentiments: and among criminals frequently of expressions of anger, vengeance, hatred of the law, and defiance of society. The following specimens, translated from various languages, will give a fair idea of their general character: "Death to false women," "Vengeance," "The child of pleasure," "Honor to arms," "Lives alone, for friends are dead," "Hurrah for France and fried potatoes!" "Death to tyrants," "Life is a deception," "Death to French officers." In several instances was found the famous reply of Brennus, but in French, "*Malheur aux vaincus.*"

The propensity of criminals to tattoo sentences of a lugubrious or self-condemnatory character upon their bodies is very remarkable, and furnishes a curious psychological study. The sentence *Né sous mauvaise étoile*—born under an evil star—was tattooed upon the arm of Philippe the strangler of prostitutes, and aided in his conviction. One of his intended victims related at his trial how she had one evening taken a man to her room, but becoming alarmed at his savage looks and at the tattooing on his arm, she contrived to make her escape. It was not the ill-augury of the sentiment of the inscription which frightened her so much as the belief that it indicated an escaped convict. She identified him by face and by tattooing. During the period from 1864 to 1866 over a dozen murders of prostitutes living in their own apartments were committed by this man. The guillotine duly fulfilled the ominous inscription upon his arm. A Venetian convict bore upon his breast these words: *misero me, como dovrò finire!*—wretch that I am, how shall I end! Fieschi, before his attempted regicide, had been condemned for forgery and deprived of his cross of the legion of honor. While in prison, he tattooed the cross upon his breast, with an inscription implying that this one could not be taken from him. Lacassagne three times found the following sentence: "The past has deceived me, the present torments me, the future horrifies me." Other inscriptions of this character are: "The child of misfor-

tune," "No luck," "No chance," "The child of misery born under an evil star," "The galleys await me."

Among Italian or Corsican convicts the vendetta sometimes figures in the designs tattooed upon them, and an oath of vengeance has more than once been found inscribed on the breast of a man condemned for the fulfillment of his vow. Lombroso gives the representation of a Piedmontese who had been a sailor, a robber, and finally a murderer for vendetta. On his right breast was the inscription "*Giuro di vendicarmi*"—I swear to be avenged—with two daggers crossed above and two banners also crossed beneath. A serpent was on the shoulder with its head regarding the inscription. Other designs, not connected with his oath of vengeance, were observed upon him, namely, a serpent, a lion, a female figure, a ship, the name "Maria," and the initials R. P. on his left arm. On the dorsum of the penis were the arms of Savoy and on the gland was tattooed a female face, the meatus forming the mouth!

Another instance is recorded in a recent journal.⁷ A criminal who had several tattoo marks upon his arm, fearful of their leading to his identification, so disfigured them with needles as to make them unrecognizable. Shortly after, in a struggle with gendarmes who were arresting him, he received a blow on the head which destroyed one of his eyes. Discarding all thoughts of prudence, he tattooed upon his right arm a vase with the fatal date 1868, and a vow that he would live for 100,000 years to be revenged on the gendarme. He kept the vow and killed the man, the tattooing helping to condemn him.

Beside the inscription of savage vows of vengeance, the Italians make use of tattooing for the purpose of recognition of membership in their secret societies. Lombroso found hieroglyphics and letters on convicts, the meaning of which they obstinately refused to divulge. He is of opinion that the Carbonari were tattooed with an especial mark upon initiation into their dangerous association. You remember how skillfully a modern novelist has made use of this custom in the discomfiture, by its discovery, of that delightful villain Count Fosco, and how the avenger effaced the mark from his arm, after his assassination, and inscribed with his dagger the word "*traditore*"—or traitor—in its place.

A redoubtable convict, Malassène, a man of herculean strength

⁷ Archivio di psichiatria. Torino. 1882. III. 156.

and size, was covered with inscriptions and designs. On his chest was a guillotine in black and red, with this legend beneath it in red letters, "I began ill, I shall end ill. It is the fate which awaits me."

Among metaphorical emblems are found stars, the star of happiness, the star of misfortune, anchors representing hope, hearts pierced, hands with fingers interlaced indicating friendship, etc. The pansy is the most popular of flowers, being the symbol of remembrance. Of 97 flowers in Lacassagne's collection 89 were pansies. Among fanciful emblems may be named lions, serpents, tigers, dogs, cocks, goats, gazelles, vases, a revolver, the wheel of fortune, and a chamber pot. Mythological personages are seldom met with, being confined to Bacchus, Venus, Cupid, or Apollo. In five instances the portrait was found of D'Artagnan of "Les trois mousquetaires," showing the impression produced on the popular mind by that inimitable romance.

The designs produced by the tramp Kelly were quite well drawn, some of them being really elegant. He had a book of patterns from which his customers could select. As very few observations have been made of American tattooing, it will be interesting to quote the descriptions given by Dr. Maury of the 22 men who came under his care in consequence of this syphilitic tattooing. One man had a large crucifixion on his chest; another had a star of 8 rays on his shoulder; another, a star of 10 rays on the hand. On the fore-arms was the greatest variety of designs: a bracelet around each wrist, a crucifixion, a shield with 3 dark and 2 light bars, a dancing-girl on an eagle holding a flag in her hand, an eagle with a scroll surmounted by a crown and 2 letters, a goddess of liberty seated on an eagle bearing the American flag, a figure 2 on which rests a ladder, a naked woman kneeling on a pedestal under a dense weeping willow, and, in several instances, a dancing-girl described as "with crossed ankles," a copy, probably, of the well-known "dancing girl reposing" of Canova.

Probably the most elaborate and extensive tattooing ever seen in Europe or America is that displayed on the person of the Greek, Georgius Constantine. In 1871, this man was exhibited to the class by Hebra, the famous professor of diseases of the skin, at Vienna, and an account of him was given in the *Wiener medicinische Wöchenschrift* for 1872.^b In the atlas to Hebra's great work on

^b Vol. XXII, pp. 39-43.

dermatology there is an engraving of the head and bust of this man. The story told by Constantine was that he was an Albanian by birth, and that, taking part in the French expedition to Cochin China, he was taken prisoner in Burmah, and with three others was sentenced to be tattooed. One man died under the operation and another became blind. The work upon his body, he says, took three months in the performance. The man's story is, in many respects, incredible; and he seemed desirous of representing himself as a very desperate character. Beside his native language, Greek, he spoke five or six other languages with varying degrees of fluency.

However it was acquired, there is no doubt that the man has been tattooed in the highest style of Burmese art. When exhibited by Hebra, he was about 40 years of age, handsome, and strongly built. From the crown of his head to the points of his toes his skin is entirely covered with figures in dark blue, with occasional intervening designs in red. The interstices between his fingers are covered with small characters in blue and red. Prof. Max Müller says the writing on his hands is Burmese and that the man speaks Arabic and Persian fluently. The blue designs are even seen among his hairs. The only portions of his body not tattooed are the under side of the penis, the scrotum, and the soles of his feet. The total number of figures upon him is 388, which are distributed as follows:

On forehead -----	2
neck and throat -----	8
breast -----	50
back -----	37
abdomen and buttocks -----	52
dorsum of penis -----	1
left arm -----	51
right arm -----	50
lower extremities -----	137
	<hr/>
	388

The figures are symmetrically arranged on the two sides of the body. On the breast are two crowned sphynxes, two serpents, two elephants, two swans, and in the middle a horned owl. Among other figures are apes, leopards, tigers, cats, eagles, storks, peacocks, men and women, lions, panthers, crocodiles, salamanders, dragons, fishes, gazelles, fruit, leaves, flowers, and various other objects.

The man exhibited himself in various countries of Europe, and more recently was traveling in this country with Barnum. It is not always that the great showman's curiosities are so well authenticated.

Burmese tattooing has been long known to travelers as wonderfully artistic in design and admirable in execution. Such work as that just described is very costly. An English officer named Chambers paid £40 for a similar piece of work on himself, in which the head was left untouched. One thing that tends to throw discredit on the story of this Greek is the fact that in Burmah criminals are coarsely tattooed across the breast with a sentence declaring their offense. The executioners and jailers have in addition a ring tattooed upon each cheek, and they are known as *Pah-quet*, *ring-checked*, a term of singular reproach, and detested even by themselves.⁹

It seems most probable that Constantine paid for having this elaborate work performed, and invented the story to give himself a fictitious importance. The newspapers have recently given an account of a young woman in New York city who is undergoing the process of tattooing over nearly the whole body, avowedly to obtain a living by the exhibition.

I am indebted to an American writer, J. W. Palmer, who traveled in the Burman Empire in 1856, for the following account of the adornment of a young noble:¹⁰

“The tattooing of young Ingaboo was laid on by a master's hand. It was high art even in Burmah where artists in lampblack and fish-galls are held in the highest esteem and extensively fostered by the state. * * * An inch or two above his navel young Ingaboo was encircled with fabulous birds, impossible birds—these were done in vermilion, thirteen birds, and every bird standing on a monkey's head. Thus thirteen blue monkeys girded him round about, just where his *pu'sho* was tucked under at the waistband. A small crimson serpent was coiled about his navel, half within and half without—a cunning device, so expertly done that the little

⁹ Personal narrative of two years' imprisonment in Burmah, by Henry Gouger, London. 1860. 12°. p. 144.

¹⁰ The Golden Dagon, or up and down the Irrawaddi, being passages of adventure in the Burman Empire, by an American, J. W. Palmer. New York, 1856, 12°, p. 187.

creature seemed just emerging from the hollow. The thirteen blue monkeys grinned on the backs of thirteen blue hogs of Bassien with blushing tails; and after that all were blue and blending one into the other."

In Japan tattooing is mostly confined to the lower classes. They are generally adorned on the shoulders, arms, and thighs, with such figures as are seen on their porcelain. Cinnabar and Indian ink are the pigments employed. The thief who has stolen property not exceeding 60 *bus* in value has a circle tattooed upon his arm. Upon a second offense a man so marked is decapitated.

Some tables have been made of the age at which tattooing is performed. The following from Lacassagne shows the numbers and ages under 21:

At 6 years	-----	1	At 14 years	-----	8
7 "	-----	3	15 "	-----	9
8 "	-----	1	16 "	-----	11
9 "	-----	4	17 "	-----	8
10 "	-----	4	18 "	-----	10
11 "	-----	5	19 "	-----	3
12 "	-----	7	20 "	-----	5
13 "	-----	3			

As a general rule from 20 to 30 years may be said to be the age when tattooing is most practised. It is sometimes made use of at the very beginning of life. Berchon frequently observed a tattoo mark on infants at the foundling hospitals in Paris, and he learned from the midwives that it was done by them at the request of the mothers for the purpose of enabling them to identify their offspring at some future time. The mark is generally a slight one, placed alongside of a vein to avoid a conspicuous appearance. You will recollect in Beaumarchais' play of "The Marriage of Figaro," that an incident of this kind is introduced, and the foundling who had been tattooed at birth by the attending physician with the professional emblem of a spatula is identified by him at the critical moment.

Tattooing among women in civilized life is almost confined to prostitutes. Occasionally a sailor's mistress or wife may be induced to submit to the inscription of a love token, but it is not common. Parent-Duchatelet, in his classic work on prostitution, states that the women who came under his observation were never tattooed upon parts of the body habitually exposed, or which were easily uncovered in ordinary life, as the arms, but the upper part

of the arm or shoulder, the space beneath the breasts, and especially the chest, were the spots chosen. If the girl were young the inscription would be the name of a man, with perhaps "*pour la vie*" added, or the initials merely, "*p. l. v.*" Sometimes the name would be inscribed between two flowers or under two hearts pierced with an arrow. These paragons of fidelity tattoo a new name upon changing their lover. One girl at La Force had thirty names upon her bust. In women more advanced in life the inscription is often found on the abdomen between the umbilicus and the pubes; but it is never a man's that is found there, always a woman's. Parent-Duchatelet observes that the reason for this is obvious when the passion which these women frequently entertain for their own sex is remembered. It is a remarkable fact that in no instance did he find any obscenity tattooed, the women in that particular presenting a striking contrast to the men with whom they associate.

In Algeria, according to Gillebert D'Hercourt,¹¹ prostitutes are tattooed upon the face, on the alæ of the nose, on the forehead, chin, lower lip, arms and wrists. Sometimes the back of the hand is covered with a lace-work pattern in the shape of a mitten. When a woman of this class quarrels with her lover, she applies a burning cigarette to his name on her arm or chest. Lacassagne saw many cicatrices of burns produced in this manner. Tattooing as a love-token is not a recent custom with them. Purchas, in his *Pilgrimage*, published in 1613, says: "The Egyptian Moores, both men and women, brand their armes for love of each other." Moorish women are the professional tattooers among the Arabs, and stand in the market place to offer their services.

Before concluding this sketch of tattooing it is necessary to say something of the occasional accidents arising from the practice, and also of its use in surgery.

The operation of tattooing, simple as it may appear, is not unfrequently attended by severe inflammation, erysipelas, gangrene, and even death. In 1860 the French minister of marine issued an order forbidding the practice of tattooing in the navy on account of the danger attending it, some men having lost their arms, and some their lives.

In 1862 Dr. Berchon made a report to the Academy of Sciences, in which he gave the details of forty-three cases of accidents from tattooing; eight in which death resulted either directly or in-

¹¹ *Anthropologie d'Algérie. Mém. Soc. d'Anthropol. de Paris*, III, 17.

directly; eight in which amputation was performed, viz: one of a finger, one at the wrist, four of the arm, one at the shoulder, and one of a thigh; seven cases in which gangrene occurred, in two of them extending over an entire limb; twenty-five characterized by inflammation, requiring at least a month's treatment, and one unique case of arterio-venous aneurism at the bend of the elbow. I have met with another case, however, of this latter injury, produced by the same causes, in a recent German medical journal.

Lieut. Colonel Woodthorpe, in a paper describing the tribes of the Naga Hills, recently read before the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain, says:

“The operation of tattooing is sometimes attended with fatal results. I was once asked to visit a poor little girl about 10 years old, whose legs had been tattooed a few days before. The operation had resulted in inflammation and mortification of the limbs. I went into the house where the poor little thing—sad votary of fashion—lay screaming with pain. The sores were dreadful, both legs apparently rotting away below the knee. * * * Fashion, whether in tight lacing or tattooing, claims its victims all over the world.”¹²

Of the danger of accidental inoculation of syphilis from tattooing, a striking instance has already been given in the account of the twenty-two men who were operated upon by the tramp Kelly. Of these men four had never had syphilis, but escaped untainted; three of them had had syphilis before, and their cases may be considered doubtful; fifteen had never had the disease, and were all infected by the tattooing. Simonet, in the *Progrès Médical*¹³ for 1877, describes eight cases of syphilis produced by the saliva of a tattooer.

In a quite recent number of the *British Medical Journal* (1882, II, 632) is an account of the case of a young soldier of the Scots guard, the finest man physically in the regiment, being 6 feet 4 inches high, and most symmetrically formed; upon a tattooed figure upon his forearm chancres were developed, followed by the usual train of constitutional symptoms.

An unintentional case of tattooing occurred not long since. A

¹² Notes on the wild tribes inhabiting the so-called Naga Hills on our north-east frontier of India. Lieut. Col. R. G. Woodthorpe, R. E. *Jour. Anthropol. Inst. Lond.*, 1882, xi., 196-214.

¹³ 1877, v., 205.

gardener fell from his ladder and severely excoriated one side of his nose on the gravel. He was working with charcoal that day, and from time to time rubbed the aggrieved member with his blackened fingers, until the result was a beautiful piece of ineradicable tattooing on the side of his nose.

Finally, tattooing is to be ranked among the resources of the surgeon. In certain diseases of the eye a white spot is formed on the cornea, and is unpleasantly conspicuous. The oculist, by adroitly tattooing it with an appropriate color, materially lessens the disfigurement.

A similar treatment has been successfully applied to *naevus*, a congenital erectile tumor known as "mother-mark," and in a simpler form as "port-wine stain," the color of which being much darker than the surrounding skin, is susceptible of considerable improvement by tattooing. An ingenious piece of work of this description was performed by a non-professional operator. A sailor had a large congenital red stain on his breast, which a tattooer converted into a figure of liberty waving the tri-color. The artist left enough of the original red to form the Phrygian cap, the robe of the goddess and the red part of the flag, and so adroitly added the other necessary colors as to entirely disguise the primitive mark and to present a very handsome specimen of tattooing.

In certain cases where disease or injury has destroyed portions of the face and left the teeth uncovered, the ghastly disfigurement can be remedied by making artificial lips with flaps cut from the cheeks or other parts of the face, but the edges of the mouth so formed are of course of a livid, unnatural color. By tattooing with a red pigment Dr. Schuh, of Vienna, has succeeded in producing quite respectable though scarcely rosy lips.

A French army surgeon has proposed to employ tattooing as an adjunct in the treatment of hemorrhage from wounds in battle. In most of the continental armies systematic attempts have been made to instruct the common soldier how to act in certain emergencies of his profession. Manuals have been written for him, and in the German army a handkerchief is issued on which are printed illustrations of bandaging, of applying improvised tourniquets and of the method of carrying the wounded. The surgeon in question, M. Comte, taught the men how to compress the brachial artery with their fingers, so that pulsation would entirely cease at the wrist. In like manner they were shown how to compress the femoral

artery and the carotid. The men became greatly interested, but it was evidently of the first importance that they should know where to apply this digital pressure, and they readily consented to allow the surgeon to tattoo a broad line on the precise location in each man's limb at which the artery could be most effectually compressed. An experiment was made to test the quickness with which the proceeding could be conducted. A soldier fully equipped and accoutred was supposed to receive a gun-shot wound of the leg. In one minute's time his comrades had relieved him of his arms, extended him on the ground, removed his clothing and compressed the femoral artery on the tattooed spot, so that all pulsation ceased beneath it. Of course an experiment on the parade ground is very different from practice on the field of battle, but it is probable that the proposed arteriography, as M. Comte calls it, might save a percentage of lives.¹⁴

In connection with the medical use of tattooing a curious bit of history may be told. During the late civil war the professional bounty-jumper became as dangerous a foe to the Government as the armed enemy. He was taught most adroitly to conceal his disabilities, and if rejected at one recruiting depot, he would present himself at another, succeed in being enrolled, pocket the enormous bounty, and desert, to renew the proceeding. To aid in detecting these men the examining surgeons were directed to make a certain mark over the loins with nitrate of silver. This would remain for some days, and served to warn the next medical officer. The plan worked admirably until a woman discovered the mark upon her husband, and the explosion came. The newspapers teemed with indignant exclamations at the outrage inflicted upon free-born Americans by branding them like cattle, and the harmless device was necessarily abandoned. The noble citizens whose sensibilities were thus wounded, robbed the Government of many millions; one of them acknowledged that he had enlisted and deserted thirty-two times.

And, now, what can we say as to the causes of the prevalence of this singular custom of tattooing?

Lombroso regards it, as above, all due to atavism. There is some confusion in the use of this term; even Topinard seems to

¹⁴ De l'hémostase temporaire dans les blessures de guerre. De l'artériographie ou application du tatouage à la chirurgie d'armée, par J. Comte. (Paris these,) Paris, 1880, 4°.

confound it with heredity when speaking of the Austrian lip and Bourbon nose. Atavism is in one sense heredity, it is true, but it is properly used to express a *recurrence* to a type derived from some more or less remote ancestor. The term itself is objectionable as lacking in precision, and the expression "atavic inheritance" as distinct from "continuous inheritance" is to be preferred. It does not seem that a decorative art like tattooing could be derived from recurrence, but that it is rather the result of imitation and tradition. Darwin suggests another reason. After speaking of tattooing and similar customs, he says :

"It is extremely improbable that these practices, which are followed by so many distinct nations, are due to tradition from any common source. They rather indicate the close similarity of the mind of man, to whatever race he may belong, in the same manner as the almost universal habits of dancing, masquerading, and making rude pictures."¹⁵

In 1856, Father Garucci published a work entitled "Grafitti de Pompei."¹⁶ A proverb, common to many languages, says that "walls are fools' writing paper." The walls of the houses in Pompeii abound in stylus pictures and inscriptions, a great many of which are copied in the work of Garucci. Lacassagne points out the striking resemblance between the *grafitti*, or picture-writings, and the general style of design of the tattooers. Take one example: Garucci prints an emblem consisting of a heart with the name *Ψυχή* inscribed in it, which he interprets to mean "Psyche is my heart, or in my heart." Lacassagne has more than thirty designs in his collection exhibiting the same thought as this *grafitto*. In other respects a similarity is to be observed; both tattooing and picture-writing are ideographic, expressing a thought by an image or a symbol. Some of these designs are phonetic, and rebuses are common to them both.

It has frequently been asserted that there is an analogy between the adornments of tattooing and heraldic bearings. This is true to some extent in savage life. Captain Burton, speaking of Abbeokuta, says, "Every tribe, sub-tribe, and even family, has its blazon, whose infinite diversification may be compared with the lines and ordinaries of European heraldry."¹⁷ Father Mathias G. says that in

¹⁵ Descent of Man. New York. 1871. II. 327.

¹⁶ Grafitti de Pompei, transcriptions et gravures tracés au stylet; recueillies et interprétées par Raphael Garucci. 2e édit. Atlas de 32 pl. Paris. 1856.

¹⁷ Abbeokuta. I. 104.

Oceania every royal or princely family has a family of tattooers especially devoted to their service, and that none other can be permitted to produce the necessary adornment.

Gillebert D'Hercourt,¹⁸ on the other hand, says that among Arabs and Kabyles tattooing cannot be regarded as a sign distinctive of religious or political sects or as a tribal badge. Formerly the great Arab families tattooed their slaves with an uniform mark for identification and as a badge of ownership, but the custom is dying out.

The cross imprinted on the forehead by the Kabyles, and which was once supposed to indicate their Christian origin, is equally worn by the Mahometan tribes of the south, and is purely ornamental. Mothers tattoo their children from taste or caprice, and very frequently with the same patterns they use in their embroidery. A Moorish woman in reply to the question said, "It is done for beauty, it is an ornament, a flower."

If the inquiry as to the origin of the custom be addressed to aboriginal tribes there is no satisfactory knowledge to be obtained. The legends which pretend to account for it are generally childish or absurd. Tylor refers to this view in his "Primitive Culture." He says, "Of the legends of tattooing, one of the oddest is that told to account for the fact that while the Fijians tattoo only the women, their neighbors, the Tongans, tattoo only the men. It is related that a Tongan on his way from Fiji to report to his countrymen the proper custom to observe, went on his way repeating the rule he had carefully learnt by heart, "Tattoo the women but not the men," but unluckily he tripped over a stump, got his lesson wrong, and reached Tonga repeating, "Tattoo the men but not the women;" an ordinance which they observed ever after."¹⁹ Such *ex post facto* legends are very unsatisfactory and lead us to agree with Tylor's conclusion that "though it may be consistent with the notions of savages to relate such explanatory legends, it is not consistent with our nations to believe them." It may be added that the most embarrassing cases of explanatory tradition are those which are neither impossible enough to condemn, nor probable enough to receive.

Another tattooing legend is told by Latham.²⁰ He says, "Does

¹⁸ Etudes anthropologiques sur 76 indigènes de l'Algérie, par le dr. Gillebert D'Hercourt. Mem. de la Soc. d'anthropologie de Paris. III. 1868-1872.

¹⁹ Primitive Culture, by E. B. Tylor. 2v. 8vo. London. 1871. i. 355.

²⁰ Descriptive Ethnology, by R. G. Latham. 2v. 8vo. London. 1859. I. 152.

any one believe this, namely, that one of the forms of tribute to one of the conquerors of one the branches of the Khyens [a race in Aracan] was the payment of a certain number of beautiful women? To avoid this, the beautiful women tattooed themselves so as to become ugly. This is why they are tattooed at the present time. So runs the tale. In reality they are tattooed because they are savages. The narrative about the conqueror is their way of explaining it."

The obverse of the legend occurred in Burman. A handsome woman of rank was discovered in an intrigue with a young man of low birth. She was tattooed in the face in order to punish her by the destruction of her beauty.²¹

It has been asserted that tattooing was adopted to conceal the nakedness of the body, and in that manner to take the place of clothing. There seems to be no foundation for the belief. Certainly modesty was absolutely unknown to the tattooed natives of Otaheite, as described by Captain Cook and Sir Joseph Banks. The distinguished anthropologist, Miklucho-Maclay, in a recent communication to the Society of Ethnology of Berlin, describing the natives of the archipelago of Pelan, states that the women all have the mons Veneris tattooed. The hair is removed by evulsion before the operation is performed. Miklucho-Maclay frequently asked young girls to lift up their "kerint," a sort of petticoat of leaves which they wore, and to show him their tattooing. They readily complied, seeming to have no feeling of shame or modesty in relation to the matter. The appearance, he adds, was that of a triangular piece of blue stuff;²² and a plate of it duly appears in the Verhandlungen of the Society.

Chief Engineer Melville informs me that the tribe of Tungoos which he had the good fortune to meet soon after landing at the mouth of the Lena were entirely unacquainted with the practice of tattooing, and evinced the most unbounded astonishment at the tattooed designs on the arms of some of his sailors who had stripped for ablution. They were curious to know how it was done, and perhaps some future generation of Tungoos may have a legend to tell as to the origin of tattooing in their tribe, in which that gallant officer may play a part.

²¹ Gouger, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

²² Anthropologische Notizen, gesammelt auf seiner Reise in West-Mikronesien und Nord-Melanesien im Jahre, 1876. Verhandl. d. Berl. Gesell.-ch. f. Anthropol., Ethnol., und Urgeschichte. Berl. 1878. x. 107., 1 pl.

Whatever may have been the causes which produced the custom of tattooing among savage races, its adoption and the perpetuation of its use among civilized man must be accounted for by other motives. These may be summarily stated as follows :

1. Vanity. A childish delight in the display of an ornament ; the pleasure of being thought singular and original.

2. Imitation. This is, perhaps, the most prolific cause. A soldier who was rallied for his tattooed designs, replied, "We are like sheep ; we can't see anything done by a comrade without imitating it, even though it hurt us."

3. Idleness ; and to it must be attributed the prevalence of the custom among soldiers, sailors, criminals, and prostitutes.

4. Religion has some influence from its tendency to preserve ancient customs. At Loretto and Jerusalem tattooing is almost a sacred observance. Of 102 tattooed Italian criminals, 31 had religious emblems.

5. The passions, both noble and ignominious. Friendship, family affection, love, lust, hatred, and revenge, all find expression by this device. Dr. Albertotti describes what he calls an epidemic of tattooing.²³ Twelve young men of excellent families, upon leaving the College of Castellamonte, tattooed each other's arms with a symbol relating to their student days ; in most instances with the name of a professor or a comrade. It must be observed that, although most prevalent among the lower classes, tattooing is by no means confined to the ignorant or debased. It is not long since the English papers rather indignantly commented upon a statement in the *Revue des deux mondes* that the Prince of Wales, when at Jerusalem, had permitted an anchor to be tattooed upon his arm.²⁴ Of the 378 men observed by Lacassagne 299 could read and write.

6. Heredity. While dissenting from Lombroso's theory of atavism, it seems probable that symbols of trades and occupations, devices from flags or seals, and perhaps heraldic bearings, have been handed down by tattooing through many generations.

Lastly, a feeling of *esprit de corps*, which, among soldiers, sailors, and members of secret societies, would lead to the adoption of a

²³ L'Uomo delinquente, p. 83.

²⁴ Revue des deux Mondes. 1881, 15 Juin. Voyage en Syrie, par Gabriel Charmy.

characteristic badge, must not be omitted from the category of motives.

The custom cannot be said to be dying out. On the contrary, it prevails as much as ever, and so widespread and deep-rooted is the taste for this barbarous adornment, even in civilized life, that we must perforce assign to tattooing a permanent though lowly place in the division of technology which includes the decorative arts.

Nearly 250 years ago a curious book appeared, which is now very scarce, entitled, *Anthropometamorphosis: Man transform'd, or the artificial Changeling*, by John Bulwer.²⁵ It is a description of the various methods of adorning or disfiguring the different parts of the body in different countries, and, in some homely rhymes, he thus expresses his indignation at the custom of tattooing:

There Art with her bold stigmatizing hand
Doth streaks and marks upon their visage brand.
The *Painter-stainers* here assume a place,
From whence descended our face-taking race;
Their faces red and white, blacke, yellow, bleu,
Distain'd, all sorts of an imposed hue.

* * * * *

Painted with lists here, naked arms behold,
Branded and sounced with colors manifold.

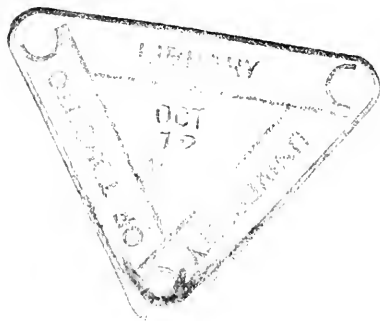
* * * * *

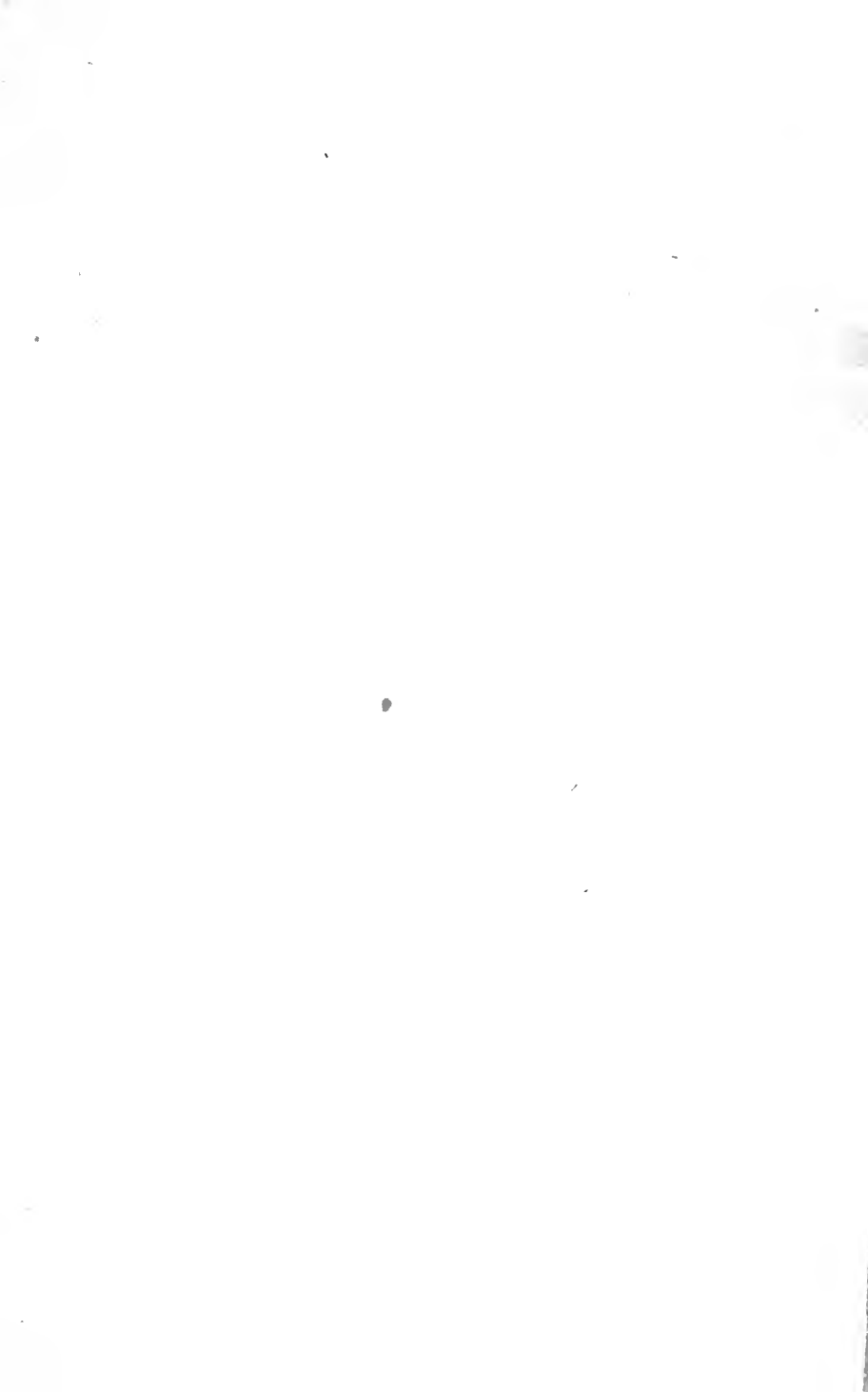
About their legs strange lists they there doe make,
Pricking the same with needles, then they take
Indeliable tincture; which rubbed in
The gallants doe account the bravest gin.

* * * * *

Thus cap a peia is that gallant great,
Horrid transformed self-made man compleat.
Admitted for to see each ranged file,
Can indignation give you leave to smile?

²⁵ *Anthropometamorphosis: Man transform'd, or the artificial Changeling*, by J. B. London. Sq. 8vo. 1653.





PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

GN
419
.3
F6

Fletcher, Robert
Tattooing among civilized
people

