

## Mr. Darwin on the Descent of Man.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ROYAL CORNWALL GAZETTE.

SIR,—Mr. Darwin's long-expected work on man has at last appeared, and while, by some, it will be thought to be inconclusive, it will be regarded by many as his master-piece. I purpose, therefore, in the following remarks, to review its leading arguments and statements. Mr. Darwin commences by comparing man's structure with that of the other vertebrata, and shows that they correspond, bone for bone and muscle for muscle; and, from this close relation of man's bodily parts to those of the animals directly below him, infers that man descended from some pre-existing (but unknown) ape-like creature. This appears an unwarrantable assumption; for why should not all the vertebrates have been formed on one general plan, which plan was varied by the Creator to suit the conditions of life of each, while the main features were always kept in view? Mr. Darwin replies that this is not a scientific explanation. But what is a scientific explanation? Is it scientific to assume that the Creator never worked in creation by simple miraculous acts? Surely not. Moreover, this reply assumes that natural causes have alone worked in man's creation, which is to assume the whole question in dispute. But Mr. Darwin here condemns himself; for, in his work on the "Origin of Species," he states that life began through a direct act of the Creator; but, by his own words, this is not a scientific explanation, and, if he calls in supernatural powers to originate life at the beginning, why should we not in like manner admit their working to produce the successive forms of life?

Then follows the genealogy of man, and his descent from the lower forms of life, and, as the immature ascidian (a marine animal like a minute sack) is said to resemble the vertebrates, it is stated that the chain commenced with a group of marine creatures somewhat like young ascidians. The resemblance stated above is denied by impartial observers, and Professor Rolleston, of Oxford, especially, fails to detect it; but these difficulties are not noticed by our author. These marine progenitors of the vertebrates differed from all living animals, so that we commence with nothing but Mr. Darwin's fanciful conjectures respecting the unknown structure of an unknown animal, which originated in an unknown manner, at an unknown period. Then arose a group of fishes like the lancelet, and from these, we are told, the ganoids must have been developed. This is not probable, for the ganoid fishes (which include the sturgeon and gar-pike) are at the head of the fish kingdom; the lancelets are just at the bottom, so that they could only develop into ganoids by a jump, which is contrary to Mr. Darwin's whole theory. Then we are led through reptiles up to birds, and from birds to the mammals called monotremata. This last is an astounding leap, for not a single specimen of the monotremata has been found fossil in any part of the world; so that there is not a shadow of proof that the

not a shadow of proof that they lived before man. It is ridiculous, in the face of this fact, to say that these animals (which join birds to mammals) once lived, but that their remains are all lost; the link is clearly snapped. Thence we are led through development up to the apes, but, unfortunately, we are told that the last link connecting them with man is lost; and Mr. Darwin admits that no living or extinct form can bridge this gap. It is impossible not to smile at the ease with which all these jumps from one form to another are related, but not a single proof is ever produced. No reason is given why birds became mammals, or how fishes became reptiles, and we must simply take the author's word that it was so. We may believe it if we like, and we may, on equally strong grounds, maintain that men live in Central Africa whose heads grow beneath their shoulders. By Mr. Darwin's theory the earlier forms should be lower than the later, but geology denies this utterly. The earliest fishes and reptiles were not only equal in organization with those now living, but often far higher, and there does not exist a single class of animals at present whose ancestors were in the least degree below them in zoological rank.

Mr. Darwin next investigates the origin and nature of religion, and starts with the assumption that primitive man was ignorant of God. When, however, we ask for the reasons for this statement we find them sadly deficient. He states that the lowest savages are without this belief, and, as primitive man resembled them, he, in like manner, did not possess it. But there a great fact is entirely overlooked, which alters the whole question: it is that religious knowledge once obtained may afterwards be lost. Many tribes of the South Sea Islanders have so forgotten the religion they had in their earlier days, that they do not know the meaning of the rites they now perform, while, even in civilized nations, religion can be not only lost but be scornfully denied, and it is less than a century since a whole nation publicly abjured Christianity and spread over Europe a dreary and desolating scepticism. Man exists to-day in a degraded state, but then this is as he has made himself and not as he came from the hands of the Creator; and to assume that barbarism is his primitive condition is to lose sight of the great truth that man has fallen from his original state. The knowledge of religion and of God arose, according to Mr. Darwin, through dreams impressing the mind of savage man with feelings of awe; but, if this be true, it is difficult to deny that the dreams of a dog might lead to the formation of a religion. If dreams thus form religions why are there savages without religion? The very existence of these tribes shows the weakness of the idea, for, as the most degraded tribes have, by this development theory, lived longest on the earth they ought not to be without a religion as they have had more time than others to originate and develop it. The question in brief is—Is the mind of man capable, when unassisted, of solving the following problems? Is there a God? Does he require our worship? What is his will toward us? And is there a future life? When it is shown that unaided reason can solve these questions we may admit theories of religious development, but not until then; while those who form these theories have their intellects instructed by Revelation, although they ignore it. From this origin reli-

gion, we are told, rose to Polytheism, Pantheism, and Monotheism; no exception is made for Christianity which, with the others, is put down as a mere human invention. The tendency then is to show that purer religions came last; but does history support this assumption? Surely not, for we find that man's practice is not to improve but to corrupt religion. How soon was this corrupting tendency shown? The Babel builders, guided by Nimrod, corrupted the primitive pure faith, and thence spread their idolatry over the earth. Heathen religions tell the same tale, and in what a short time was the early pure Christianity corrupted into the superstitions and errors of the Papacy. Professor Max Müller (than whom no one is more competent to judge of this subject) says: "If there is one thing which a comparative study of religions places in the clearest light, it is the inevitable decay to which every religion is exposed. Whenever we can trace back a religion to its first beginnings we find it free from many blemishes that affected it in its later stages."

Although compelled to omit much (especially that part called sexual selection) I have noticed the leading points of the work, and it will now be asked by all—What does the theory rest upon? I regret to have to reply. On nothing, except Mr. Darwin's extravagant assumptions. The facts are good, but the conclusions are most unwarrantable. Instead of advancing, man has, in many places, retrograded. Savage tribes in all lands are found wandering ignorantly among the relics of earlier civilizations; the Indians of North America, have become degraded, for their ancestors worked the copper mines near Lake Superior; and in Australia and Polynesia, ruined temples may be found amid savages, who know nothing of the builders of these edifices.

The whole scheme breaks down on examination. Physiology shows that species vary only in a limited degree; geology proves that the earlier forms are often higher than the later, and that those forms which have lived from the dawn of Creation down to the present time have scarcely varied at all; and history bears record to primitive culture. Keeping these things in view, it is not strange that the leading journal said of Mr. Darwin and his theory—"A man incurs a grave responsibility who advances the disintegrating speculations of this book. He ought to be capable of supporting them by the most conclusive evidence of facts. To put them forward on such incomplete evidence, such hypothetical arguments, is more than unscientific—it is reckless." This language is strong, but is just; a theory based on such assumptions cannot convince, and must be counted a brilliant dream of the imagination, and not a sober scientific truth.

Yours, &c., W.