THE DESCENT OF MAN.

This question, the interest in which has been freshly stimulated by Mr. Darwin's recent work, was made the subject of a lecture delivered last night by the Rev. Kennedy Moore, in St. George's Presbyterian Church. The text was Acts xvii, 28, "For we also are his offspring." These words, it was remarked, which occur in St. Paul's speech to the Athenians, were quoted by him from the Greek poet Aratus. They expressed the natural conviction of men that they had derived their being from God. In what manner, however, they had been formed, remained a further question. Science and Scripture were the two parties called to give evidence. The witness of Scripture claimed to be direct; the evidence of science was circumstantial. The weight of Scripture testimony rested on the proof we had for its Divine authority, which would not be argued out, but taken for granted meanwhile. A further point, however, was the true interpretation of Scripture statements. We might have anticipated that on some points revelation would be very clear, and on others very obscure. This was the case with the world, and would naturally be so with the Word if they proceeded from the same author. The reason was obvious in both instances. It was that man might be stimulated to constant study, and never find Nature or the Book antiquated and worn out. Hence it was to be admitted that the progress of knowledge might bring newer and truer interpretations to the written record. Religion had nothing to fear from any truth whatsoever, and time would bring reconcilement even to what appeared for the present insurmountable contradictions. So much for Scripture. As for science, our other witness, we had to distinguish between facts and theories—between actual observations and hypothetical conjectures. Some people seemed to think that nobody but scientific men had a right to express any opinion on scientific theories. Now, it was true that the special facts of geology were to be received from the geologist, and of anatomy from the anatomist. But we were by no means bound to receive opinions as well as facts. The intelligent public was called on to decide for itself how far these opinions were supported by sufficient proof, just as a court of law received professional evidence from a medical man, but reserved to itself the power of deciding how far this bore on a prisoner's guilt. In Mr. Darwin's case, the world was much obliged for his eminent services as a naturalist for a store of facts he had carefully observed and described. But his special theory of the origin of species at once raised the question how far his facts bore out his own conclusions. His idea was that the multiplicity of species had arisen by gradual divergence from some primal living organism of simple structure. The process of modification had been extremely slow, and had been ruled by the law of "the survival of the fittest." Any slight peculiarity in the shape or size of any organ which gave its fortunate possessor an advantage in "the struggle for life," by enabling it more easily to appropriate food or escape danger, would be sure to reappear in its progeny, and be slowly developed through succeeding generations. Other peculiarities were due to a fixed preference in the mating of animals. These principles applied to all living creatures, and to man himself, who was descended from some species of ape. Such in brief was Mr. Darwin's theory. It was a repulsive one to the ordinary mind. We recognised a certain unity between a man and his progenitors, which lay at the foundation of ancestral and family feeling; and as the idea of descent implied that of transmission of qualities, our natural instinct revolted against

of qualities, our natural instinct revolted against the thought of recognising our ancestor in a filthy baboon or chattering ape. Yet, on the other hand, there was a wonderful fascination about the theory. It seemed to raise the veil on one of the most absorbing of mysteries; it seemed further to explain naturally the astonishing similarity in the inward structure of animals, and the links by which all orders of creatures were bound together. It was not at all surprising, therefore, that it should have been so warmly welcomed. What, then, was its value in the light of Scripture and science? If it could be proved true on the latter ground, it could easily be shown that it did not necessarily contradict the former in regard to the origin of man's bodily frame. "God made man of the dust of the earth"—that is, of its appropriate inorganic constituents; but it was not necessarily implied that the process was instantaneous. It might have been developed through the slow lapse of untold centuries. The question was then narrowed to this—Could Mr. Darwin's theory be established by full scientific proof? Considering how the scientific world were themselves divided, it did not seem presumptuous to assert that it had not yet at least been so established. An immense mass of facts had been arrayed to show what singular and numerous varieties had been produced by domestication. But it was to be borne in mind that these referred only to a very few animals, and that, even in these, the tendency was to return to the original type, especially when allowed to go wild. No new species had ever been produced. In the fossil treasures of the earth's crust we could not find the needful links in the chain of development; and some species could be traced not only through historical but through long geological ages, exactly the same as they were now. As for the principle of "sexual selection," as held by Mr. Darwin, it seemed very much of a mere assumption. Mr. Darwin himself seemed to have occasional glimpses of the insufficiency of his explanations, and with estimable candour referred certain phenomena to "some unknown cause." Our verdict might, then, safely be "not proved." So far for man's physical structure. But the theory was further applied to his mind and soul. It was asserted that his intellect and conscience had also been simply developed from the qualities of the lower animals. Mr. Darwin here overstepped the field in which he was so strong, and his reasoning became confused and pointless. His very conception of the questions in moral science was cloudy and incorrect. To show this by entering into the whole theory of conscience would require more time than was available. This application of Mr. Darvin's principles was to be wholly rejected. There were two parts in man—the body and the soul. The body might possibly have been prepared by God through gradual development, though this had not yet been proved. But the soul was a peculiar gift, which came direct from God. It was this which put so wide a gulf between man and the lower creatures. They were animals, and so was he; but they were animals merely, while he, on the contrary, was much more a moral and spiritual being. Science could not look beyond the tomb. Her torch was quenched in the ashes of the grave. But the Scripture, which taught us our true original in God, gave us also the hope of immortality with him. The mission of science was great and noble, but, then, noblest when she became the faithful handmaid to religion. The fruits of knowledge might be good, but life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel.