

THE MAN-FROM-MONKEY THEORY

Absurdity of Mr. Darwin's Hypothesis.

From a Review in the London Times, April 8.

If, in short, in its general application, Mr. DARWIN'S hypothesis is utterly unsupported by observed facts, it is still more destitute of such support in its application to man. Mr. DARWIN himself admits two things—first that the difference is immense between the highest monkey and the lowest savage; and, secondly, that “this great break in the organic chain cannot be bridged over by any extinct or living species,” or, as he again expresses it, that “the connecting links between man and some lower form have not hitherto been discovered.” No monkey has been discovered which is even comparable with man; no race of savages, however degraded, can be regarded as on a level with monkeys. If Mr. DARWIN'S hypothesis were true, it is almost incredible that no evidence should be producible of the existence of ape-like creatures closely allied to man, and showing a tendency to further development. On the other hand, we have the undoubted and recorded experience of at least 4,000 years of history, during which many races of man have been subjected to influences the most diversified and the most favorable to the further development of their faculties. After the lapse of that time, man remains as distinctly man as he was before, just as all the animals with which he is acquainted have preserved their specific characteristics. It is more than questionable whether his faculties have in any degree improved. He has accumulated knowledge, he has increased the instruments of his thought and action, and his power has thus been augmented. But there is some reason to think, with PLATO, that these numerous aids have actually debilitated his natural vigor of body and mind. At all events, it is in glaring contrast with Mr. DARWIN'S theory of continuous development to observe that the earliest known examples of man's most essential characteristics exhibit his faculties in the greatest perfection ever attained. No poetry surpasses HOMER; no religious sentiment is more sublime than that in the Book of Genesis; no art is more perfect than that of Greece; no specimens of the human form are more beautiful than the models which Greek sculptors have preserved for us. History is a continuous refutation of the theory that faculties are gradually called into existence by circumstances. On the contrary, they seem to start fully formed from the brain of man, and to work out their inherent power for the modification of circumstances. Race after race appears on the scene—the Egyptian, the Jew, the Greek, the Roman, the German, each with some special endowment working, as it were, in its blood with inexhaustible vigor. The endowment is applied in various ways, and its forms are multiplied; but it seems to lose, rather than to gain, in fulness and fervency by the lapse of time and the course of experience. The real problem of life lies in that mysterious fertility, at once so constant and so variable, by which the same nature is constantly reproduced, but by which, from time to time, germs of new energy seem developed. The solution of this problem is to be sought, not in Mr. DARWIN'S facile method of observing superficial resemblances, but in the difficult task of penetrating into hidden differences. It is a problem which will be solved, if at all, not by romances in human and natural history, but by minute investigations with the microscope and in the laboratory.

We wish we could think that these speculations were as innocuous as they are unpractical and unscientific, but it is too probable that if unchecked they might exert a very mischievous influence. We abstain from noticing their bearings on religious thought, although it is hard to see how, on Mr. DARWIN'S hypothesis, it is possible to ascribe to man any other immortality, or any other spiritual existence, than that possessed by the brutes. But apart from these considerations, if such views as he advances on the nature of the moral sense were generally accepted, it seems evident that morality would lose all elements of stable authority, and the “ever fixed marks,” around which the tempests of human passion now break themselves, would cease to exert their guiding and controlling influence. Mr. DARWIN is careful to observe that he does not wish “to maintain that every strictly social animal, if its intellectual and social faculties were to become as active and as highly developed as man, would acquire exactly the same moral sense as ours.” If this be the case, why should our existing moral sense be deemed a permanent standard? “If, for instance,” says Mr. DARWIN, “to take an extreme case, men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can scarcely be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters, and no one would think of interfering.” What is this but to place every barrier of moral obligation at the mercy of the “conditions of life?” Men, unfortunately, have the power of acting not according to what is their ultimate social interest, but according to their ideas of it; and if the doctrine could be impressed on them that right and wrong have no other meaning than the pursuit or the neglect of that ultimate interest, conscience would cease to be a check upon the wildest, or, as Mr. DARWIN'S own illustration allows us to add, the most murderous revolutions. At a moment when every artificial principle of authority seems undermined, we have no other guarantee for the order and peace of life except in the eternal authority of those elementary principles of duty which are independent of all times and all circumstances. There is much reason to fear that loose philosophy, stimulated by an irrational religion, has done not a little to weaken the force of these principles in France, and that this is, at all events, one potent element in the disorganization of French society. A man incurs a grave responsibility who, with the authority of a well-earned reputation, advances at such a time 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 cursory investigation, such hypothetical arguments as we have exposed, is more than unscientific—it is reckless.