

## MY COUSIN THE GORILLA.

CONSIDERED IN A LETTER TO JOSEPH WAGSBY, ESQ. OF LITTLE PEDDLINGTON.

MY DEAR OLD FRIEND,—I was glad to see your handwriting again, but grieved to find that the terrible tidings of our new cousinship had penetrated already down into the wilds and quiet solitudes of Pedlington. I fancied that you were as safe from a branch dépôt of Mudie's as from a joint-stock bank in High-street, or a steam plough on the Squire's lawn. 'Good heavens!' you say; 'have you seen Darwin's awful book,\* and learned that Genesis i. ii. and iii. at least are all bosh, and Moses no better than he should be? What *is* the world coming to?'

With regard to that final question, I must refer you to the learned divine of Crown-court, who, of all living men, seems to be most intimately acquainted with the history of the world, past, present, and to come; and in his next prophecy of the millennium may be even more successful than he has yet been. But, touching Moses, my dear Joseph, I am bound to say NOT PROVEN, and not anything like *proven*. Don't be terrified, my dear friend—it is not quite a hopeless case as yet. The world is a wide place, and in it are many men, of many minds—too many to be counted, too wise not to know their own wisdom; of understanding too keen not to dispense with revelation; of intellect too supreme not to survey time, eternity, the universe, things seen and unseen, of the flesh and

of the spirit, at a single glance; and of knowledge too transcendent not to ignore such words as bar or limit, finite or infinite, human or divine. One of these perfect omniscient beings has written a book to show to the nineteenth century, and specially to the Christian world, what took place ten, twenty, or fifty thousand or million years ago.

Very well, my dear Joseph, what then?

'*Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona;*' there were brave men before the son of Atreus; there were learned doctors before Aquinas; many a long-ears before the days of Baalaam, as there have been since; doubters before our own South-African bishop, who, puzzled by the intelligent Zulu, thereupon, *more suo*, turned the books of Moses into a set of arithmetical problems, but omitted the answers; geologists, biologists, and gnostics long before the days of Davy (not Jones), Brewster, Herschel, and Darwin; and scoffers long—say a million years—before nails were driven into the Ark. The art of sneering flourished, no doubt, long before letters; and infidels, whole ages before men knew *meum* from *tuum*. These last have been the master spirits of their day. Every age has its chief, elect, stars that shine for their own great glory, and the safety of the world in general. Why should our age have less?

As for *Moses*, he has been so often and so utterly upset, that the only wonder is he is yet on his feet

\* *The Descent of Man*, &c. By C. Darwin, M.A. 2 vols. John Murray, 1871.

—so often annihilated, that his very existence would be a *miracle*, were such a word within the bounds of remote possibility, and not a mere remnant of bygone superstition—obsolete, exploded, and defunct. Let us, then, look this awful book full in the face, and see whether our own well-known, old-fashioned account of things according to Moses, such as has stood the test of—well, say four thousand years—will stand this latest shaft from the enemy or not. In my opinion, Joseph, it will.

Did you ever read the old Indian fable of the manner in which this great world of ours is held up, of course for the sun to go round? Nothing can be easier, nothing simpler. It is altogether and entirely a matter of faith. This little globe, then, rests on the back of a mighty elephant, and the mighty elephant stands on the back of a tortoise—a creature whose shell is specially adapted to undergo any amount of pressure. And the tortoise, on what does he stand? Ah, my dear Joseph, you must not ask impertinent questions! The globe, the elephant, the tortoise—*voilà tout*—you must be content, and leave the rest to the pundits. Faith, Joseph, faith.

Faith, Joseph, faith; and listen to the latest gospel according to Darwin. There can be no doubt that—there is every reason to believe, 'it seems to be almost certain,' 'it is incredible that all these facts should be so,' unless—our remotest forefathers and foremothers (for it seems we had both)—*always barring Adam and Eve*—belonged to one of two great groups of monkeys, the Catarhine and the Platyrrhine families; probably owing most to the former, from which we receive our dental system and nostrils. From this delicious and dainty kindred—the missing link between the wild uncultivated de-

nizen of the forest, with filthy habits and unintelligible cries, and the first rational human being—we, my dear Joseph, have all sprung. Out of this happy intermingling, transfusion, and improvement of race, sprang our more immediate forefathers—rough hairy (some say slightly squamous) quadrupeds, who lived in trees, who ate acorns and pig-nuts, who grinned and gibbered at each other, and scratched their filthy backs and shoulders, and cocked their pointed ears, and brandished and twisted their long tails, and fought savagely for the youngest and fairest females of the tribe, and carried with them a fragrance not identical with eau de Cologne. These, Joseph, were our noble ancestors! Brutes, knowing but the two appetites of lust and hunger; conscious but of heat and cold; of being full or empty; and alive only to the arguments of brutal force and untamed ferocity. And for their predecessors we must go even farther back to the dim obscurity of ages remote by untold millions of years, to creatures still lower and baser, who basked in the slimy ouse, or glided through muddy water, revelling on filth, and rejoicing in the foulest of created things; with both sexes combined in a single being, possibly resembling the larvæ of marine ascidians.

Such, Joseph, is the fountain-head of our being—of the race of man; the source whence sprang Socrates, Shakespeare, Dante, Homer, Michael Angelo—in a word, all the mighty intellects that have ever adorned the world, and crowned it with the richest fruits of imagination, reason, wit, fancy, judgment, and skill; of heroic endurance, of living charity, of burning faith, and passionate devotion; of patriotism, of reverence, of piety, of humility, of honour, of purity, of righteousness, justice, and eter-

nal truth. Well may the poet exclaim,

'Sed genus et proavos et quæ non fecimus ipsi,

*Vix ea nostra voco.*'

Such ancestors *ours*? Who would have them at any price? Far better be an oak of the forest, a root of mangel-wurzel, a wholesome cleanly potato, or an honest turnip.

'It takes a deal of faith,' you say, 'to believe this.'

Yes, Joseph, it *does* take a good deal; but still you must have it—you must believe in Darwin, in the *ipse dixit* of one man. Remember the elephant and the tortoise, and be wise in time.

But, joking apart, in the name of heaven and of common sense, why should you believe one single iota of such a mountain of pure and unqualified assumption? Why should the printing of so monstrous a delusion overwhelm the souls of Little Pedlington with dismay for a single hour? On what ground does the mountain rest?

You must believe it, Joseph, for a hundred and one such reasons as *these*. Because monkeys, baboons, gorillas, and all other such gentry have, from time immemorial, and millions of years before that, in all regions of the earth, fought for and obtained the best and fairest females, by dint of a strong arm; the strongest, bravest, and handsomest arboreal has always got the pick of the tribe for his harem; the young roving blade, with the bluest patch of skin on his back—a patch denuded of hair for the purpose of attracting the gentler sex—who had the most or least amount of hair on his face (for the fashion, it seems, wavered, as among poor humanity) has ever won for himself the most charming of damsels, with the longest ears and most capacious of paunches. Thus the strongest, fairest, and

hugest carried on the race, mainly, Joseph,—mainly, though not entirely. And as they fought for wives, so fought they for the snuggest trees, the coolest or hottest snuggerly in arboreal domains; for the choicest pig-nuts and most savoury of acorns; the richest scrap of garbage, or the hugest lump of cocoa-nut. So, hand in hand, for countless ages, went on the two great works of *progress by natural selection* for both sexes, and all time; and by *sexual selection* for individuals of the same sex fighting for wives, or grinning, biting, and screaming for husbands.

Nothing can be simpler or easier, Joseph, if you will but believe.

This, then, is the happy path, at length, by which we arrive at the race of man, in all its countless varieties, colours, and forms. Out of this charming woodland family, slowly, step by step, in the course of ages, emerged a being who did *not* live in a tree, or crawl, or grin; but stood upright, and uttered intelligible words, and looked up to heaven, and knew that he did so; who had within him a living conscience, and a power to think, and felt within him the breath of an immortal spirit.

Do you ask *why* you are to believe this? Because as monkeys, baboons, and gorillas fought for wives or for rations, wore beards or tore their hair, scraped or coloured patches of skin, screamed or bit in jealous fury, or grinned in amorous delight—just in that very same fashion has it been with man and woman, from the remotest ages to our own day. As did their forefathers, so have they done; the border ruffian or the bully, the armed soldier, the whiskered, scented dandy, the male flirt, the artful coquette, are but antitypes of the past. As among the race of refined and interesting gorillas, so among the human race went on the two

great works of *natural and sexual selection*! Surely, these are reasons enough. But, if you must have more, be content to know that so it must be, because birds, male and female, have been seen and known to coquet and flirt, to pay court to gay feathers and bare spots, to fight madly in wanton jealousy, to indulge in a thousand little arts and artifices at times of breeding and nursing—just as it happens in May-fair and in Seven-dials; because one mighty orang-outang has been known to cover himself with leaves at night, and another equally scientific baboon to hide his ugly carcass under the bough of a tree to escape the sun; because the *os coccyx* at the end of the human vertebræ is the rudiment of what is a tail in his *quondam* allies! Q.E.D.

Nothing can be fairer, clearer, simpler, Joseph, than such reasoning; nothing more logical than the deduction. And the beauty of it is, that such a style of reasoning will apply equally well to all subjects, human and divine. By such logic may be proved any proposition under the sun, however fantastic, infamous, or startling. But a good deal depends on the way of handling your tools. If you come to an awkward dangerous place, where the ground quakes under your feet, leave it point-blank at once. Go back a thousand years or so; or a million, if needed. 'Just here,' you can say, 'occurs an unfortunate gap, which future scientific pioneers will have to bridge. There is a link missing; an interval, an "hiatus"—but of no real importance to the theory; of course not.' Only have faith, Joseph; fill up the gaps or leave them open, supply the links or eliminate them, just as required, and all difficulty is at an end; only faith! The globe is safe on the elephant's back, the elephant on the tortoise, and that curious creature, as we have seen,

'Self-poised in air, serenely strong, alone  
Its mighty burden bears, from age to age,  
Amidst the rushing orbs.'

Such, my old friend, is in reality the drift of the awful book which has fallen like a thunderbolt on your peaceful hamlet. Don't be terrified. Many such bolts have fallen before now; and the world still stands. Moses still survives. Millions believe in him, still feeling within them 'the breath of life;' knowing that they are not as the beasts that die; conscious that, in spite of all man's follies, sins, ignorance, and sorrows, there is yet in him a part which must outlive all these baser things, and cannot perish. Nothing can stay this belief; nothing can root it out of man's heart. It is a part of his heritage; in him and of him; his inmost being—himself.

Meanwhile, let the master spirits write on; let them send forth in dainty green covers, adorned with many woodcuts, their latest, fondest, keenest rhapsodies as to the past or future ages of the world. All in good time will wiser, keener volumes appear, and blot out their names in the same dust which swallowed up their forefathers.

'They have their day, and cease to be.'

My dear Joseph, let them have their day, and say their say. The grand old faith which has taught men to live and to die all these thousands of years is not to be snuffed out by a single blast from Albemarle-street, however keen or however subtle. Blood is thicker than water; but let those own the gorilla who like the connection. And Little Pedlington may sleep in safety.

Meanwhile, my dear Joseph, if any interesting disciple of the new faith, red-hot from Piccadilly, should wander into your neighbourhood, and put all the dovecots in a flutter, before he begins his work of evan-

gelisation, just ask him to answer the following simple questions :

1. If the present race of man sprang from these cocktailed long-eared progenitors of the woods, whence come the broad varieties of colour and form—brown, red, black, and white—Malay, Negro, European?

2. If the mental powers of animals are the same in kind with man, they must be capable of advancement. Yet from the Flood to this day no signs of advancement are visible. The elephant, the bee, the beaver are only and precisely what they ever have been as far as record remains. *How is this?*

3. If Mr. Gladstone and Dr. Manning both sprang from that same hirsute forefather 'up a tree,' the sublime ascent to pure Whiggery and Infallibility must have been

'Through the long sweep of ages still drawn out.'

How is it, then, that, under the sun, no one single specimen of the half-breed, the glorious mule-bird, has ever through the ages greeted human eye?

4. Such a creature would be worth countless millions of dollars, and Barnum would rise from the grave to greet him. Why not send out a scientific expedition from Al-bemarle-street to secure him at once?

A single such specimen would be more potential than a hundred octavos; and an elephant that could pass through the College of Preceptors with the very smallest known honour, or survive a competitive examination for the Indian service, more convincing than the armies of Colenso.

Sleep in peace, my dear Joseph; Genesis i. ii. and iii. are quite

safe as yet. The world is not coming to an end. The monkey-house in the Zoo has not yet ordered a dozen copies of Darwin for family reading. The Prime Minister and the Bishop of Melipotamus in Westminster still hold their own. So may you, the wife of your bosom, and the arrows in your teeming quiver. 'Man looks back,' says Dr. Darwin; 'he reflects, compares, and feels disappointment—*this is his conscience*—just as Ponto the pointer feels when he thinks of a partridge hunted instead of pointed at.' Not quite the same, most excellent of doctors. Ponto, under the keen eye of Colonel Hawker, only just does what his forefather did under the ken of Nimrod, that mighty hunter, a thousand years or so before the Pyramids; and that only will future Pontos do when the Pyramids are dust. But between Ponto and the Colonel lies a mighty gulf of difference, which widens as the ages roll by.

Man *does* look back, think, compare, reflect, and, in spite of enormous follies, infinite crimes, mistakes, and errors, yet feels within him that which is greater than himself—a spark of that divine breath which was breathed into him when the morning stars first sang together as time began; which must outlive time, and bring him at last to the things unseen and eternal; a certainty into which the wildest dream of Ponto never remotely intruded.

Go, therefore, my dear Joseph, when next this way, straight to the 'Zoo,' and give that interesting quadruped behind the bars a penny bun, at the end of your walking-stick, without the faintest compunction. Charity does begin at home; but you will not be bestowing *largesse* on a poor relation.

Ever yours, dear Joseph, affectionately,

SIGMA.